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ABSTRACT

The research described here is based on a qualitative study conducted in Puerto Rico, with the participation of ten middle school students attending a Laboratory school in metropolitan San Juan. The students answered questions relating to their perceptions about learning English as a second language under colonial conditions in Puerto Rico. Participants also analyzed, discussed, challenged and constructed their own meanings concerning the images and content in the stories contained within U.S. made textbooks utilized in their English class. Moreover, they had the opportunity to discuss, analyze, and contest images of themselves and their countrymen as portrayed in English stories written by both Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican authors.

By utilizing the Case Study research method, I was able to explore, in depth, how this group of children perceived the learning of the English language and its didactic material, i.e. textbooks under colonial conditions, and how perceptions were related to their own culture and national identity. This research method encouraged the inclusion of the researcher’s personal perspective into the interpretation; allowing reflection on both my role as an ESL teacher in Puerto Rico and on my personal educational philosophy while discussing English language issues from the students’ perspective. The theoretical framework for this study was based on colonial/postcolonial theories, following the views of Pennycook (2001), Loomba (1998), Dimitriadis/McCarthy (2001), and Phillipson (1998), and includes critical pedagogy as described by Freire (1998) and Canagarajah (1999). Colonial/postcolonial theories helped in providing a framework for understanding the complex context in which the research project took place: English is a compulsory
subject that students love, hate, and may also resist in the educational system current within Puerto Rico. A critical pedagogical perspective provided the study participants the opportunity to challenge and question the agenda of the U.S. dominant culture promoting the ESL program in Puerto Rico, and those English textbooks utilized in the program which usually reflect the predominately white middle class values and beliefs existent in the US.

One of the main objectives of this study was to provide an environment for the participants in which to feel safe to freely express their honest and genuine opinions toward the imposition of the English language in Puerto Rico, taking into consideration the colonial context. Another objective was to critically examine and discuss all images and story content contained within the English textbooks. From my position as postcolonial researcher, my objective was to make students aware of their own voice and to assist them in exercising their power as critical thinkers.

The results of this research project revealed the complex colonial/postcolonial mentality that still prevails in Puerto Rico today, congruent with a mental ambivalence common among colonial subjects who are simultaneously under the influence of two different cultures. Participants were allowed and encouraged to express their genuine concerns, (and occasionally contradicting opinions), about the ESL program in Puerto Rican schools and any connections between content and the colonial political status of the island. They also challenged and expressed strong and conflictive assumptions about the U.S. Empire, its dominant culture, and its power over the island. Additionally, they questioned the representations of themselves by Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican authors embedded in the English stories and were able to identify different kinds of
interesting stereotypes concerning the U.S. culture as well as the Puerto Rican and Latino culture in both illustrations and story content.

The results of this study demonstrate that when students have the opportunity to make their voices heard within a safe and respectable environment, they are capable of exercising their power and of utilizing higher level critical-thinking skills.

A significant landmark would be to develop ESL and ELT curriculum that includes the perspective of a critical pedagogy in which students, as well as future ESL teachers, could reflect and discuss within the English class environment, the reality and the agenda behind the ESL program in the context of Puerto Rico. A critical pedagogy curriculum could help in empowering both students and future ESL teachers as Puerto Rican individuals who are currently studying under a colonized mainstream educational system to reflect on their own uniqueness in opposition to the images imposed on them, to become critical thinkers who could challenge the actual system, and to position themselves to bring about change in society.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The ESL Teacher’s First Day of Class in Puerto Rico: A Personal memoir

A warm, sunny morning at the elementary school, following a week of informative faculty meetings, curriculum preparation and classroom decoration, the ESL \(^1\) (English as a Second Language) teacher was filled with excitement at the prospect of receiving her first group of students. She was very happy to be involved and associated with such a prestigious school, where college students would do their student teaching practicum and would be assigned for frequent classroom observations. It was designated as a model school and she believed it was the perfect place to her to work after eight years of teaching both in the U.S. and in private schools within Puerto Rico.

As the little first graders entered the colorful and newly decorated classroom, the ESL teacher greeted them enthusiastically in English. She began the English class by introducing herself and describing carefully the usual classroom management rules. The teacher spoke very slowly in English and used some pictures to help with students’ understanding of this new and secondary language. She meticulously followed the ESL teaching techniques acquired during her college years in the TESOL program and designed to ensure success with second language learners. Everything seemed to be going just fine with the English class until a little boy abruptly stood up in front of his

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\(^1\) ESL is the terminology used in Puerto Rico to refer to the teaching of English as second language. Spanish and English are both official languages of the island, even though English is not utilized in Puerto Rican’s daily domestic life except for some commercial, industrial, and tourism activities. English therefore becomes the language of commerce and does not represent the vernacular.
chair, folded his little arms across his chest, and shouted defiantly in Spanish, “¡Yo no se hablar inglés y a mi no me gusta hablar en inglés porque en Puerto Rico se habla en Español!2”

The teacher reacted with shock to the little boy’s bravado. Who was this boy, where did this small voice originate, and how dare he challenge the English teacher this way? In spite of the teacher’s initial shock, she paid close attention to the first grader’s words, quickly realizing that he had a point. Spanish was the native language of Puerto Ricans; English, on the other hand, was a language they had to learn whether they liked it or not because that was how the education system functioned in Puerto Rico.

With no time to waste, the teacher decided she had to quickly make her next move to counteract the boy’s open protest before there was a riot of little first graders in the English classroom. She returned to Spanish and carefully explained to the little boy that he had nothing to worry about because he was going to have lots of fun in her class. She even made what she considered an irresistible offer to the little boy, telling him that if he still didn’t like the class after a week, she would intervene with the principal herself so that he wouldn’t have to take the English class again.

The little boy sat back down quietly on his chair, eyeing the teacher with suspicion. He would accept the deal, at least for now, but it appeared that he couldn’t quite believe her irresistible offer. (Teresita Santiago, ms. 2007)

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2 “I don’t know how to speak English and I don’t like to speak English, because in Puerto Rico we speak Spanish!”
Teaching English in Colonial/Postcolonial Puerto Rico

Such passionate resistance to the learning of the English language in the Puerto Rican colony of the U.S. was what I, as a Puerto Rican ESL teacher, experienced for the first time after eight years of facilitating that very practice in the education field. It had never occurred to me that students could (or even would) actually challenge English language classes since I always accepted the status quo and took the teaching and learning of English in Puerto Rico for granted. Certainly I had encountered some level of discomfort from students with learning the English language, particularly in the private school environment, yet no one ever openly challenged its teaching as this little boy had done. At the time, I was not aware of any strong resistance to the English language nor did I recognize ESL as the imposition of a different and perhaps colonizing language on my own Puerto Rican students. On the other hand, outside the academic field I recall occasionally noticing opposition to the imposition of the teaching of English from people who identified themselves as independentistas. These independentistas were regarded as communists and terrorists in our society who were against anything the U.S. was trying to do for Puerto Rico, and their claims, therefore, were never taken seriously by me. I understand now that the negative image created around the independentistas was one of the strategies the U.S. used to deal with resistance toward their systematic dominance. This strategy was yet another way for the U.S., legitimizing their dominance over the island by controlling any resistance or challenge.

In order to understand the reasons for a Puerto Rican ESL teacher such as myself to take the presence of English for granted, we must also look briefly at the history of the teaching of English in Puerto Rico.
Since the United States invaded and occupied the island in 1898, the colonial system’s educational policy has imposed the English language, as well as the history and culture of the U.S., on our students through the vehicle of English textbooks (Negrón de Montilla, 1975). Our Puerto Rican history, on the other hand, appeared only in a summarized and simplistic manner in textbooks that carefully avoided the topic of any challenges towards U.S. dominance of the island. This deliberate intention to substitute everything Spanish with U.S. culture and the English language was then referred to as “the Americanization process in Puerto Rico”. The teaching of English in schools was used as the most effective medium to Americanize the Puerto Rican people in the beginning of the 20th century (Negrón de Montilla, 1975). By the time I started school in the 1960’s, Spanish was then the primary medium of instruction. However, the curriculum and didactic material used in class was very much influenced by the U.S. education system. I learned to accept the U.S. system as the norm. As a result, from the perspective of adulthood I still could not perceive the political agenda existent behind the English program since the political issues and historical background related to the teaching of English in Puerto Rico were never discussed thoroughly or critically within the TESOL program at the B.A. or Masters levels. Consequently, I never questioned the hidden agenda behind the English education program I had become a party to and was expected to perpetuate. This obvious distance between the ESL program and political ideologies in Puerto Rico could be explained by what Pennycook (1994) and Phillipson (1992) describe as reasons for ignoring ideological concerns in language teaching. They claim that English Learning Teaching (ELT) discourses and practices are influenced by roots established during the
colonial period, which resulted in limiting the ELT definitions of language learning and teaching to virtually non-political activities.

“The professional discourse around ELT *disconnects* culture from structure by limiting the focus in language pedagogy to technical matters … to the exclusion of social, economic, and political matters” (Phillipson, 1992:48).

Canagarajah (1999) adds to the discussion that the dominant Enlightenment period in the West has also helped in this non-political view of language teaching by, “providing a scientistic and positivistic cast to ELT, and by encouraging its perception as an apolitical, technocratic, and utilitarian enterprise” (p.20). It is very interesting to realize that as an adult student in the English teaching education program in college, I never had the opportunity to discuss or challenge the imposition of English in P.R. Theorists, such as the ones mentioned above, have helped me realize that the ESL research methodology and theoretical background courses I experienced during my undergraduate studies were based on the western and U.S. colonial, dominant ideology. ESL theory discussed in class at that time legitimized the U.S. dominant culture thus causing me to internalize its values.

As an Americanized and colonized ESL teacher, I was startled to encounter such a young student, as the one mentioned in the opening narrative, expressing his agency and making a clear distinction between his national identity, with the language it represents (Spanish), and the “other” language (English) as represented by the U.S. I interpret the little boy’s protest from my perspective now as the way he used to defend both his native language and national identity. He felt threatened by a foreign language he claimed he didn’t know,
and felt he did not need, since he already knew and used a language that he believed could serve him very well. At the same time this young student was questioning the established language policy of his school. Why did he have to learn English in Puerto Rico if he already knew how to speak the language used there in daily life? Why couldn’t he choose whether or not to take the English class? This little six-year old boy voiced through his challenge the very complex situation existent with the concept of learning English in the colonial/postcolonial context of Puerto Rico.

**Statement of the Problem**

“¿Por qué nos tenemos que tragar el Inglés aunque no queramos? ¿Por qué cuando los Americanos vienen a P.R. ellos van a escuelas bilingües? ¿Por qué ellos no aprenden Español cuando vienen a P.R.?”

(Why do we have to swallow the English language even when we don’t want to? When Americans come to P.R., why do they go to bilingual schools? Why don’t they learn Spanish when they come to P.R.?)

The statement above can be better understood as representative of how the imposition of a language has been a colonizing tool up to the present time in Puerto Rico, after review of the colonial history of the island.

Puerto Rico is the smallest island of the Greater Antilles located between the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. The island population of Taínos was first colonized by the Spaniards in 1493. This event launched four hundred years of Spanish colonization, one of the, “most brutal systems of subservience and exploitation of both indigenous and African populations in the Americas” (Murillo, 2001). After nearly exterminating the

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3 Fifth grade student discussing the teaching of English in P.R.
Taínos through cruel and bloody battles, imposed hard labor, and diseases brought by the Spanish, black people were imported from Africa whom they enslaved to continue their exploitation of people and of the island’s natural resources for their own economic gain and expansion plans. Eventually, the fusion of these diverse peoples (Taínos, Spanish, and African) constituted the Puerto Rican people of today. The Spanish occupation lasted until Puerto Rico became a possession of the United States as a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898. “The Treaty of Paris which ended this war and the territorial clause of the United States Constitution gave the United States Congress full and complete legislative authority over the territory of Puerto Rico and its people.”(Document on the Constitutional History of Puerto Rico as cited by Negrón de Montilla, 1975). Thus Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States over a hundred years ago and virtually remains so up to the present time.

This colonial status is clearly apparent today as manifested in many aspects of our lives, especially the political, economical, and educational systems. The education system in Puerto Rico emulates the U.S. educational model and imposes English as a mandatory subject in schools beginning in kindergarten, in spite of the fact that Spanish is the vernacular language utilized in daily life. It is precisely the public educational system, and particularly the English language program currently existent in our schools, on which I focus my research.

During the late 1890’s, in the initial stages of the Americanization process, many attempts were made to impose the teaching of the English language on schools all over the island (Negrón de Montilla, 1975). The ideology behind this process was that via the education system and the teaching of English, Puerto Ricans would learn to appreciate
the American culture, its principles of liberties, and all of its affairs related to the
economic world (General John Eaton in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1901, cited
by Torres, 2002: 98). The establishment of a forced English curriculum, which relegates
Spanish to a second position in relation to this U.S. ideology, relates to what Freire
oppressors are the ones who act upon the people to *indoctrinate* them and *adjust* them to
a *reality*, which must remain untouched (2002: 94). Once the U.S. military arrived on the
island they began to indoctrinate Puerto Ricans through the imposition of a new English
language policy based on the understanding that Spanish was sort of a, “patois … with
little value as an intellectual medium” (Victor S. Clark in the U.S. Senate, 1900, cited by
Torres, 2002: 103). Eventually Puerto Rico’s political superstructure generated
ideological practices that supported the “supervaloration of English” while fomenting the
idea of the Spanish language as one of “underdevelopment” (Barreto, 1998).

In the early 1900s the federal government established the Foraker Act in which English
became the official language of the island thus positioning Spanish as unofficial or
secondary in importance. This language policy, more than a bilingual initiative, was a
way to, “facilitate government activities for Anglophone administrators from the U.S.
mainland” who didn’t speak Spanish (Barreto, 2001). The Foraker Act led to the
establishment of a new public school system and created the first English language
curriculum, supplanting the Spanish curriculum already implemented by the Spanish
government in 525 schools, mostly in the San Juan area (Tirado, 2003). Under this new
language policy, English became the medium of instruction at every grade level while
Spanish was set aside as a special subject (Torres, 2002). This English language program
was based on political and economic agendas instead of linguistic methodologies (Muntaner, 1990), and encountered strong opposition from the Puerto Rican people who refused to have English imposed at the expense of their native language. As a result, from 1900 to 1949, language programs interchanged Spanish and English as the medium of instruction, trying sometimes many complex combinations of language teaching within the public education system. These attempts were eventually opposed once again by teachers, parents, and politicians (Negron de Montilla, 1975).

As observed, “Puerto Rico’s educational development and conceptions of education have historically contributed to issues of language imposition on the island. Foreign control of the language in Puerto Rico has more to gain in terms of its goal to preserve ‘American Values’ through means of education” (Roderíguez-Galarza, 1997, p.31). It was not until 1949, when the first Puerto Rican governor appointed a Puerto Rican Commissioner of Education that Spanish was finally established as THE medium of instruction in the public school system and English was finally designated as a second language subject (Tirado, 2003).

Presently, the medium of instruction used in schools is Spanish or English, depending on whether the school is a public or a private one (Torres, 2002). The language policy of public schools states that Spanish must be used as the language of instruction and English must be a second language subject from Kindergarten through high school. Private schools are autonomous, and some of them still offer English immersion programs. The instructional materials and methodologies utilized to teach English have routinely been imported from the U.S. For the most part, these English textbooks portray the everyday
life of peoples in the context of the U.S., have questionable relevance to the reality of the majority of our Puerto Rican students, and provide for an imposed cultural disconnect.

It is interesting to observe that after twelve years of mandatory ESL instruction in the public school system, and in spite of all these U.S. made materials and methodologies, many students still lack sufficient proficiency in English to even carry on basic communicative functions (Pousada, 2000). Such a negative outcome, according to Pousada, an English professor in P.R., has been attributed to the resistance against an imposed language, the betrayal of the Spanish language that represents the students’ Puerto Rican national identity, and the lack of quality English instruction. Aloise, a late English professor, highlights other interesting factors that have contributed to the alleged ineffective English program in Puerto Rico (1998). Among these factors Aloise mentions, “the ‘colonial’ mentality whereby instructions are followed without question which is the result of Puerto Rico’s history first as a colony of Spain and now as a colony of the United States; some are economic, e.g., the misuse of monetary resources by supporting a top-heavy educational bureaucracy” (1998: 236).

It is clearly notable that Puerto Ricans have demonstrated their resistance toward the domination of the U.S. as reflected in their conscious choice of the Spanish language over English, even when English has been imposed in various ways throughout its colonial history until the present. They have also retained their Puerto Rican traditions and culture despite the introduction of the U.S. culture through a strong Americanization process in which even U.S. holidays were consistently celebrated at schools. Puerto Rico, while officially referred to today as a “territory”, is in reality a virtual colony of the U.S. Consequently, my discussion concerning both the learning of English and the textbooks
utilized for that purpose will be set within the **colonial/postcolonial** context of Puerto Rico. The colonial and postcolonial terminology and their relevance to this study are developed in more detail in chapter two.

**Postcolonialism** in Puerto Rico could be interpreted following Pennycook’s view of this debatable concept. He defines postcolonialism as, “a political and cultural movement that seeks to challenge the received histories and ideologies of former colonial nations and to open a space for insurgent knowledges to emerge” (2001: p. 66). Postcolonialism for Pennycook is more than just resisting the political and economic dominance of the colonizer, but it is also challenging the ideologies or claims of rationality, enlightenment and logic created by *the imperial entity*. Although Puerto Rico is not technically a former colonial nation, I understand Puerto Ricans have demonstrated a postcolonial attitude towards the U.S. domination through their resistance towards the English language domination policies and their persistent attachment to Puerto Rican cultural traditions despite the strong Americanization process they were subjected to following invasion of the island. Puerto Rican authors Flores (1993), Dávila (1997), Torres (2002), and Duany (2000) have been producing postcolonial literature in which they challenge U.S. dominant ideologies that have described the Puerto Rican people as inferior and incapable of governing themselves.

Juan Flores, professor of sociology at CUNY and Puerto Rican by birth, states that in the case of Puerto Rico the island could be described as a “modern colony” which retains non-independent status and relations with the U.S. under conditions of postcolonial globality (Flores, 2000). Puerto Rico is not an independent country and not a state, yet the U.S. does not refer to the island as a colony either. After 1949 the U.S. finally permitted
some autonomy in the island, and Puerto Ricans were allowed to vote for their first Puerto Rican governor. This process also allowed for the creation of a Puerto Rican Constitution, although subjected to the constraints of the U.S. Constitution (Tirado, 2003). These views describe Puerto Rico’s actual situation as a colony of the U.S., as I will demonstrate through my research.

In acknowledgement of this complex historical framework as context, I researched Puerto Rican students’ perception of the English language learning in the postcolonial colony of Puerto Rico.

What do students have to say about the imposition of English instruction in Puerto Rico? What is their perception of the textbooks employed to teach English? How do students interpret images of Puerto Rican characters existent in U.S.-made textbooks? What messages are these textbooks representing concerning the U.S. culture and their Puerto Rican culture?

**Description of the Problem**

“¡Yo no se hablar Inglés y a mi no me gusta hablar en Inglés porque en Puerto Rico se habla en Español!” (“I don’t know how to speak English, and I don’t like to speak English, because in Puerto Rico we speak Spanish!”)⁴

As an ESL teacher in Puerto Rico during the past sixteen years, I have taught English in both the private and the public school systems. While I worked in the private school setting, most of the students’ attitude towards English appeared to be positive. Moving from the private sector to the elementary laboratory school of the University of Puerto Rico (a semi-public school, part of the State University on the Island but not of the

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⁴ First grade boy upon his first encounter with an English class.
Department of Education) required a significant change in my teaching style. It was in this setting that I first experienced resistance toward the teaching of English, as I explained previously through the incident of the first grade student.

Following this challenging incident, I realized that I had taken the teaching of English for granted, not questioning the imposition of this different language on my Puerto Rican students. I had not yet recognized the political agenda behind the English program as the political issues and historical background related to the teaching of English in Puerto Rico were never discussed thoroughly in my BA or Master’s courses. Freire’s (2002) discussion of different kinds of oppression in an unequal society caused me to realize that limiting the amount of different perspectives and ideas in the education field is actually another form of oppression, a way of keeping the colonized learners ignorant of other realities that could challenge the dominant colonizing ideology.

In an attempt to appease my “oppressor teacher” guilt, I worked harder than ever to make the English class fun and enjoyable and tried more innovative methods to motivate and facilitate learning. I applied what I had learned during my TESOL Master’s program and implemented Krashen’s (1987) affective filter hypothesis, which states that affective variables have a strong relationship with the second language acquisition process. Implicit was my belief that the more I motivated my students by creating a positive environment immersed with English, the more likely the students would learn the target language. Many appeared to have learned English acquisition well from this effort. However, this ESL methodology didn’t take into consideration any political, social, or economic factors involved in the teaching of English and I perpetuated a western “mainstream pedagogical tradition” of ESL education by participating in an educational
program devoid of any socio-political realities (Canagarajah, 1999). None of my efforts made to create a positive learning environment could ever change the fact that English was, and is still, imposed due to our complex political relationship with the United States, and that some students still resist this imposition.

Not all students exhibited a negative attitude towards English; some students achieved competency in English and of anything “American” such as T.V. shows, video games, and movies. Occasionally these students even exhibited an attitude of superiority over those who were not as successful in English acquisition or as knowledgeable regarding “American” media.

I admit that I also experienced this feeling of superiority while in high school when everything in the English media - music, TV shows, and movies - was considered “cooler” than any produced in our own Puerto Rican culture. English represented the powerful country with the advanced technology and media that we in P.R. could not have due to our lack of resources. Additionally, only one side of the story was represented in the history textbooks where U.S. patriotic individuals were frequently portrayed as heroes whose only objective was to help the needy or save the world from evil. These history textbooks in actuality were, “accounting for and legitimizing the rise of a particular nation-state, such history is written solely from the advantage point of the most powerful” (Nealon & Giroux, 2003: 105). Whether history books were produced in the States or in Puerto Rico, before dissemination they were subject to U.S. approval. History books practically excluded the other side of our history, avoiding portrayal of any Puerto Rican intellectual whose position was anti-U.S. occupation. This is the partial knowledge (Kumashiro, 2002) we were receiving at school during the 1960s. Partial knowledge was
taught indirectly to our subconscious through the vehicle of U.S.-made T.V. shows and movies. Media often employed stereotypes of minority groups, while the U.S. characters almost always represented the heroes, the people in power, or the superior race. In this atmosphere, I began to embrace English as part of my identity and desired to become a “Gringa”. Ultimately this attitude of superiority led me to despise my own Puerto Rican music, native language, and culture. I comprehend now that I was exhibiting one of the symptoms of being colonized. “The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him. In the name of what he hopes to become, he sets his mind on impoverishing himself, tearing himself away from his true self” (Memmi, 1967).

The sense of power I felt that came with my acquisition of the English language could have been one of the reasons behind my decision to become an English teacher. Ironically, I have come to realize that as a colonized individual, I became a colonizer. Being an English teacher in Puerto Rico coopted me to be a participant in the federal system and thus our own government which was imposing the English language on our students.

Moving to Penn State to pursue my doctoral degree has been a new learning experience, awaking my awareness of this postcolonial dilemma. I discovered through the courses and readings by Freire, (1990), (1997), (1998), (2002) Memmi, (1967) Hooks, (2000) Weiler, (1998) and others, what oppression is all about and have realized how “colonized” my mind is still. I have also read the work of authors like Anzaldúa, (2002), Hall, (1996) and Castells, (1997), who have developed interesting theories regarding the notion of identity. I can admit now that there is a very close relationship between my
national identity and the colonized status in which I live. I have evolved through a personal journey from desiring to become someone I was not, the “Gringa”, for the sake of feeling superior and having power, to reaffirming my Puerto Ricaness. I also recognize that I still retain fragments of a colonial mentality, since I have found myself inescapably comparing the situation of our students in P.R. against those in the U.S. even though we are in very different socio political and economical contexts. United States is a free, large, and powerful nation with plenty of resources while Puerto Rico is a small colony with limited resources. It seems that the process of decolonizing my mind after so many years of colonial education in the island has only just begun and is a work in progress as I keep examining more about my colonial historical past.

Inspired by Freire’s (2002) book, Education for Critical Consciousness, and reflecting upon my own experience of learning English in P.R., I was motivated to survey two fifth grade groups that I was teaching then as a pilot study to fulfill the course requirement. The survey questions were related to their perception towards the teaching of the English language in Puerto Rico. I was interested in learning what the students really thought about the English language issue, something many of them seemed to take for granted while others appeared to resist it. From the perspective of a postcolonial researcher, I also wanted to give the students a voice and help them exercise their power. Freire’s (2002) notion of oppression made me realize that, as an educator, not only I am in a position of power in the classroom, but I am also participating in the system that is imposing the English language on the students. It was my intent to give the students the opportunity to express their honest opinion about the English program in P.R. within a safe and respectable environment. My premise is that educators could learn from their students’
opinions, that these could be very helpful for English teachers in becoming aware of how
the students perceive the English program, and could also have interesting implications
for the application of English curriculum in the future.

The survey was conducted at the end of the school year, while I was their English
teacher, but the timing did not provide for the opportunity to discuss the results with the
students. A notable result of the survey was the indication that out of thirty six students,
thirty four percent of them felt Puerto Rican when they spoke English while fourteen
percent felt American and twenty six percent felt both Puerto Rican and American. This
segment of the research indicates some interesting responses related to the English
language and its relationship with Puerto Rican national identity. I was motivated to
question what I observed as a distinct connection between the mandatory English
education program, which represents a colonial status requirement, and the students’
perception of their Puerto Rican national identity. Why do some indicate that they feel
both Puerto Rican and American when they speak English? What does it mean to feel
both Puerto Rican and American in colonial /postcolonial Puerto Rico?

A year later, fulfilling the requirements for another doctoral course, I discussed the
results of the first survey with the same students. During this first opportunity to present
the results of the pilot study, they mentioned the lack of representation of Puerto Rican
intellectuals in the textbooks used in class and the relationship this lack may have with
the fact that Puerto Rico is a colony and that most of the didactic material emanates from
the United States. I then scrutinized the textbooks used in the English classrooms. Even
today, the stories within the English textbooks, “carry and transmit the ideological
assumptions” of the U.S.A. culture (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003).
If this is true, then what could these stories and their illustrations be telling our students about the U.S. culture? What can the positioning of Puerto Rican characters, or the lack of their inclusion in the textbook stories, tell our students about themselves?

Research Purpose and Outcomes

“La ciudadanía Americana es un papel político, no un sentimiento.
Nuestra ciudadanía Puertorriqueña es lo que nosotros sentimos y es lo que queremos ser.” („American citizenship is a political paper, but not a feeling. Our Puerto Rican citizenship is what we feel and what we want to be.”)5

According to Goodman, (1972: 717) as cited by Muntaner (1990, p.27), “a national language serves as the nerve center of a national memory because it produces a sense of cohesion among its people by nurturing and transmitting national traditions”. Spanish has been the language used to transmit our national traditions for more than four centuries and the language used in our daily lives in the island today. Consequently, Spanish has become the symbol of our national identity despite the fact that it represented the language from that other colonizing empire in our history, Spain. As a result, when P.R. was colonized by the U.S. in 1898, the imposition of English as part of the Americanization process encountered resistance from the Puerto Rican people.

Since then, the English program has gone through many transformations due to the fact that it was not based on language methodologies but was rather based on expansionists’ and colonialists’ political agendas. Freire (1998) has claimed in many of his writings that, “education is a political practice” in which teachers hold some kind of power over the

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5 Eighth grade student discussing his Puerto Rican national identity.
students. This dissertation studies the imposition of English instruction in Puerto Rico using Freire’s critical pedagogy view that education is a political practice in which teachers must decide for whom they are working and how to be consistent in justifying their teaching practices with their political choices. Educators must be aware of the, “concrete world in which their students live.”(Freire, 1988) In the case of Puerto Rico, English teachers must be aware of the realistic needs students have to learn English under a colonial status and must take into account their students’ “likes, beliefs, fears”, and any desires formed that may not be easily accepted by the “teachers’ own worlds” (Freire, 1998). Studies exist that deal with historical accounts, descriptions of the language and our national identity issue in Puerto Rico, (Barreto, 2001), (Barreto, 1998), (Muntaner, 1990), (Torres, 2003); many others have discussed the situation of the English instruction in the island (Montilla, 1975), (Rodriguez, 1997), (Aloise, 2001). Other studies have taken place in the U.S. describing the education of Puerto Ricans outside the island (Ruiz, 1999), (Soto, 2001) (Nieto, 2000). However, very few studies have been carried out in Puerto Rico from the perspective of the young students, focusing on their view of the language dilemma, and its relationship to their cultural and national identity. Consequently, it is my intent to give voice to the Puerto Rican children and investigate how a group of intermediate students from a laboratory school in Puerto Rico perceive English language learning and the textbooks used for instruction, while taking into consideration the colonial/postcolonial context of the island.

The Americanization process continues to take place in Puerto Rico through the education system and in a differing manner through the media. As Barreto (1998) suggests in his thesis, after the 1950’s, the Americanization process has become more
suggested than imposed. I have observed first hand how this is implemented on young children. Many students constantly discuss in the school environment the most recent U.S.-made movies or TV shows, U.S. singers, or the latest U.S.-made toys or video games, commercially available all around the island. Puerto Rican music, singers, or TV shows are a less desirable topic. Many prefer to eat Mc Donald’s cuisine to eating the rice and beans available at home. Others show a preference for English books rather than Spanish ones. Does this mean that our students have been assimilated to the U.S. culture through this suggested Americanization process or are they maintaining a distinctive Puerto Rican national identity as Morris (1995) states in her study of Puerto Rican adults? Some children in my pilot survey claimed to feel half Puerto Rican and half American, or both, when they speak English. These preliminary results made me wonder how our children perceive the learning of English within this U.S. saturated environment. Considering the historical background and my experience as an ESL teacher in Puerto Rico, I devised the following main research question:

- How do Puerto Rican children perceive the learning of English as a second language and the English textbooks in the complex colonial/postcolonial context of Puerto Rico?

I would also address the following questions related to my research:

- What do Puerto Rican children have to say about the English textbooks being used in their English class today?

- What does an ESL teacher have to say about the designated English text books?
- What could the stories and illustrations within the designated textbooks be communicating to our students about either the U.S. culture or Puerto Rican culture?

- How are Puerto Rican children interpreting U.S.-made images of themselves in children’s literature?

- How are the stories within these textbooks being comprehended by the Puerto Rican children?

Research Design

The methodology employed was discussion through interviews with the students using the questions presented in Appendix D. These questions were developed as a guideline to help the students discuss how they feel about the teaching of English and the English language in general, and how they feel about their Puerto Rican national identity in contrast with U.S. national identity with the understanding that the Spanish language represents the Puerto Rican culture while English language represents the dominant U.S. culture. The students wrote the answers for these questions individually, and then, based on their written responses, a group discussion followed in which their varied opinions were openly discussed.

The participants analyzed the English stories and illustrations located in a sixth grade textbook used in the English class at the time. Although the students were in eighth grade by the time the final interviews took place, the sixth grade text book was a convenient vehicle for eliciting responses as picture books are no longer used in the middle school. We also had the opportunity to compare the picture books with the actual stories that
appeared within their eighth grade English textbook. The stories and the interpretation of the images were discussed with the group and also individually following the questions presented in Appendix E. Additionally, U.S.-made stories with Puerto Rican characters, not necessarily used in the English curriculum in Puerto Rico, were discussed in order to have a broader variety of images, since very few were located in the English textbooks. Book club discussion questions were developed to motivate participants to reflect on the characters in the story. The concept was to have participants describe how they felt about the images in the stories and what clues there were as to whether a character is Puerto Rican or not. Seeking to identify the portrayal of Puerto Rican characters led to the discussion of how this image was being promoted by the illustrators of the stories. Participants answered the questions once again in a written form individually first, and then a group discussion followed based on their written responses.

The results could have interesting implications for the teaching of English in Puerto Rico and the implications this may have concerning portrayal of, and perception of, our culture and our national identity. Even within a colonial context, there is value in giving children the opportunity to express how they feel about themselves under an imposed English curriculum. Open discussion could help children feel empowered and valued. This feeling of empowerment could lead to a more positive, and equitable learning environment. Listening to what children have to say about themselves or their culture could even assist teachers to better understand who they are within the complex scenario of contemporary times in Puerto Rico. Ideally, it could help English teachers better understand their own Puerto Rican students within the English classroom context, which could lead to a more powerful learning environment.
Encouraging children’s honest, open, and critical feedback of the English textbooks can motivate teachers and students to read English books more critically instead of taking them for granted and not considering their effect. I have realized that we can learn about a powerful culture through the English language and we can also use the English language as a lens to learn and value our own culture and our own national identity. It is possible that this study could also have implications for ESL programs globally concerning the effect the teaching of English may have on the second language learners’ perceptions of themselves and their national identity.
CHAPTER TWO

Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and English in Puerto Rico

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this research is described in this second chapter. As this study is centered within a colonial/postcolonial context in Puerto Rico, it is crucial to discuss and explain these terms and their relevance to this work. Scholars such as Pennycook (2001), Loomba (1998), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, (1995), and Dimitriadis/McCarthy, (2001) have developed differing views on colonialism and postcolonialism, and their notions concerning these terms will be discussed within this chapter. Additionally, a discussion of various theoretical views explaining how the teaching of English has expanded around the world under these same conditions will follow, since the main focus of this study is the teaching of the English language in Puerto Rico under conditions that can only be described as colonial and postcolonial. Pennycook (1998), Phillipson (1998), and Canagarajah (1999), also discuss how the English language was used historically as a colonial tool and is contemporarily applied in neocolonial format by powerful countries such as the United States and England in the context of underdeveloped countries. Their differing views related to ELT (English Language Teaching) programs existent globally will also be described and analyzed within this chapter.
Notions of Colonialism and Postcolonialism

The notion of postcolonialism has been contested and debated by many scholars, as it has lately been widely a topic for discourse within academia. According to Pennycook (2001) some see postcolonialism as just an, “historical period after colonialism”, while also viewed as an, “intellectual movement that has revitalized English studies”, and still others view it as, “yet another Western elitist fabrication” (p. 66). Scholars like Stuart Hall claim that the term postcolonialism has a “kind of elasticity” in which the term very easily can refer to all kinds of battles, all kinds of oppression, or all kinds of emancipation from all kinds of domination all over the world. He states that even when this “elasticity” could make the term postcolonialism an ambivalent one, we should not focus our attention in delineating periods, time frames, or figures, but concentrate on challenging the ideologies colonialism has for so long represented (Hall, 1996 cited in Dimitriadis/McCarthy, 2001).

On the other hand, Loomba (1998) argues that the notion of postcolonialism could not be applied the same way to every group of people who have claimed to be colonized subjects. As an example, she describes the situation in many parts of Latin America where colonial exploitation was experienced differently by locally born whites or ‘creoles’, mestizos, or ‘hybrids’, and the native peoples. The elite creoles and mestizos continued domination of the native people after the Spanish colonizers departed from the colonized territories. This new elite of creoles and mestizos became the dominant groups in the new free countries, and interestingly, they still followed the European ideals and practices. The so called ex-colonized people stepped into the void to become the new “white Americans”, following a European white supremacy ideology, which eventually
negatively affected the remaining native people, (who then became the new colonized group), within the postcolonial era. Consequently, Loomba (1998) concludes that, “Colonialism is not just something that happens from outside a country or a people…but a version of it can be duplicated from within. So ‘postcolonialism,’ far from being a term that can be indiscriminately applied, appears to be riddled with contradictions and qualifications” (p. 12).

Loomba’s view of postcolonialism could also be applied to Puerto Rico’s colonial historical background where a similar situation occurred to some extent. Once Spain ceded the island to the U.S. in 1898, a group of mostly white and educated creoles resisted the U.S. occupation and colonization of the island yet invoked previous Spanish colonial ideologies related to racial, gender, and social class differences. To this day, there has never been a dark skinned or black governor elected on the island, and women are very much underrepresented in the political arena. The majority of governmental candidates have been white, educated, male, and wealthy politicians.

After more than a hundred years of U.S. colonization, a new group of Puerto Ricans who promote the U.S. imperialistic ideology have recently emerged. This group follows U.S. colonial ideologies and advocates for U.S. cultural assimilation with the objective of converting Puerto Rico into a state of the U.S. and with the intent that the island could become a part of the U.S. Empire. In other words, these U.S.-colonized Puerto Ricans have become, to some extent, pro-U.S. colonizers themselves. So as Loomba (1998) states, these pro-U.S. Puerto Ricans are promoting a version of colonialism among their own people. This pro-statehood lobby has encountered opposition from other groups who are not interested in assimilating the U.S. culture completely or in Puerto Rico becoming
a state of the U.S. Therefore, if we follow Loomba’s idea, the term *postcolonial* might not apply to all Puerto Ricans the same way. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study I prefer to maintain Hall’s view and, “concentrate on challenging the ideologies colonialism has for so long represented” for Puerto Ricans in general, and on the implications these colonial ideologies still have in our society today.

In order to understand postcolonialism, it is necessary to have some understanding of *colonialism*. Pennycook (2001) describes colonialism as not only a political or economic exploitation justified through ideologies of racism and progress, but rather a **cultural process** in which the knowledge and culture of both the colonized and the colonizer was constructed (2001). It was through the context of colonialism that much of the European culture and knowledge developed historically. This was also how the European ideology of Enlightenment - with its inalienable rights, claims of ownership of the universal truth, and unquestioned superiority of the white European culture - was produced in contrast with the idea of inferiority as related to the primitive, ignorant, colonized individual.

Applying this notion of colonialism as a reference, Pennycook (2001) defines postcolonialism as, “a political and cultural movement that seeks to challenge the received histories and ideologies of former colonial nations and to open a space for insurgent knowledges to emerge” (p. 66). Therefore, postcolonialism for Pennycook is more than just resisting the political and economic dominance of the colonizer, but it is also challenging the ideologies or claims of rationality, enlightenment and logic created by the imperial entity.

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995), editors of the book *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, argue that even when there are some theoretical positions still referring to post-
colonialism as an historical period after the colonies became independent, they believe that it is better to define post-colonialism as the, “totality of practices, in all their rich diversity, which characterize the societies of the post-colonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day, since colonialism does not cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in a neo-colonial mode to be active in many societies” (p. xv). There are many societies in the post-colonial world presently struggling with the remains of the colonial period; they still have to speak and read the colonizers’ language, deal with history books that portray mainly the positive aspects of the colonizers’ European cultures while hiding or superficially mentioning the negative horrendous realities of slavery, colonialism, and oppression, and be exposed to stereotypical representations of their own cultures perpetuated through literature and the media. Moreover, many of these societies still maintain economical relationships with the former empires, usually under unequal circumstances. This description of postcolonialism can also be applied to the case of Puerto Rico today since it functions as a colony with only some limited degree of autonomy. We can select our own governor and we have our own constitution, although even that is subjected to the U.S. constitution. While it is not necessary to speak English in conducting our daily lives, English is a compulsory subject in school. Most of the textbooks used in the classroom originate in the U.S. and are written in U.S. English, or are translations of English books into Spanish. They still convey the U.S. culture and imperialistic ideology while hiding or rarely mentioning Puerto Rico’s colonial history under U.S. domination. In other words, Puerto Rico is as Flores (2000) states a, ‘modern colony’ which retains a non-independent status and relations under conditions of postcolonial globality.
While Pennycook emphasizes challenging the dominant ideology, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin concentrate on the rich diversity of demonstrated resistance and the continuation of colonization practices through neo-colonial modes as the ones mentioned above. Loomba on the other hand, focuses on the idea that postcolonialism cannot be applied equally to all the colonized people since postcolonialism has been experienced differently by colonized people from the various social classes, gender, and racial groups. Among the rich diversity of resistance practices, Dimitriadis/McCarthy (2001) define postcolonialism as, “a marker of a spatial challenge of the occupying powers of the West by the ethical, political and \textit{aesthetic} forms of the marginalized” (p.7). Dimitriadis/McCarthy (2001) include the artistic dimension to the resistance and challenging practices by citing the role of music, art and literature within this repertoire. They also maintain that postcolonial art, music and literature can be locales for the production of knowledge which can definitely have critical pedagogical dimensions. Dimitriadis/McCarthy (2001) are actually advocating for the teaching and reading of these postcolonial artistic expressions in order to, “rethink the discourses in which we operate”, and “remake our own emancipatory educational practices” (p.9). This idea is something I envision for the future for the ELT in Puerto Rico. I would like to advocate for the view of Dimitriadis/McCarthy and teach English by employing a curriculum that utilizes postcolonial art and literature in order to add the critical pedagogical dimension to the class. It is my expectation that this could develop a more empowering educational environment that would develop critical thinkers who ideally would function from a position of strong self esteem and national identity.
Even though the term *postcolonialism* is very much debated among researchers and scholars, there are some commonalities among the varied notions. We can observe that all of the scholars mentioned above agree that postcolonialism is not merely the ideology developed after the colonies obtained their independence. It is also the resistance expressed through literature and other means against former colonizer countries and the neocolonial practices that are still taking place in these countries. As mentioned, Pennycook and Dimitriadis/McCarthy add the element of challenge or resistance to the dominant ideologies created by the former empires; Loomba takes a step further and adds the racial, gender, and social class issues to this discourse.

**Imperialism, Colonialism/Postcolonialism, and Language Issues**

“No es justo que un niño se cuelgue porque sacó “F” en Inglés. Si un niño no puede aprender inglés por las razones que sean o no le gusta el inglés porque se siente Puertorriqueño y siente que no tiene que aprender inglés, ellos no lo deben obligar a coger inglés. El inglés debería ser una clase extra. No se debería dar nota”.

(“It is not fair to fail a child because he got an “F” in English. If a child can’t learn English for whatever reason, or doesn’t like English because he feels Puerto Rican and feels that he doesn’t have to learn English, they should not require him to take it. English should be an extra class. It should not be graded.”)

The focus of my research also considers culture and the learning of English as a second language under a colonial/postcolonial context. Hence, I will describe various theoretical views that consider how the teaching of English has expanded around the world under

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6 Sixth grade student discussing the teaching of English in Puerto Rico.
both colonial and neocolonial conditions. Pennycook (2001), Phillipson (1998), and Canagarajah (1999) discuss how the English language was used as a colonial tool, and is still used in neocolonial forms, by powerful countries such as the United States and England to perpetuate their economic power and sometimes their indirect political power in an increasingly globalized world.

In his book, *Linguistic Imperialism*, Phillipson (1998) draws on Galtung’s *imperialism theory* to describe his own perspective on *linguistic imperialism*. He summarizes this *imperialism theory* as a type of, “relationship in which one society can dominate another”, in different arenas such as, “economic, political, military, communicative, cultural, and social” (Galtung cited by Phillipson, 1998:52). This unequal relationship is developed through the mechanisms of, “exploitation, penetration, fragmentation, and marginalization” (Phillipson, 1998: 52). Phillipson continues his summary by stating that this theory, “operates with a division of the world into a dominant Centre (the powerful western countries and interests) and dominated Peripheries (the underdeveloped countries)” (1998: 52). The dominant Centre controls the different norms of imperialism, whether economic, military or linguistic, while the ones in power in the Periphery internalize the imperialistic discourse within these norms. According to Phillipson (1998), during the early colonial stages of imperialism, the colonizers were the ones in power in the Periphery. However in the contemporary neocolonial stage, this power has switched over to mostly indigenous groups, who still advocate the Centre’s colonial interests since they have been educated either in countries of the Centre or through the dominant language of the Centre. This view is consistent with Loomba’s (1998) view of post-colonialism, in which indigenous groups in the Periphery who have been previously
colonized by a dominant group, become themselves a dominant group and perpetuate the colonizers ideology within their own territory. It is in this stage, according to Phillipson, where economic, political, communicational, and cultural international organizations play a key role.

Moreover, Phillipson claims that in the next stage of imperial evolution, which he calls *neo-neo-colonialism*, international communications by means of computer technology will be the primary mode of interaction between the Centre and the Periphery. In order for this new communications technology to be effective in controlling people’s consciousness and the means of production, the Centre’s linguistic and cultural norms will have to penetrate the Periphery. The cultural and linguistic penetration of the Periphery by the Centre is a type of imperialistic control process, which could evolve into different modes from “impositional force” at the beginning stage, to “bargaining”, and then to the influence of ideas at a more advanced stage. Phillipson states that, “language is the primary means for communicating ideas”, therefore, “an increased linguistic penetration of the Periphery” is imperative in order to get to the, “neo-neo-colonialist control by means of ideas” (1998: 53).

It is within this discourse of imperialistic control that Phillipson’s notion of *linguistic imperialism* is developed. He states that *linguistic imperialism* covers all types of imperialism because it has to do with form (language used to transmit ideas) and content (cultural and social imperialism), which are related, “to the transmission of the norms and behavior of a model structure” that are also connected with the language (Phillipson, 1998: 52). As an example of the transmission of the norms and behavior, he mentions how social values are transmitted through English in the education system of
underdeveloped countries. Consequently, Phillipson introduces us to the concepts of *English linguistic imperialism* and *linguicism* and explains that the former is one sub-type of the latter. He describes *linguicism* as, “the representation of the dominant language, to which desirable characteristics are attributed, for purposes of inclusion, and the opposite for dominated languages, for purposes of exclusion” (Phillipson, 1998: 55). The researcher notes that although linguicism, “may be in operation simultaneously with sexism, racism, or classism, linguicism refers exclusively to ideologies and structures where language is the means of affecting or maintaining an unequal allocation of power and resources” yet it also, “operates within a wider socio-political structure which is always itself full of contradictions” (Phillipson, 1998: 55: 56).

This description of *English Linguistic Imperialism* and *linguicism* could be observed in Puerto Rico by the time United States took control of the island in 1898. As soon as the U.S. administration began, the English language was imposed in the education system based on the idea that the Spanish language used on the island was not a civilized language but a dialect or patois. The terms “dialect” and “patois” have been used in the colonial discourse, “to express the way the dominant group differentiates itself from and stigmatizes the dominated group” which, “forms part of an essentially racist ideology” (Phillipson, 1998: 38).

This imperialistic process is the context in which **ELT** (English Language Teaching) emerges as the working definition in which, “one language dominates others with anglocentricity and professionalism,” and where the ELT starts operating, “within a structure in which unequal power and resources allocation is affected and legitimated” (Phillipson, 1998: 54).
The British were the first to disseminate English around the world successfully through conquest, colonization and trade in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. However, this linguistic expansion was greatly accelerated by, “the emergence of the United States as the mayor military world power and technological leader in the aftermath of World War II” (Troike cited by Phillipson, 1998:7). Economical, political, intellectual, and social forces have pushed English forward according to Phillipson (1998) but not just by mere chance since English instruction through ELT programs has played a major role in this successful process. Interestingly, even though ELT has been developed within an imperialistic context, Phillipson argues that, “the professional discourse around ELT disconnects culture from structure”, portraying a narrow sense of language and education since it only focuses on technical matters while excluding social, political, and economic matters (1998: 48).

This narrow sense of language and education is a subtle imperialistic form, or a neo-neo colonial manner in which the dominant language culture, social, and political views are taught indirectly through the language by, “means of ideas”, and not through “impositional force” as Phillipson (1998) has described. Finally, he concludes that, although linguistic and educational imperialism seems to have provoked some positive economic effects in ex-colonies like Hong Kong and Singapore, it doesn’t mean that adopting a dominant language for economic purposes will be free of the assimilation of other values embedded within the dominant language. For Phillipson, the question related to the marketing of the ELT programs around the world remains, “Can ELT contribute constructively to greater linguistic and social equality, and if so, how could a critical ELT be committed, theoretically and practically, to combating linguicism?” (1998: 319). The
issue raised by this question could be precisely one of the greatest challenges I will face as an ESL teacher, with a newly acquired critical pedagogical orientation, returning to what I can now identify as a colonial/postcolonial Puerto Rico. How could I teach English under the existent colonial conditions in Puerto Rico and still contribute constructively to a greater linguistic and social equality among my own people? How could I accomplish this from the power position of an ESL teacher who is part of the system that is imposing this language on our students?

Phillipson describes in detail how English linguistic imperialism and linguicism emerged within a colonial context and leaves us with the same dilemma I describe above. How could ELT contribute constructively to greater linguistic and social equality in our society? On the other hand, Canagarajah (2003) approaches the issue brought by Phillipson’s question on ELT’s contribution to social equality when he approaches it from the Peripheral perspective in his book, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. Unlike Phillipson, who examines imperialism and its relationship to the ELT field from a macro-level and centre perspective, Canagarajah, explores this subject from a micro-level as well as macro-level orientation. He studies how linguistic imperialism functions in the periphery and particularly how it is complexly experienced in everyday life by English learners within the periphery. He also takes into account the larger socio-political context and its structures that influence life in the communities in the periphery. Canagarajah, an English professor from Sri Lanka currently working in the U.S., recognizes the importance of representing adequately the interests of the Periphery groups; he claims that knowledge constructed around the ELT field has been dominated by Western scholars. As a result, he proposes **critical pedagogy (CP)** as the most
effective pedagogical paradigm to resist English linguistic imperialism as it is expanded through ELT practices around the world. This researcher claims that in the post-modern world the idea that, “education may involve the propagation of knowledges and ideologies held by dominant groups”, has motivated a more critical view to pedagogical practices (2003:3). He describes the historical background of mainstream traditional education and critical pedagogy and how these two pedagogical constructions were conceived under the context of power. Canagarajah starts the historical summary by agreeing with Phillipson (1998) and Pennycook (1998) as he explains that intellectual movements such as, “Enlightenment, rationalism, science, and modernism” have strongly influenced the, “mainstream pedagogical tradition” which is still practiced in our society today (2003:17). He views knowledge as an “intrinsically social” activity that is carried out through interaction within members of a community, usually under the exercise of power. The dominant groups’ knowledge is imposed through the institutions under their power, including of course, the education system (Canagarajah, 1999). As this knowledge is reinforced and established through the educational system, it maintains and justifies the dominant group’s ideology. It is precisely through this perspective that post-Enlightenment and post-modern ideology interprets education to be political, according to Canagarajah (1999). One of the effects of the Enlightenment movement in the West was the development of socio-political organizations such as industrialism, capitalism, and colonialism, which led to the domination of the Periphery or underdeveloped countries in places like Asia, Africa and Latin America. This Enlightenment movement, with its white superiority culture ideology, made the West believe that it was the white man’s mission to spread its cultural and scientific advancement throughout the world.
However, Canagarajah (1999) notes that behind this “altruistic mission” there was also the West’s real need to find more resources for its industry and more markets in which to sell its products, which would boost the capitalist industry and economy all around the world.

This is a very significant colonial historical fact that was also observed in the Caribbean through the U.S. imperialistic and colonialist agenda in the beginning of the twentieth century. The imposition of an English-only language policy on the education system was one of the first tactics the U.S. implemented in Puerto Rico. This policy was actually based more on an exercise of power and economical gain the U.S. could have than on any truly academic motive. Having Puerto Rican English speakers who could communicate and understand the U.S. administration meant that the U.S. could produce obedient, productive workers who could follow their instructions and also become faithful citizens. Spanish was not validated until the U.S. realized they needed bilingual citizens who could serve as business intermediaries between the U.S. and Latin America. This move certainly helped with the U.S. economic expansionist agenda (Torres, 2002). It is not a mere coincidence that Puerto Rico’s economy today is mostly dependent on the U.S. market, since the majority of the products sold on the island come either from the U.S. or through the U.S. For this reason, there is a very close relationship between the economic and business worlds and the ELT field in Puerto Rico. Learning English is automatically related to future success in any business, and this is the mantra frequently used by teachers in the classroom to motivate students to learn English.

This economic and industrial expansion also led to the development of a white man’s scientific and technological view, which was accepted globally as the norm and the whole
truth. This development also created the geographical division between the centre (powerful developed countries) and the periphery (underdeveloped countries) as described previously by Phillipson (1998). Unfortunately, the Enlightenment movement also brought with it the suppression of the periphery/indigenous knowledge systems, leaving the many different ways of knowing and learning represented by minority groups rejected as invalid knowledge within the dominant scientific field. As a consequence, “science was defined as a universally applicable project rather than a cultural product of the West” (Canagarajah, 1999:18).

All this ideology created around the Enlightenment movement has led to the claim that knowledge and education are isolated activities that have nothing to do with the political, cultural, or economical context around them. This claim has helped in, “the legitimation of the Western intellectual tradition”, while invalidating any other different ways of thinking and learning (Canagarajah, 1999).

As a result, post-colonial and post-modern thinkers came forward to try to explain why the practices of mainstream pedagogies are being questioned today. It is within this post-colonial context and post-modern thinking that Critical pedagogy (CP) emerges as the pedagogical paradigm that intends to challenge the hegemony represented by mainstream pedagogy (MP). We now have two educational ideologies that are significantly different; MP is based on the dominant group’s thinking, while CP tries to challenge the dominant group’s thinking as represented by MP.

Canagarajah (1999) argues that even though critical pedagogy was developed by marginalized groups from the periphery, with precursors such as Paulo Freire (1970; 1985), this pedagogical paradigm has been lately appropriated by Western academia, but
with, “certain simplifications and distortions”. This argument seems to suggest for those interested in CP, to first scrutinize some of the original Periphery work of CP practitioners such as Paulo Freire before taking into consideration any of the Western appropriations of CP. Canagarajah (1999) further states that critical pedagogy has become fashionable in academic fields such as “adult literacy (Freire, 1970), literature (hooks, 1989), feminist studies (Lather, 1991), cultural studies (Grossberg, 1994), and education (Giroux, 1992).” Still, this has not been the case with ELT and the language-teaching field (2003:19). In fact, critical pedagogy has been viewed with some aversion by most ELT practitioners according to Canagarajah (1999). He claims this aversion can be explained by the fact that ELT was developed within a colonial context, which helped ELT define the practice of teaching a language as a cognitive activity free of any cultural, political, or economic influence. This narrow definition easily ignores any economic or ideological interest in teaching English, and would deny any agenda other than teaching a language for the benefit of the English learners.

This situation within the ELT field could be observed in the teaching of English in Puerto Rico. From my position as ESL teacher, I don’t recall any critical perspective having been discussed in any of the TESOL conventions that I have attended for many years. Every single lecture was about how to improve the learning and teaching of the language on the island. But, the fact that this language is being imposed under a colonial context, and that children tend to resist it, was rarely discussed. Efforts were consistently concentrated on how to improve the English language situation, but disregarded this very important historical fact of colonization. The connection between critical pedagogy and the ELT field in P.R. is just not there at present. I understand that the main reason for the
lack of a critical pedagogical approach in the ESL curriculum in Puerto Rico could be the colonial status of the island where the English teachers’ preparation program is still based on the mainstream pedagogical paradigm. The situation described above may also explain the reason that many ESL teachers resist the idea of including any political discussion within the ESL curriculum.

Consequently, in order for ELT practitioners to understand the CP project, Canagarajah (1999) encourages them to learn about the post Enlightenment period and the ways in which this period views pedagogical issues. ELT practitioners must be made aware of their unfamiliarity with a pedagogical paradigm like CP, which generates questions that are usually suppressed in the dominant culture, and the mainstream pedagogical field where they were trained in the first place. Therefore, for ELT practitioners to really appreciate the importance of CP, they must make a great effort to reflect upon and understand the underlying political issues and assumptions being made within critical pedagogy. As ESL teachers, we must be willing to get out of our comfort zone and challenge the traditional assumptions we have developed and internalized through our ESL teacher-training programs and practice.

Finally, Canagarajah (1999) reiterates that CP should never be taken as “a settled body of thought with a uniform set of pedagogical practices and assumptions,” because there are “different ways of dealing with power and inequality within the critical pedagogical paradigm” (p. 22). He chooses to distinguish between two competing perspectives called, “models of reproduction and resistance,” to explain the issues of power and inequality within CP. These models come from social philosophies that theorize the nature of education and schooling (Canagarajah, 1999). This researcher describes these two models
as follows: “reproduction models explain how students are conditioned mentally and behaviorally by the practices of schooling to serve the dominant social institutions and groups,” and, “resistance theories explain how there are sufficient contradictions within institutions to help subjects gain agency, conduct critical thinking, and initiate change” (Canagarajah, 1999:22). According to Canagarajah, these two models could be very helpful when examining educational issues through a critical pedagogy lens. For instance, “reproduction models” could show how subtly socio-political influences may actually mold the learning process in schools, while “resistance theories” could keep our eyes open to question all aspects involved in the learning process like “the curriculum, pedagogy, classroom interactions, school regulations, and educational policies,” using a genuine critical view.

Ultimately, Canagarajah (1999) hopes critical pedagogy could help ESL learners in the periphery develop critical language awareness and maintain their vernacular while also appropriating the English language, which could make the periphery learners, “linguistically competent for the culturally hybrid post-modern world they confront”. He strongly suggests, “the maintenance of polyvocality with the clear awareness of their own socio-ideological location empowers them to withstand the totalitarian tendencies – of local nationalist regimes and Western multinational agencies – enforced through uniformity of thought and communication” (1999:197). For Canagarajah, resisting English imperialism is not about avoiding learning the English language, but is more about learning it while being aware of the agenda behind this global language and, at the same time, retaining the native language, becoming bilingual, and maintaining a strong cultural and national identity. It is also about using English to empower yourself by
appropriating it, validating its many variants of “Englishes” and utilizing them to challenge the western dominant ideology behind its well known “standard” form.

Pennycook (1994) is another scholar who has also extensively researched the hegemony of English and its implications as a global language around the world. He states that the ways in which English has been promoted around the world have been changing over time from, “the discourses of pre- Second World War ‘cultural propaganda’ through the postwar English language teaching as ‘development aid’ to the more recent understanding of English as a ‘global commodity’ ” (Pennycook, 1994: 146). The researcher further claims that this view of English as a “global commodity” that can be bought or sold on the world market, has been developed within a power knowledge relationship where English is presented as modern, efficient or scientific, vs. the native language which is invariably represented as backward, traditional, inefficient, or unscientific. Consequently, the English language business is extremely prolific; in addition to selling English didactic material around the world, the promotion of ELT leads to the development of materialistic consumers who, once they learn English and are exposed to the U.S. media through textbooks and films, tend to become consumers of other U.S. products (Pennycook, 1994).

As part of his work, Pennycook (1994) also introduces the notion of “the worldliness of English” which he describes as a term that refers to the positioning of English language both locally and globally. Both the global and local positions “reflect social relations and constitute social relations,” and make the worldliness of English a question of cultural politics. This notion of the worldliness of English has to do with how the act of using English as an international language will, “always imply a position within a social order,
a cultural politics, a struggle over different representations of the self and others” (1994:34). He describes the ELT practices as cultural practices, and, rather than focus on the fact that ELT practices are inherently expansionist or that these practices are for the most part inappropriate when carried out in different cultural contexts, he chooses instead to focus on, “how the teaching practices themselves represent particular visions of the world and thus make the English language classroom a site of cultural politics, a place where different versions of how the world is and should be are struggled over” (Pennycook, 1994:146). This focus on practices leads Pennycook to discuss a brief historical background on language teaching methods and how these have contributed to the portrayal of English as a scientific, modern, and efficient language, and dictated how it should be taught through the use of English only, without the interference of the native language. He claims that well known teaching methods such as audiolingualism, as applied in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as the communicative approach in the 1970s and 1980s, always advocated for a restricted monolingual teaching of English as the only way to learn a language. Consequently, “the English language classroom, as idealized in the discourses of Western ELT theory, is not a place in which languages can be freely used and exchanged but rather has come to reflect a dogmatic belief in a monolingualist approach to language learning” (Pennycook, 1994: 169).

I see this monolingualist approach to teaching English as another way of devaluing the native language in comparison with the imposed second language. This approach was precisely what I was exposed to through the ESL teaching training program during my years at college. I recall very well the times when, as a beginning teacher teaching English in Puerto Rico I demanded that the students speak English exclusively in the
classroom, and prohibited the use of Spanish. Interestingly, the same approach was followed when I taught Spanish as a foreign language in the United States. I do remember, however, being very surprised when the supervisor demanded the use of Spanish only in the kindergarten class that I taught; these young students never had any exposure to Spanish before and there were no opportunities for them to be exposed to the Spanish language outside the classroom. I implemented the supervisor’s instructions as far as possible, and the monolingual approach to teaching a foreign language seemed to be effective to some extent. Still, it was impossible to continue exclusively in Spanish one hundred percent of the time. It was evident that there were times in which I needed to speak English if I wanted to be clearly understood by the young children. In order to allow the children to feel secure and earn their trust, I wanted them to know that I could also understand them and they could feel free to communicate with me in their native language if they had to do so. Curiously, I had been more inflexible as an ESL teacher with the students in Puerto Rico in letting them speak Spanish in class. This was probably because I knew that they were exposed to English through the media outside the classroom, and hence, I assumed that English shouldn’t be such a strange language to them as Spanish was to the U.S. students. Eventually, I realized that this was not the case for every student. While some of them were more exposed to the English language at home through cable TV and video games, this was not the case for many other students. The point being made here is that, as an ESL teacher, I followed for some time this monolingual approach that Pennycook is describing in his work. It was not until I was exposed to more recent pedagogical methodologies such as the Constructivist approach (Vygotsky, 1954), or the Whole Language educational philosophy (Goodman, 1974), that
I became more flexible in the classroom. These approaches advocate respect for the learner’s native language and validate the idea that a second language is learned based on well-developed first language skills.

In addition to the monolingualist approach, among those teaching methodologies applied to the ELT field, Pennycook (1994) also examines the content of the ESL curriculum. His opinion is that this curriculum has been trivialized, not as a mere coincidence but as a way to assimilate English learners to the western culture. Thus, this simplified English content, “ignores key issues of social inequality faced by many ESL learners,” and presents education as an activity free of any political or cultural influences or as one that, “has nothing to do with the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities or with questions of racism and exclusion” (Pennycook, 1994: 172). This trivialization of the English language curriculum also does not take into account how, “language has been historically constructed around questions of power and dominance”, and supports, “a view of teaching that may have more to do with assimilation than with any useful notion of empowerment” (Pennycook, 1994).

Another interesting point Pennycook (1994) discusses in his work is how complex and sometimes contradictory the teaching of English can be within a postcolonial context. He describes how the English language in Africa, paradoxically, became a colonial tool that led to a degree of Westernization, while at the same time it served as an educational tool which helped the colonized people express and articulate their anti-colonial feelings as the new African nations emerged. Many colonized people in Africa viewed English acquisition as a sign of education and intellect. It was the so-called intellectuals who started to express, in English, their opposition to the Empire as resistance to the colonial
rule emerged. Ironically, English became the language used to resist precisely those racist ideas it taught to the African people through the ELT program as a cultural and political practice.

Interestingly, a parallel situation is occurring with Puerto Ricans and the English language, particularly with Puerto Ricans located now in the United States. Organizations, focusing on Puerto Rican Studies publish academic journals with an array of articles in English. Implicit in these articles, many Puerto Rican academics, among other things, are challenging the U.S. dominant culture and its practices against minority groups both in and out of the U.S. Thus, some Puerto Rican scholars are using the language of the colonizing country to resist and challenge the colonial and racist practices they claim the U.S. still employs against them today.

Finally, Pennycook (1994) agrees with Canagarajah (1999) as he also advocates for the use of a critical pedagogy paradigm within the ELT venue as a way to empower the English language learners. He is interested in Freire’s current critical pedagogical practices and his approaches based on a “problem-posing curriculum” which could lead students to increase their critical consciousness of real issues and concerns surrounding their lives. As a result, Pennycook (1994) notes that, “a critical practice in English language teaching must start with ways of critically exploring students’ cultures, knowledges and histories in ways that are both challenging and at the same time affirming and supportive” (p.311). He also makes a very important point in terms of the decolonization of English and its relationship to critical pedagogy when he states that if one of the objectives of critical pedagogy is to decolonize English, then it would be necessary to first decolonize the colonizer’s minds, since colonialism has also brought
with it the Orientalist construction of the inarticulate or primitive “Other”. Pennycook then argues that colonized and colonizers, as well as post-colonized and post-colonizers, are both linked linguistically and discursively, and are constantly affecting each other through the discourses and counter-discourses of English. English, ironically, could be in many ways, “the greatest hope for a possible decolonizing of the colonizer’s mind” (Pennycook, 1994:325). He then concludes that these, “counter discourses formulated through English and the articulation of insurgent knowledges and cultural practices in English offer alternative possibilities to the colonizers and post-colonizers, challenging and changing the cultures and discourses that dominate the world” (Pennycook, 1994:326).

It could be observed that Canagarajah and Pennycook both share the idea that Freire’s critical pedagogy can offer a real possibility for the ELT field to change its dominant, monolingual practices toward a more challenging and critical curriculum where English learners could be empowered. However, Pennycook takes a step further in his research and discusses how English can actually become the tool to decolonize not only the colonized minds but the colonizer’s minds as well. This could certainly make a difference for those native English teachers who are dispersed all around the world, teaching English to so many different cultures and in so many contexts. Once native English speakers cease viewing their English learners as primitive and become interested in their backgrounds, try to understand their orientation and world views, and try to help them address their realities, the possibility emerges for the learners to study under a more equitable environment and be empowered by the same language that has been used to dominate them.
English as a Colonial tool around the World and in Puerto Rico

In his book, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*, Pennycook (1998) discusses not only how English is closely related to the discourses of colonialism, but also how the ELT profession continues with neo-colonial practices in countries within the periphery. He makes a clear connection between the English language and colonialism by stating the following: “English language teaching was a crucial part of the colonial enterprise and English has been a major language in which colonialism has been written” (Pennycook, 1998: 9). The colonization of Puerto Rico and the language policy issues that accompanied this process have also occurred elsewhere globally throughout history with a few variants. If we compare English policies during colonial times in Puerto Rico with other countries like China, it is interesting to observe that even when the Chinese language was not highly valued in contrast with English by some British colonizers, others viewed it differently. Some thought that it was preferable to teach Chinese because its culture teaches morals and respect for the authority, which could then promote obedience and respect for the British Empire. Other British colonizers agreed with teaching Chinese, but had a different motive. They had the idea that it was more important to spread the Western knowledge through the native language, which ensures better understanding than the spreading of the English language alone (Pennycook, 1998). Using the Chinese language as a colonizing tool helped preserve the colonized people’s native language, since bilingual education respected their language; in this context Chinese was not substituted by English.

During the time of colonization in India, a similar situation occurred in relation to the teaching of English. The colonizing British government supported the idea that teaching
Western thinking in the vernacular languages of India could be more advantageous than using English only as the medium of instruction. The British dominant culture in this situation believed in educating those that they considered to be backward peoples with Western ideas in order to produce, “a productive and docile workforce who would also become consumers within colonial capitalism” (Pennycook, p. 93, 1998). Again, even though the native language was used as a tool to aid the colonialist, and also capitalist agenda, the vernacular languages were never substituted by English. In Puerto Rico, on the other hand, where Spanish was discarded from the beginning of colonization as something that was not even considered to be a real language but a kind of slang that must be substituted by English, the indigenous language was not even valued as a colonizing tool until the concept of conducting business with South and Central America developed in support of the fast growing economy of the U.S. (Torres-Gonzales 2002). In order to expand U.S. trade with South America, the federal government advocated a Spanish/English bilingual education program with the overarching aim that Puerto Ricans could become industrial leaders who would assist the U.S. extend commerce, and create markets for their manufacturers (Torres-Gonzáles, 2002). Once again, language policies were implemented to promote U.S. economic expansion plans; Spanish became just another useful tool for the U.S. to promote its economic agenda. Even when the Federal government acknowledged that Spanish was crucial to our heritage and cultural identity, English was expanded into daily life and the economic arena. Clearly, the final goal was to use the English language as the medium of communication except when Spanish was needed to conduct business with Latin America. However, this goal has never been accomplished since the imposition of English on the island actually motivated people to
defend their native language. In spite of this, English is still a mandatory subject, the supporting textbooks invariably originate in the U.S., and the Americanization process is existent on the island.

**Colonial /Postcolonial Historical Background in Puerto Rico**

Given that Puerto Rico is in actuality a colony of the United States; educational policy imposes English language, history, and culture of the U.S. in our schools via Spanish and English textbooks; Puerto Rican history is diminished, hiding the realities and challenges toward U.S. dominance of the island; U.S.-made textbooks mostly portray the U.S. culture - rarely representing Puerto Rican or Latino characters; and many resist the imposition of English; how are Puerto Rican children reading, interpreting and making meaning of the curriculum within this colonial postcolonial context?

To understand the notion of colonialism and postcolonialism in the Puerto Rican context, we must first take a look at the complex historical background of the island.

Puerto Rico was first colonized by the Spaniards who established four hundred years of European colonialism on the island. Spanish occupation ceased when Puerto Rico became a possession of the United States as a result of the Spanish-American War in 1898 and remains so up to the present time. Soon after United States invaded and occupied the island under a military government, an intensive Americanization process of the Puerto Rican people began. The aggressive execution of the Americanization process contrasts greatly to what General Miles said in his first document addressing the people of Puerto Rico, as incorporated by Negrón de Montilla (1975) in her book,
Americanization in Puerto Rico and the Public-School System 1900/1930. A portion of the document is as follows:

“The chief object of the American military forces will be to overthrow the armed authority of Spain and to give to the people…the largest measure of liberty consistent with this military occupation. We have not come to make war upon the people of a country that for centuries has been oppressed, but on the contrary to bring you protection…to promote your prosperity and to bestow upon you the…immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our Government.” (Negrón de Montilla, 1997:2)

With the stated intention to promote prosperity among the Puerto Rican people, the first attempts to Americanize them were accomplished via the educational system. However, those sweeping reforms made by General John Eaton as Head of the Bureau of Education during the military regime faced strong opposition. Negrón de Montilla (1975) He clearly stated that his mission was to promote Americanization through the English language. Among his proposals for English education were the compulsory learning of English by every teacher, the preference to hire English speaking teachers (mostly young men who came to P.R. with the American army) over local ones, and the mandatory examination of high school and college students in English (Negrón de Montilla, 1975). General Eaton didn’t last beyond his first year, but his replacement, Assistant General Clark, shared his ideas regarding English language policy. He even considered Puerto Rican Spanish a “patois” and strongly advocated for a total Americanization of the schools in order to inspire an “American spirit” among the “passive” and “moldable” teachers and students (Negrón de Montilla, 1975: 236).

After multiple visits to Washington by Puerto Rican commissioners advocating for the ending of the military regime, the Foraker Act (The first Organic Act of Puerto Rico)
made a transition to a civil government possible in 1900. However, this new civil
government only appointed American governors, thus avoiding any possibility of self-
governance by Puerto Ricans. General Davis believed this self-government could lead to
their independence, but also held the opinion that Puerto Ricans were not capable of
using the power of independence wisely. At that time he was an influential voice of the
military and had the support of Congress (Negrón de Montilla, 1975).
The new civil government provided for the creation of the Department of Public
Instruction; its head, was appointed by the President and occupied a position at the Upper
House as well. Being a legislator and a member of the Executive Cabinet gave the
Commissioner of Education great power to carry out President McKinley’s goal, “to put
the conscience of the American people on the islands of the sea” (Middeldyk 1903 as
cited by Negrón de Montilla 1975: 238). Thus, the Education commissioners, advocating
this ideology, launched a strong Americanization process, which led to general guidelines
incorporated in the Island’s civil affairs such as:

“…the public school system which now prevails in the United States should be provided
for Puerto Rico and that the same system of education and the same character of books
now regarded most favorably in the country should be given to them…Puerto Rico is now
and is henceforth to be part of the American possessions and its people are to be
American.”

(Report of the United Sates Insular Commission to the Secretary of War, 1899 cited by
Negrón de Montilla 1997:36)

Most Education commissioners implemented an array of contradictory language policies
which led to great opposition from teachers, students and local politicians. These
language policies established a diversity of teaching methodologies ranging from English
immersion programs to bilingual curriculums at all academic levels. The implementation of a particular methodology was dependent upon any designated Commissioner’s educational, political and philosophical background.

From 1900 to 1901, Martin Brumbaugh, the first Commissioner of Education, advocated a policy to continue the teaching of Spanish while teaching English as a separate subject with the objective that it became the commercial and domestic language of P.R. To accomplish this goal, many North American English teachers were hired, U.S. holiday celebrations were encouraged, schools were named after American patriots, and salutation of the flag - accompanied by the singing of the American national anthem - were all instituted at schools all around the island (Negrón de Montilla, 1997). In 1902, Samuel McCune Lindsay succeeded Brumbaugh and followed his practices. He instituted teacher-training at Harvard and Cornell, created the University of Puerto Rico, and implemented the testing of English teachers for hiring purposes, (although the teachers refused to take the tests). In 1904, Roland P. Falkner succeeded Lindsay and implemented the most controversial language policy of all. His policy mandated the use of English as a medium of instruction and suppressed the use of the Spanish language in classrooms. In order to implement this, Falkner established English teacher training programs, summer institutes, and compulsory weekly English classes for the native teachers. A monthly raise was offered to those who were qualified to teach English, but teachers who failed the English test could be suspended and their teaching license could be revoked after failing the test for more than two years (Negrón de Montilla, 1997). This policy must have been devastating for teachers who, with their own limitations in the English language, had to deal with English textbooks in all subject areas. Consequently,
the students’ learning process must have been affected as well. This policy continued
with other commissioners until 1916, expanding into the rural areas, but not without the
sometimes-violent resistance of parents, students, and teachers. Opposition became so
strong that the Puerto Rican legislature, following the petition of Puerto Rican Teachers
Association, pushed for changes in this policy, advocating the inclusion of Spanish as a
medium of instruction at the elementary level, although without success. During this
time, a strong nationalist sentiment was spreading throughout the island, even though
differing opinions about English and Spanish language policies among Puerto Ricans had
already been formed. According to Pousada (1999), it was at this point that the
connection between politics and language policies manifested itself clearly. Pro-English
followers were seen as assimilationists while pro-Spanish people were considered
separatists. The teaching of English was finally viewed as a clear example of U.S.
imperialism and a real threat to Puerto Rican culture and identity. In 1916, Paul G. Miller
became the next Education Commissioner. As a teacher during the early days of the U.S.
occupation, he had experienced the problems associated with the teaching of English in
P.R., and with implementing the policy of Spanish as a medium of instruction from first
to fourth grades, English and Spanish in fifth grade, and English as a medium of
instruction from sixth grade on. He described this policy as a way to conserve Spanish
while learning English, which would make students bilingual (Negrón de Montilla 1997).
The Teachers Association was not satisfied with this policy and continued their petition
for Spanish to be the sole medium of instruction in the elementary levels. However in
1917, these protests diminished once U.S. citizenship was granted to Puerto Ricans
through the Jones Act Law, thus providing some a reason to accept both the
Americanization process and the learning of English (Pousada 1999). Subsequently, until 1930 English was strongly enforced by requiring it on all official school documentation, during extra curricular activities, in mandatory high school tests prior to graduation, and the testing of teachers, accompanied by the prohibition of materials written exclusively in Spanish. These enforcement policies led to additional protests by both parents and teachers. Eminent Puerto Rican intellectuals became involved during this time, publicly defending the use of Spanish as the medium of instruction in schools. As a result, Commissioner Huyke resigned and José Padín replaced him in 1930 (Negrón de Montilla, 1997). Padín, who believed in bilingual education and the placement of both languages at the same level, implemented Spanish as the medium of instruction up to the eighth grade with English considered as a special subject, while in high school English would be the medium of instruction, with Spanish then designated as a special subject (Pousada, 1999). Padín viewed the previous bilingual language programs as failures and attributed these failures, “to the attempt to teach English to the Puerto Rican children as if it were their mother-tongue, without regard to the fact that they live in a non-English environment, and utilizing the advantages which accrue to the children from linguistic training in their native language” (Padín (1916) cited by Rogers, 1983). Padín’s bilingual policy lasted until 1937 when José M. Gallardo, the new Education Commissioner appointed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, established the use of both English and Spanish in the elementary grades at the request of the President to make all Puerto Ricans bilingual, since English was considered the official language of the U.S. In 1946, President Truman named Mariano Villaronga as Commissioner. Villaronga intended to institute Spanish as a medium of instruction to all levels, with English taught as
compulsory second language, but had to resign because his education policy was not espoused by the Federal government.

It was not until 1948 that Puerto Rico had its first elected Governor, Luis Muñóz Marín. He reinstated Villaronga as Education Commissioner in 1949, and Villaronga rapidly established Spanish as the medium of instruction at every level of education on the island, designating English as a mandatory second language subject. This is the policy that is still in effect today (Pousada, 1999).

As we can observe, the historical background of colonialism and education in Puerto Rico has been very complicated due to all the inconsistencies of policy and application. The language debate became purely political following application of the (so called) *Project for the Bilingual Citizen* as promoted by the Pro-Statehood party in the late 1990’s, thus causing great controversy among different sectors on the island. The Project advocated a bilingual education program to be implemented in some public schools where subjects like Math and Science were mandated to be conducted in English with English textbooks. We can imagine the opposition of teachers who were not competent in English and were being pressured to teach these subjects in this language. Torres (2002), who analyzed this project carefully, concluded that this bilingual program seemed to be more of a *subtracting* one (learning English at the expense of losing Spanish) than an *additive* one (becoming very competent in Spanish and adding English as a foreign language). In this Project, English had priority over Spanish while it claimed that both languages were important and deserved the same attention. It appeared that the ideology behind the Bilingual Citizen project was to satisfy the Federal government in its English-only requirement in the event that Puerto Rico requested Statehood status from the U.S.
Congress. The fear of losing the native language caused many educators, students, parents, and politicians to oppose this Project (Torres, 2002). The Bilingual Citizen Project terminated once the political party supporting it lost the elections in 2000.

It is clearly observable that resistance to the “Americanization” process has been consistent throughout our colonial history within certain sectors of Puerto Rican society and presently seems to be active whenever the English vs. Spanish language discourse is discussed.

**ESL in Colonial/Postcolonial Puerto Rico Today**

Few studies related to the instruction of the English language for public high school students have been conducted in Puerto Rico. One of these studies, relevant to my research, was written by María Inés Rodríguez-Galarza (1997) who worked with the students’ perceptions and attitudes toward English in Puerto Rico. Rodríguez-Galarza compares how the difference between high and low achievement in English affects the students’ attitudes toward English. Even though the researcher focuses on the effect on their achievement, she made the connection in her conclusions between the English instruction, the social, psychological, cultural, and political factors and how these had an impact on both the students’ attitudes and their achievements. The low achievers who perceived English as a threat to their cultural identity had a negative attitude toward learning the second language. It was interesting to observe that her participants, particularly the low achievers, claimed that English should not be a mandatory subject, but one that students should have the opportunity to elect to study. The participants in my pilot study likewise mentioned the desire to have this choice instead of English being
imposed upon them. Rodriguez-Galarza (1997) doesn’t discuss in depth the issue of identity and its possible connection with the English instruction. This is an area that holds interest for me; my participants definitely appeared to make this particular connection during the pilot study. On the other hand, I would like to concentrate on how my participants perceive the learning of English within a colonial/postcolonial context regardless of their achievement in the English class. I am also interested in what this group of Puerto Rican students has to say concerning the textbooks utilized in the English classroom today after evaluating them with a critical eye.

Another interesting study, conducted in Puerto Rico and related to English instruction, is one Torruellas (1990) made with students in the context of three different private high schools, and the relationship between English instruction and the issues of class, identity, and ideology. Two of the private schools had mostly middle and upper middle class student populations and the third school involved a student population that could be described as mostly upper class. She describes the value students in these three private schools hold toward English and how this value affects their English achievement, their future college education, and possible careers. The researcher points out that to study the value that informs the learning of English by the middle and upper classes in Puerto Rico is particularly important, because this aspect of educational research is closely related to how social and economic capital is distributed differently in contemporary Puerto Rican society. An interesting finding in this study is the contradiction exhibited by some middle class students from private high schools. They paradoxically demonstrated resistance toward the English language through their behavior in class as it was observed by the researcher, while their responses to the research survey supported the learning of English
for economic purposes. Torruellas (1990) explains that although middle class students understand that English is essential to obtain a good profession in modern Puerto Rico, “the lack of practical experience to sustain this belief turns English learning into an imposed task” (p. 241). Most middle class students don’t see the need to learn English at a higher level since they don’t expect to study abroad in the U.S., which they know their parents can’t afford, and they don’t anticipate high-level management positions in multinational companies where excellent English proficiency is pro-forma. She concludes that student counter-school culture in the middle class schools tends to be oppositional toward the English class, while at the upper class private school student culture reinforces the English dominant educational paradigm. These private school students are motivated by their goal to study in the U.S.; their privileged social status affords them the possibility and advantage to consider this eventuality. According to Torruellas (1990), her research has uncovered, “how differential achievement in English serves as a marker of ‘distinction’ among different segments within the largely privileged social group that sponsors private schools” (p. 306). This research also reveals how English is no longer just a colonizing tool to “Americanize” our students, but a tool that helps in perpetuating the social class differences in today’s Puerto Rican society. It further reveals how the U.S. dominant ideology perpetuates its power base, since those upper class students trained in these private English immersion schools, attend U.S. colleges, experience post graduate education in the dominant culture, and eventually hold the high level management positions in various industries all around the island. This could be considered a different kind of “reproduction model” (Canagarajah, 1999) where, instead of having average students, “conditioned mentally and behaviorally by the practices of
schooling to serve the dominant social institutions and groups,” students of an upper social class are conditioned mentally and behaviorally through their education to be leaders and become part of the dominant social institutions which perpetuates the U.S. western cultural ideology.

It has been difficult to locate literature related to the issue of culture and the learning of a second language involving elementary school children in Puerto Rico. Most of the literature I found deals with adolescents, college students, or adults. Among the very few found, there was a master’s thesis titled; *A Description of English Language Learning in a Rural Elementary Community School in Puerto Rico* (Heinlein-Pacheco, 1999). In this research, the author, who identifies herself as a non-Puerto Rican native English speaker, describes her experience as an English teacher in an elementary school in a rural area of Puerto Rico. Heinlein-Pacheco describes the methodologies and approaches the Department of Education expects English teachers to use in the classroom after the well-known *Educational Reform* was implemented in the public school system in Puerto Rico in 1994. She explains that part of this Educational Reform was applied to the English language program through the *Project for Developing a Bilingual Citizen*, which designates English and Spanish as possible mediums of instruction for all grade levels. I mentioned this project in the first chapter and discussed it in more detail previously in this chapter. According to Heinlein-Pacheco (1999) the methodologies used in the department of education at the time of her research were the following: Natural Approach, Communicative Approach, and Whole Language. It is interesting to note that according to Pennycook (1994), the first two approaches mostly advocate for a, “monolingualist approach to language learning”, as the only way to learn a second
language. These approaches also advocate for the trivialization of the English language curriculum which does not take into account how, “language has been historically constructed around questions of power and dominance”, and supports, “a view of teaching that may have more to do with assimilation than with any useful notion of empowerment” (Pennycook, 1994).

Pennycook’s views concerning these approaches could be clearly observed when the researcher performed research in action by reflecting on her own teaching practices and analyzing her students’ response to the English class. She states the following about her students: “The 3rd grade students were able to read in English to the extent that they could sound English words out with a lot of interference from the Spanish sound and spelling system” (emphasis mine) (Heinlein-Pacheco, 1999:104). The researcher viewed the native language of Spanish as interference instead of a natural and logical accent second language learners develop as part of the process of learning English. Heinlein-Pacheco also insists on teaching the children vocabulary words with English definitions while discouraging the use of Spanish definitions (even when students insisted on having them). The students claimed that they needed Spanish definitions in order to have their parents understand their English work, since many of their parents didn’t have any English knowledge. In any case, students could have learned the English definitions as well as the Spanish definitions simultaneously. It appeared that the researcher viewed this practice as another interference of the Spanish language instead of looking at this practice as the students’ own practical strategy to learn English. Viewing Spanish in this context as interference, and not allowing student use of Spanish definitions as a strategy to help them learn English could also send a negative message about their native language to
Puerto Rican students. Whole Language philosophy states that any negative attitude toward a child’s language, whether native or second language, could affect the learner’s ability to expand their language skills and their communication with the teacher (Goodman, 1974). I recall following similar monolingual practices during my first years of teaching English in Puerto Rico, since this was what western ESL theory advocated. Yet, as I stated earlier, after learning about the Whole Language philosophy, I began to see the use of Spanish as a strategy to learn English and welcomed the use of this strategy in the ESL class. I believe this strategy proved to be very helpful to many students who eventually became bilingual. Looking at the Spanish native language as a strength on which teachers can draw, rather than as interference, could make a difference in the students’ attitudes toward their native language as well as towards the second language.

Finally, Heinlein-Pacheco evaluates the textbooks she used to teach English and concluded that these were not intended for second language learners. These were U.S.-made books intended for native English speakers and were being used above the grade level for which the textbooks were originally intended. For example, she used a 3rd grade textbook originally intended for native English speakers with 6th grade second language learners. The researcher claims that the English text within the stories and their context were “confusing” for the Puerto Rican students. However, Heinlein-Pacheco does not discuss in detail the relevance the stories within these textbooks may or may not have with her students’ Puerto Rican culture and their immediate environment in a rural area. This could be a factor generating some confusion for the Puerto Rican students. The use of English textbooks is one of the issues I discussed with my participants; they had the
ability to view English textbooks and their images used in the ESL class critically and they expressed many interesting opinions about them. Once again, ESL is discussed through this research within a western pedagogical ideology but not from a critical pedagogical view, which is the perspective that I am concentrating on in my research.

One of the few studies related to elementary school children in the U.S. is the research done by Dr. Lourdes Soto involving elementary Puerto Rican children from a school in Pennsylvania. She was studying how children perceive their identities as bilingual and biliterate subjects within their community and the school setting (Soto, Bilingual Research Journal, 2002). She found in this study that these Puerto Rican children demonstrated what she calls, “pro-social altruistic behaviors.” They were willing to advocate bilingualism and biliteracy and shared their views with non Puerto Rican children in their school after seeing how the bilingual program at their school was being eliminated by the board of Education. Some children indicated very clearly through the interviews that they did not want to become “American.” They were willing to become bilingual, but they did not want to lose their Puerto Rican identity. They also were not willing to forfeit the Spanish language being taught at their Pennsylvania school. The difference I see between these children and the ones living in Puerto Rico is that on the island, children don’t seem to feel threatened to lose their language and the pressure from other organizations to substitute their culture for the “other one” doesn’t seem as evident for them – even when the media is bombarding them constantly with U.S. culture propaganda.

The Education System has been a key player in the colonization of the island, as English has always been a compulsory subject. Rodriguez-Galarza (1997) states in her thesis that
it is, “through the English program [that] the Department of Education in Puerto Rico seeks to further develop the Americanization efforts carried out through the current curriculum” (p. 30). If this Americanization effort continues through the current English curriculum as Rodriguez-Galarza states, then again what do our students think about it? How do they perceive the teaching of the ESL class and the text books used in it under these circumstances? These questions will be discussed in more detail in chapter four and five.
CHAPTER THREE

Qualitative Research and the Teaching of English in Puerto Rico

Research Methodology

My research focuses on children’s perception of learning English as a second language in Puerto Rico in a colonial/postcolonial context; also how these children perceive, read, and understand the stories and accompanying images used to teach them the English language.

As my interest is in developing an in-depth analysis of how particular subjects perceive the learning of English as a second language in Puerto Rico, the qualitative approach involving Case Study research is applied in this study. The Case Study model was also chosen because, according to Stake (1995), it is “highly personal research” wherein the participants can be studied in depth. Stake (1995) affirms that in Case Study, “We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on the case itself” (p.8). The focus in the Case Study method is in understanding the case thoroughly. Because of this, we have the possibility of modifying the research design and initial questions, in the event new issues emerge along the way. It is a very flexible methodology that allows for changes as they are necessary through the process. There is also an ongoing interpretation of the data, since these interpretations can vary during the process of our investigation. The idea is to seek an understanding of the issue and possible interpretations, not necessarily to get a particular or definite answer to a
question. The objective of my study is to understand how this group of children see and perceive the learning of English as a second language under colonial conditions and how this may be related to their own culture and national identity. It is not my intention to find a solution for the language dilemma in Puerto Rico, but to better understand such complex phenomena from the students’ perspective.

In the Case Study methodology, the researchers are also encouraged to include our own personal perspectives into the interpretation. This is vital for my research because, as I discuss the English language issue with my participants, I am simultaneously reflecting on my role as an ESL teacher in Puerto Rico and on my own educational philosophy. My personal views on this issue will be evident in my study, and this qualitative method also allows me to choose how personal I would like it to be as well as what roles I would like to assume. Additionally the Case Study research method scrutinizes the “particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Although this method focuses in particularization instead of generalization, Stake (1995) claims that there is still some of what he calls “naturalistic generalization” within the method, because people arrive at conclusions “through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experiences so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves.” Another way of making generalizations according to Stake, is when “people are familiar with other cases and they may add this one in, making a slightly new group from which to generalize, a new opportunity to modify old generalizations” (Stake, 1995, p. 85).

The particularity of my Case Study is that it is an in-depth study of the perceptions that a group of ten Puerto Rican children hold concerning learning English as a second
language and of the textbooks used in their class under the complex circumstances of a colonial/postcolonial context on their island.

It is my hope that this study might become a “naturalistic generalization” for other ESL teachers who may be struggling with the difficulties of understanding their students’ reactions toward the English language as they try to teach it as a foreign or a second language to non-native language learners, not only in Puerto Rico but also globally. Case Study theory (Stake, 1995) allows me to not simply interpret the particularity of my study, but also to pass along an experiential account for future readers to apply to similar situations. The experience of this small group of participants becomes just one more example of the many other experiences existent within a broader context in Puerto Rico or any other country with similar postcolonial circumstances.

**Cases and Other Units of Analysis, Sites, Data Sources, and Collection Strategies**

I conducted my study at the University of Puerto Rico’s Laboratory High School (UHS) (grade levels 8-12.), where the students involved in the 5th grade pilot study were currently enrolled. (I had carried out the pilot study as part of my first doctoral class at The Pennsylvania State University.) UHS is located in metropolitan San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico. This area is a cosmopolitan city where cultural life, social entertainment facilities, the largest shopping malls, and the latest technological facilities and media services such as cable TV and internet access are available to the majority of its residents. The setting of this high school is uniquely distinct because it serves as a laboratory school for the University of Puerto Rico (the main State University), yet it is not part of the Department of Education, nor is it a private school. Parents are not required to pay the
monthly fees charged by private schools, only one small fee to be paid at the beginning of the first semester covering the entire school year. This is not the context existent within the public school system. Moreover, in order for teachers to work at the UHS, they must have obtained a Masters or a Doctoral degree. As a laboratory school exempt from oversight by Puerto Rico’s Department of Public Education, the UHS creates its own unique curriculum and serves as both a model and a class observation and practicum site for student teachers. The high school has a reputation for being a college preparatory school where students are exposed to innovative classroom activities and encouraged to express their opinions openly through curricula development of critical-thinking...

This education center was convenient for my particular study because, as a laboratory school, it was open to research and I had familiarity with it from past involvement. Being acquainted with the school personnel and the administrators facilitated the bureaucratic process necessary to implement my research. The majority of the participants developed their academic skills in the Elementary laboratory school before they entered the UHS.

The participants in this study were ten Puerto Rican children who were among the initial forty 5th grade students, divided into two groups who participated in a pilot study survey three years prior. I had the opportunity to reconnect with the groups a year later, while they were in 6th grade, to discuss their answers to the pilot survey. The group discussion regarding the survey from the first pilot study elicited interesting responses, which then initiated the framework overarching my research.

By the time my study was instituted, the students were in 8th grade and the number of participants had been narrowed down by my selection to a group of six girls and four boys. Most participants came from middle class working families, although two
participants could be considered upper middle class if we consider their parents’ careers in dental medicine and as Associate Dean at the University. The participants’ profile information is summarized in the chart provided in the following page. According to the information provided through the participants’ profile documents, the academic background of the parents indicates varying
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age/Gender</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Job - Fa</th>
<th>Job - Mo</th>
<th>TV in Eng</th>
<th>List Music</th>
<th>Self-Eval. ENG</th>
<th>Relatives in USA</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Siblings' School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Margie</td>
<td>13/F</td>
<td>Always in Puerto</td>
<td>University based - Laboratory</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Grant writer</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>In English</td>
<td>+ ORAL Low writing &amp; reading</td>
<td>Yes – Only Spanish</td>
<td>1M</td>
<td>Public university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>12/F</td>
<td>Rico</td>
<td></td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Special Ed – Asst</td>
<td>SOME</td>
<td>Spanish ONLY</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes – Only Spanish</td>
<td>3F</td>
<td>Lab School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>13/M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>SOME</td>
<td>In English</td>
<td>&quot;Pretty bad&quot;</td>
<td>Yes – ENG minimally</td>
<td>2M</td>
<td>Lab School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>13/F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Administ. Asst.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Spanish ONLY</td>
<td>Able but need more work</td>
<td>Yes – ENG only</td>
<td>1F</td>
<td>Private School, Public college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramon</td>
<td>13/M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paramedic</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>English &amp; Spanish</td>
<td>High with Spanish accent</td>
<td>Yes – Only Spanish</td>
<td>1F</td>
<td>Private School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>13/F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>English &amp; Spanish</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1F, 1M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolando</td>
<td>13/F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Elem. teacher</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Spanish ONLY</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes – Only Spanish</td>
<td>3M</td>
<td>2M – Public university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>13/F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td>Assistant Dean</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Spanish &amp; English</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes – ENG &amp; SPAN</td>
<td>1M</td>
<td>1M – U.S. public univ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>13/F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Speech Pathologist</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Spanish &amp; English</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes – ENG &amp; SPAN</td>
<td>1F</td>
<td>Lab School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armando</td>
<td>11/M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Home – Higher Ed</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>In English</td>
<td>High – prefers Spanish</td>
<td>Yes – ENG &amp; SPAN</td>
<td>1F</td>
<td>Private School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
levels of academic degrees obtained, ranging from a basic two-year Associate degree, to Bachelors, Masters, and one degree in Medicine.

As we can observe, all of the participants have parents who have valued education and have set an example for their children, therefore we can predict the probability that the participants have their own academic expectations. The participants’ family groupings range from a one single child - to a four-children family. Six siblings attend private schools while four participants have siblings enrolled in the Elementary laboratory school and the UHS laboratory school. Seven participants have relatives living in the U.S. who converse both in English and in Spanish with them, while two participants have no relatives in the U.S. This information indicates how some participants might have the opportunity through their relatives to be exposed to and practice English more frequently than other participants. All the participants live within the San Juan metropolitan area, had a cellular phone provided by their parents, and access to the Internet and cable T.V. at home. It is important to point out that my student participants have access to technological facilities that many students in other schools around the island, particularly in the countryside, may not have due to limited financial resources and/or inaccessibility to this technology in the area where they reside. All of the participants have been resident on the island all of their lives. This is a detail crucial to my research, since Puerto Rican children who live in the States have a different context from the ones who live on the island. English in Puerto Rico is taught as a second language even though students don’t have an immediate need for the language in their daily lives, while Puerto Rican students in the United States have an immediate need to learn English in order to survive within an
English-speaking environment. The context of the setting could certainly lead to different responses toward the perception of the English language.

After obtaining the required permits from the school administration in the University of Puerto Rico, CIPSHI (Comité Institucional para la Protección de los Seres Humanos en la Investigación) and the pertinent IRB (Institutional Research Board) at Penn State, I contacted ten of the 8th grade students who had participated in the first survey in the pilot study. I also contacted both their parents and their English teachers through an invitation letter to assertain the students’ availability to participate in the study (See Appendix B for these letters). The students were selected by myself based on my perception of their openness to answering the questions in the first survey discussion and expression of what I considered to be interesting views concerning their culture, their national identity and the teaching of English in Puerto Rico. In the process of selecting these candidates, I also took into consideration different characteristics such as gender and academic, social and family backgrounds in order to maximize what I felt could be learned from the study. Unfortunately, students who had shown contrasting or conflicting views during the pilot study declined to participate in this research which affected the overall results of the data in terms of my goals for obtaining more diverse viewpoints. Once the participants were finally selected, I conducted an initial orientation meeting to discuss the Informed Consent forms with the students and their parents and to ensure their understanding of the research. In order to protect the students’, teachers’, and English consultant’s identities, all the names used to identify the participants in this study are pseudonyms. Higher-elementary or intermediate grade level participants were chosen due to the nature of the study, which deals with their perception of the English language dilemma within a
complex colonial scenario. Children at this level were expected to be able to verbalize their thoughts and ideas in Spanish or in English appropriately. The selected participants also had to be capable of writing, reading and analyzing English books independently. They were expected to discuss these books with the researcher and respond to them in different ways. However this factor doesn’t mean that all participants had to have a high proficiency level in English. Their English proficiency self evaluations in the profiles showed that five participants viewed their English skills as not good and felt nervous when they had to speak, while the other five labeled their English skills as very good or excellent. (Since they were previously my students, I was in a position to agree with their self evaluations in relation to their English language proficiency.) It should be pointed out that I am interested in the students’ opinions about the English language learning regardless of their English proficiency, yet the participant’s language proficiency impacts the information we can obtain from the data. All of the participants are exposed to the English language through cable TV programming, yet almost half of them specified that they watch English programs with Spanish subtitles. Three participants stated that they like only Spanish music, five indicated they liked both English and Spanish music, with only two favored English music.

During the study, I employed several data collection strategies: direct observation of participants during interview group discussions, individual interviews, and children’s literature group discussions using the questions described in Appendixes C, D, and E. The first week was spent on setting the meeting schedules and answering the students’ profile questions in a written format (see Appendix C for profile questions). Individual discussions followed and all meetings were scheduled at school during students’ free
periods and at their convenience. The participants were given nine interview questions to which they first responded individually and in written format. The questions were related to the teaching of English and how they perceived their national identity. Oral responses were elicited next in the context of group discussions of the interview questions. These group discussions were audio-recorded and consisted of three meetings of 60 minutes each. Next, the literature discourse began with discussion of stories containing Puerto Rican characters and stories embedded within English textbooks in order to compare and contrast them. A minimum of two children’s literature books were discussed by each individual group member. Approximately seven 60-minute literature discussion sessions were scheduled in all. Participants responded to the stories both verbally and in a written form (see questions for the book club discussion in Appendix E). The time devoted to these tasks was the amount required by each participant, and thus time for this segment of research was varied. All of these tasks were discussed with the participants after they finished them with emphasis on the literature discussions, their responses, and the interviews. The entire process took about five weeks during the fall semester of the school year.

Their English teacher was interviewed in addition to the students in order to compare her opinion regarding the English textbooks with the students’ opinions (see questions in Appendix F). In addition, an English consultant from the Department of Education was interviewed in order to investigate the textbook selection process for the public school system in Puerto Rico and to identify the factors that may affect this process within the colonial/post-colonial context of Puerto Rico (see questions in Appendix G). These interviews consisted of only five questions, and the participants received an invitation
letter as well as an Informed Consent form. Interviews with the English consultant and the ESL teacher lasted approximately thirty minutes each.

**Enhancing the Quality of the Study**

I believe quality of this study was dependent upon how effective the interview questions were in helping the participants talk freely about their perceptions towards the ESL class. Quality in this study also meant to make valid, assertive interpretations of the participants’ literature responses and the answers they presented in the interviews. In order to ensure this, interpretations were discussed with the participants whenever I felt it was necessary. The varying techniques for eliciting literature responses, oral and written formats, also facilitated in obtaining differing perspectives, which were then compared and contrasted, and later on discussed with the participants when discrepancies or inconsistencies were located. In other words, participants were able to explain in more detail their written answers to the interview questions and book club questions. Students also had the opportunity to share their ideas with each other during the group discussions, resulting in enhanced discussions as participants shared their different perspectives on the variety of topics.

**Data Analysis Strategies and Related Issues**

The first data collection consisted of the participants’ profile survey, in an effort to get basic socio- demographic background information. (See the profile questions in Appendix C.) The second data collection employed the written interview questions which were then related to the first data set. Once the participants answered the questions
related to the participants’ perception of the ESL class and its connection to their Puerto Rican national identity) individually in written form, I introduced their answers in an open group discussion format. I recorded these group discussions and also took notes while leading them. The notes were analyzed first and complemented with the recording transcripts when necessary. I coded the most relevant notes and transcripts in the interviews, separated the data to look for new codes or themes, and used a chart format similar to the one provided by Stake (1995) in his book, *The Art of Case Study Research* (page 82).

The last data collection employed was the literature discussions and response, which will be discussed and analyzed in detail in Chapter Four. Participants read four stories contained in the English textbook used for sixth grade in the Public school system. Among these four stories, three were written by Latin American authors, and one story by a U.S. author. None of the stories within the textbook had a Puerto Rican author; therefore I selected other stories about Puerto Rico written by both Puerto Rican and U.S. authors. Seven stories were studied, of which three were written by mainland Puerto Rican authors, three by U.S. authors, and one by a local Puerto Rican author. It was very difficult to locate English stories concerning Puerto Rico on the island itself; paradoxically, there were many stories about Puerto Rico within the children’s section of the Education area at the Penn State University library. Participants initially read the books individually and then answered the questions described in Appendix E. Based on their written responses I led oral discussions in which students talked individually about the books they read within the group discussion format. During the oral discussions, I took notes and made audio recordings. In the written responses, I looked for pre-
established codes related to language culture and identity. I then separated the data to look for new codes that might evolve as we discussed the stories orally. I believe that by making audio recordings of the dialogues that emerged through the discussions, I obtained more complete information in the event I missed something while overseeing the group’s interaction. Although I constantly tried to focus on the topics of language and culture, many other topics emerged. Once all the data from the recordings was transcribed, I identified a multitude of main topics about which the students were concerned - language issues, culture, identity, political issues, Puerto Rican image, U.S. image, and racial issues. From the many it was necessary to narrow the focus of my study. As mentioned, these issues will be discussed and analyzed from a Freirian’s critical pedagogy perspective and within the colonial/postcolonial context of Puerto Rico.
CHAPTER FOUR

Children’s Perceptions Regarding the Teaching of English in Puerto Rico

This chapter contains an in-depth analysis of the first part of the data collection, in which participating students express and discuss their perceptions regarding the teaching of English in Puerto Rico, while acknowledging colonial/postcolonial status as a crucial context. The term *colonial* is applied in this study per Pennycook’s perception as, not only political or economic exploitation justified through ideologies of racism and progress, but rather a *cultural process* in which the knowledge and culture of both the colonized and the colonizer are constructed (2001). Puerto Rico, a colony of the U.S. for over one hundred years, continues in this status today. During the periods of dominance, by the U.S., and for the five hundred years preceding that by the Spanish, Puerto Ricans have been constructing their own culture and knowledge.

On the other hand, the term *postcolonial* is used in this study following the views of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1995), Pennycook, (2001) and Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) as not merely the ideology developed after the colonies obtained their independence, but the resistance expressed through literature and other means against their former colonizer countries, the challenging of the dominant ideologies and the neocolonial practices that continue to take place in these countries. The resistance Puerto Rican students continue to exhibit toward the English language is an example of postcolonialism in contemporary Puerto Rico. The discussion about the teaching and the learning of English in Puerto Rico is framed within a critical perspective following Freire’s view of critical pedagogy. The
participating students were able to express their opinions and their perspective on the language issue within a safe environment. As the researcher and participants’ former English teacher, I functioned more as guide and mediator than a figure of authority. I initiated the discussion and encouraged participants to approach the language issue with a critical eye. I strove to create respectful interactions among the group members, in hopes of empowering all of us as a community of learners.

**Discussion of the Interview Questions**

With a personal history of teaching English as a second language in Puerto Rico for almost twenty years, this research presented me with the unique opportunity to elicit open and honest reflections from students regarding their feelings about the imposition and teaching of the English language in their Puerto Rico. I have been influenced and encouraged by Freire’s educational philosophy and dared to challenge the traditional assumptions I had developed and internalized through my ESL teacher-training program. Therefore, my goal was the creation of a safe place where students could feel comfortable talking about the imposition of English without feeling any negativity or constraint from me in my role as an ESL teacher. I strove to give them space to voice their true feelings about the imposition of English as a second language in Puerto Rico. As the participants were my students three years prior to the study, I had already established a good rapport with them. I believed the participants knew me well enough to trust me, but I was distanced from them in that I was no longer their teacher at the time of this research. The assumption was that this relationship helped in having them feel very comfortable during interviews and discussions. To some extent, this situation might possibly have also prevented the
participants from saying what they thought the researcher wanted to hear. They exhibited a willing disposition towards working with the writing and reading tasks at all times. All participants also expressed how much they learned from each other through this research and appreciated the time spent in reflecting about the language issues and their culture. An environment of trust was established and the participants indicated that they felt they could express their opinions freely, as we will observe through the analysis of this study.

**English - the Universal Language, the Other Language, the Imposed Language**

After answering the personal profile questions, the participants’ next task was to answer in writing the interview questions (Appendix D) related to their perception of the English language, its importance in the Puerto Rican context, and its relationship to their national identity. The question regarding the relationship of the ESL class to their national identity was included in the interview because students had made this connection during the pilot study. They were asked then if they felt Puerto Rican, American, or both when they spoke English and thirty four percent answered they felt both Puerto Rican and American at the same time. However these results changed after the pilot study, as will be explained. Group and individual discussions followed all questions answered in a written form. All of the oral discussions were audio recorded.

The first topic that emerged from the written responses to the interview questions was the notion of English as a universal language, emerging when asked whether they liked to speak English or not. Seven student participants who felt competent in English claimed they liked to speak it because it is a language that helps them to communicate with people all around the world. According to these participants, this is one of the reasons for
English to be considered a universal language. However many of them admitted feeling a little nervous when they have to speak it and fear making mistakes since they know it is not their native language. The remaining three participants who felt less competent or not competent speaking English admitted that they don’t like this language because they are afraid of making mistakes and feel very nervous when they have to speak it. Two participants used the words insecure and strange to describe how they feel when they have to speak English. These feelings could indicate that there are students who, despite frequent exposure to it through the media in the San Juan city area, still feel this language is somewhat strange to them. As an ESL teacher, identifying myself as fully bilingual, with two U.S. residencies behind me, and feeling a comfort level with speaking English, I must admit that I still consider English the “other” language. I am very aware that it is not my mother tongue and I don’t feel very comfortable, for example, speaking in English about personal feelings. It also feels awkward to me when speaking English among fellow Spanish speakers unless I am exercising my identity as ESL teacher. While discussing this issue with the student participants, most who stated they felt competent and comfortable speaking in English admitted having similar feelings to mine under similar circumstances. Consequently, I conclude that for the participants as well as myself, English is still regarded as the “other” language, regardless of our perceived levels of competency and comfort. This perception could be common among those of us who learned English as a second language under colonial conditions where it was not a necessity in our daily lives, was promoted for academic purposes or travel, and even when exposed to it through the media. Memmi (1967) may have a better explanation for this situation when he states that “Possession of two languages is not merely a matter of
having two tools, but actually means participating in two physical and cultural realms” (p.107).

One participant admitted that he liked English because it was the second official language of Puerto Rico since the island is part of the United States. However, this same participant suggested that English should be an elective course instead of a compulsory subject at school. Many other participants agreed with him in what seems to be an interesting contradiction. The participants make a distinction between the legal and political aspects of language policies in Puerto Rico which cause the imposition of the English language, and their desire to have some agency in choosing whether they want access to it or not. Somehow they feel that having a choice would take the imposition aspect of the language policy away, yet they simultaneously accept the government’s positioning of English as a second official language in Puerto Rico.

I see this contradiction as part of our complex colonial/postcolonial mentality. By accepting English as the second official language the participants indicate loyalty toward the U.S., since we are in reality part of this powerful country. Yet the imposition of English, which ironically originates from the U.S. imperialistic agenda, is not so easily accepted by the group of students. This ambiguity could be interpreted on the one hand as part of the effect of more than 100 years of colonization and the conviction that we owe loyalty to this great nation which protects us, while on the other hand the resistance toward the imposition of English could evidence a postcolonial attitude.

Another good example of resistance towards the imposition of English was demonstrated by one of the participants referred to here as Ruth. She was very strong about this point when she stated the following:
Ruth: “No es justo que un niño se cuelgue porque sacó “F” en Inglés. Si un niño no puede aprender inglés por las razones que sean o no le gusta el inglés porque se siente Puertorriqueño y siente que no tiene que aprender inglés, ellos no lo deben obligar a coger inglés. El inglés debería ser una clase extra. No se debería dar nota.” (“It is not fair to fail a child because he got an “F” in English. If a child can’t learn English for whatever reasons or doesn’t like English because he feels Puerto Rican and feels that he doesn’t have to learn English, they should not obligate him to take it. English should be an extra class. It should not be graded.”)

Ruth herself is very competent in English (she was the only participant to write her answers in English even though it was permissible to answer them in Spanish) yet she expresses her concern for those less competent or not interested in achieving competency in English. She doesn’t only suggest that the ESL class should not be a compulsory subject, but that it should not qualify for a grade because it is not fair for those students who are failing this class since this could affect their academic average. Of more interest in Ruth’s statement is how she uses the Puerto Rican national identity in opposition to the English language when she states that a student could refuse to learn English just because he/she feels Puerto Rican. Resisting English by emphasizing the Puerto Rican nationality in opposition to the U.S. began as a consequence of the Americanization process as a way to distinguish ourselves from the U.S. dominant culture when Puerto Rico was invaded by the U.S. in 1898 (Dávila, 1997). Her statement is indicative of how this resistance exists today. Ruth also recognizes an important issue related to the negative effect this imposition could have in the academic life of some Puerto Rican students. It is interesting to note that Puerto Rican students in other studies have exhibited similar resistance to the
imposition of the ESL class by promoting the Puerto Rican national identity and Spanish in opposition to English language (Torruellas, 1990), (Rodriguez, 1997), (Heinlein-Pacheco, 1999), (Irizarry-Vicenty, 2005). Ruth carries the argument a little further and brings to the discussion a genuine concern for the negative effect low ESL scores may have for less competent students. Canagarajah (1999) described a similar situation in his study with Sri Lankan college students when he claimed that students could not earn the Bachelor of Arts degree if they didn’t pass a mandatory first-year English requirement at a particular university in Sri Lanka even when these same students passed courses in other content areas. This situation created an intense debate among faculty members, which in 1993 led to the eventual cancellation of the English competency requirement since “Strong nationalistic sentiments were expressed at the prospect of ‘an alien language’ hampering the employment prospect of local students” (Canagarajah, 1999: 83). This situation could be existent in Puerto Rico for college students whose ESL scores may be affecting their overall college average, which could then jeopardize their chances for graduation or possibilities of entrance to non-English colleges in countries around the world.

Ruth’s statement also highlights the many Puerto Rican students with learning difficulties in their native Spanish language, and how the imposition of English (depending on the language learning difficulty) could become more of a burden at times for these students than an advantage or assistance in their learning process. Students in this instance could end up lacking competency in both languages. I recall teaching a second grader who was a special education student and who struggled in my ESL class. I suggested releasing him from the ESL class for a while until he could develop better and stronger native language
skills that, through the Whole Language approach, could eventually facilitate the learning of a second language. Today this boy, now an adult, is a certified chef. He was not able to achieve competency in English after all, yet he functions as a chef in a restaurant and is planning on going to Spain for continuing education courses. This real life example demonstrates how in a special case such as this, lack of English competency was not necessarily a complete disadvantage. This is in direct contrast with the common extremist assumption that if one doesn’t master English in Puerto Rico, one doesn’t have any possibility of employment. This common assumption has been exposed in other studies (Torruellas, 1990), (Vicenty, 2005), and was repeated by various participants during our discussion as we will see later in this study. While job opportunities exist in Puerto Rico for those who lack English language skills, these might be much more limited compared to opportunities where good English skills are required due to our colonial situation, the strong economic ties with the U.S., and the increasing English job markets on the island. According to Barreto, “the articulation of Puerto Rico’s production, based on U.S. market needs, does not allow for significant local participation favoring some internal growth” (1998, p.93). The situation described above is an example of how English language continues to be a colonial tool in the island, not only because it is imposed in schools, but for the necessity created for this language in the job market today which is being affected directly by the U.S. economic influence in the island.

The Benefits of Mastering English vs. the Disadvantages of Not Mastering

Interestingly, all of the participants admitted that if the ESL class had been an elective course they would have taken it anyway because they are very aware of the advantages
English can offer. However, four participants also mentioned their interest in learning other languages besides English and expressed their regrets for not having this opportunity in their school. All participants emphasized multiple times the usefulness of a universal language like English for communication purposes when traveling not only in the U.S. but also in many other countries. This was the case even though most participants have not traveled elsewhere in the world at all. For the most part, those who traveled have visited the U.S. or other Spanish speaking countries in Latin America. Only two of them have experienced first hand the convenience of being able to communicate in English when visiting the French Canadian city of Quebec.

Other participants mentioned the cultural capital English provides to those who have access to it. They gave as an example the many academic textbooks that are available in English, particularly at the college level, the great literature and research base that has been translated into English, and how everything related to the technology field is in English. They also mentioned that English can open doors to better job market opportunities both in Puerto Rico and the U.S. The participants certainly appreciate English not only as a language that opens opportunities in the professional world but as one that opens opportunities within the educational field. However, their opinions were divided between those who claimed that English is extremely necessary to study overseas and those who claimed there are other possibilities in addition to English colleges when studying overseas. Carmen noted that in order to study a good profession, many Puerto Ricans usually head to the U.S. due to lack of academic offerings for certain professions or particular majors on the island. This same participant admitted later on in the discussion that some Spanish speaking countries in Latin America may also offer
excellent educational choices and specialties in certain areas and students don’t necessarily have to master the English language in order to study in these colleges. Rolando, another participant, added that Spain is another alternative for studying medicine in a Spanish-speaking environment. Immediately after Rolando’s statement, two other participants, Yolanda and Jenny, claimed that Spanish speaking colleges still use English text books. Rolando objected to this argument by noting that this was the case in Puerto Rico because we are a colony of the U.S., but it was not necessarily the case in many other non-English colleges in countries like Spain where he believed they used text books in their respective native language.

This argument indicates how some participants have been influenced by the U.S. media more than others and are convinced that English has spread universally, making it requisite to study even in non-English speaking countries. Surprisingly, a few other participants are also aware of other educational possibilities which may not necessarily require English, and seemed to support non-English alternatives despite the strong influence of the U.S. over the education system which only advocates for U.S. colleges as educational alternatives outside the island. Economically speaking, many participants noted that even when it would probably be easier for Puerto Ricans to study in a Spanish-speaking country, they admitted that the availability of financial aid and educational grants in U.S. colleges could facilitate their future college education plans if they decide to study overseas. It is interesting that the participants appeared to take the U.S. education financial aid for granted as if their Puerto Rican U.S. citizen status automatically entitled them to this educational benefit. They are unaware that their middle class status might not
allow them to benefit from this financial educational aid if they would elect to study in the U.S.

This way of thinking can be perceived as yet another example of colonial mentality where the U.S. is viewed as a “paternalistic generous benefactor”, which, according to Barreto (1998), is part of the overall plan of colonial domination where this country, “has been able to set up a mechanism of social control that uses financial assistance to instill in the Puerto Rican psyche the belief that dependency on the U.S. is indispensable and good” (p.65). Once again we can observe a colonial/postcolonial mentality framing this argument. When participants promote the idea that English acquisition is not completely essential for study abroad, this is a way of challenging the superior status of this language, and indicates resentment of the predominance of English. Paradoxically, they may take for granted that the colonizing country will provide financial assistance to study abroad, even when they might not be entitled or qualify for it.

It is very clear that the participants are universally aware of the benefits English acquisition offers, and these benefits appear to keep them very well motivated to learn English since all of them responded positively to all the questions related to the importance of learning English in Puerto Rico. (See questions 3-5 in Appendix D.) Although most participants feel motivated to learn English for the reasons mentioned above, one participant, Yolanda, used what could be construed as a disparaging word to describe how she felt about the importance of English in today’s world with this explanation for why she thought learning English was important:

Yolanda: “Si, porque si no sabes ingles no eres “nadie” en el mundo de ahora.” (“Yes, because if you don’t know English you are nobody in today’s world.”)
When challenged to explain her characterization of “nobody”, she tried to diminish her use of such a depreciative word by saying that she wanted to express how extremely difficult it is to be a professional today if one doesn’t learn English. As Yolanda’s former ESL teacher I am aware of her struggles to try to learn it without much success and understand there could be two possible interpretations for her choice of this wording. First, the term itself indicates an inferiority feeling that one may hold if one doesn’t learn English, since this language above all has the power to open doors to better educational and career opportunities. This feeling of inferiority implies that Spanish alone is not good enough or is inferior to English since it can’t bring about the same access to educational benefits or economic power, and is a legacy of our colonial status. Barreto (1998) states, “In this colonial situation, Spanish remains the language of social solidarity, and valued for its colloquial use. English, on the other hand, is the language of economic development and growth” (p.138). Secondly, the use of this word could also be indicating hidden resentment on Yolanda’s part towards English and the advantages it provides to those, unlike herself, who have mastery. Certainly Yolanda is very aware of the benefits English could bring to her future and seems motivated to learn it, since she suggests the increase of English class hours in one of her responses as she surmises that this could benefit her. Nevertheless, her motivation might be, ironically, hindered by her concern about the advantages other students could have over her, which could limit her career possibilities in the future. Another factor that could affect Yolanda’s motivation is social class and the fact that her middle class parents could not afford sending her to any U.S. college. These situations could eventually lead Yolanda to resist learning English altogether like the students in Torruellas’ (1990) study. In this study students
paradoxically demonstrated resistance toward the English language through their behavior in class, while simultaneously their responses to the research survey supported the learning of English for economic purposes. In this case Torruellas explained that middle class students couldn’t see the need to learn English at an advanced level since they knew their parents couldn’t afford sending them to study abroad in the U.S. Therefore, they didn’t expect to have the opportunity for high-level management positions in multinational companies where excellent English proficiency is required. In Yolanda’s case, even when her responses indicate motivation and awareness, she might not be able to enjoy these benefits or access a high level career in Puerto Rico if her English skills aren’t significantly improved. She may have to seek whatever alternative possibilities are available, if her native language alone qualifies her in a job market where English is increasingly predominant.

Yolanda’s situation is also a good example of how learning a second language requires much more than a good dose of motivation, as SLA (Second Language Acquisition) theories such as Krashen’s (1987) affective filter hypothesis, usually claim. SLA theories do not take into account how, “language has been historically constructed around questions of power and dominance,” and mostly support, “a view of teaching that may have more to do with assimilation than with any useful notion of empowerment” (Pennycook, 1994).

Moreover, Canagarajah (1999), Pennycook (1998), and Freire (1973) discuss how the “socio political context” also affects the education system and the learners. Yolanda’s position could serve as an example of how the socio political context of the island, in which English is taught under the U.S. domination, could actually affect the second
language learning process in Puerto Rico. That this student feels tension in relation to the English language could have a lot to do with the colonial socio political context of the island. The great economic dependence upon the U.S. is reflected on the Puerto Rican job market where various U.S. corporations dominate and compete with the local job market for the labor force. It is very difficult for the few local corporations to expand or compete with powerful U.S. corporations. As a consequence, desirable, available jobs in the local sector are very limited in comparison with those in the U.S. sector, which commonly require good English language skills. According to Muntaner (1990), those ads for U.S. companies clearly state the requirement of being bilingual as English/Spanish, implying that the English language has a higher rank than Spanish, otherwise they would read Spanish/English. This situation also increases the gap among differing social classes - for those who can benefit economically from the English cultural capital and those who can not as stated by Torruellas (1990), Muntaner (1990), Barreto (1998), and (Barreto, 2001). “With regard to income we understand that, again, English is the language of socioeconomic mobility, and the higher one’s income the more likely one can afford the opportunity to learn English” (Barreto, 2001 p.31).

English; a Powerful Language from a Powerful Country

Every participant indicated awareness of the prominent position English holds universally as a lingua franca. When asked why they thought English was so widely spread, they immediately connected this language to the power of the United States. They linked the spread of English around the world to the globalization movement. When asked what they understood about globalization, they mentioned that technology has caused the
countries around the world to come closer, but that U.S. has been the common
denominator in this tendency because of the economic power it has and the way this
country dominates many others via the economy. They seem to equate the power of the
U.S. with the power of the English language, since it is the language used for business
globally today and the language of technology.

The participants also mentioned that U.S. power could be clearly observed when large
U.S. companies acquire smaller ones outside the U.S. This view coincides with
Fishman’s suspicions that, “…if American business is generally conducted in English and
almost exclusively so, throughout the world, then the power of the American economy
may itself become a spearhead and an ongoing support system for the world wide
diffusion of English” (Fishman, 1996).

Yolanda makes an arresting point, adding to this concept of a powerful country in tandem
with a powerful language, when she states that since money is all people care about
today, it is not surprising that everyone around the world wants economic benefits, which
she sees as the reason for so many countries to do business with and ally themselves with
the U.S. Implicit in doing business with the U.S., according to Yolanda, is learning
English in order to be able to position oneself and thereby earn some economic benefit.

Although Yolanda refers to people in general terms, this point could define the
participants’ personal lives since the economic benefits ascribed to English are a primary
reason they think learning English is so important. They appear convinced that English
will open the door to job opportunities and better salaries, which simultaneously implies
that Spanish alone will not facilitate similar opportunities.
The colonial context of Puerto Rico, where English is both mandatory and holds the prevalent advantaged position as an Official Language, has produced, according to Barreto, “an emerging linguistic ideology” that positions English, the language of the colonizer, as the language of “social climbing, progress and great opportunities” while Spanish is viewed as a “familiar language, with only a colloquial value” (1998). The participants’ view of English also concurs with Pennycook’s view of English as a “global commodity” which has been developed within a power knowledge relationship where English is presented as modern, efficient or scientific language, while the native language is seen as backward, traditional, inefficient, or unscientific (1998).

Once the topic of U.S. power was initiated by Yolanda, it triggered interesting responses from other participants like Margie who describes the U.S. as a country that presents itself to the world as a dominant country and she thinks that presentation may also influence its power.

Margie: “Es que E.U. se da a ver como el país que tiene más poder y el más dominante por lo que mucha gente tal vez no tenga mucho conocimiento de los otros países que tienen como el mismo poder o la misma tecnología… muchos de los demás países quieren hacer negocios con E.U. y por eso se traduce en mayor recursos.” (“The U.S. presents itself as a country with the most power and as the most dominant, which might overshadow other countries that may have similar power and technology…many other countries want to do business with the U.S. and this leads to more resources [for the U.S.]”)

Margie appears to acknowledge that the U.S. is not the only powerful country in the world, but since it presents itself as the most powerful one through media, it has the
advantage of monopolizing the economy globally and the English language is the tool used to facilitate this power play.

Interestingly, Carmen thought that the fear factor also contributes to the U.S. power base. The following statement is her response to this question:

Researcher: ¿“El que otros países hagan negocios con E.U. eso hace el país qué?” (“So the fact that other countries want to do business with the U.S. makes this country what?”)

Carmen: “Hay unos que le tienen miedo a E.U. porque hace guerra por todo. Las compañías le tienen miedo a las compañías más grandes porque piensan que las van a cerrar o las van a poner en quiebra. Entonces prefieren aliarse con ellos para tener más dinero y para que sus compañías aunque se destruyan pues ellos tener una posición como que segura en cualquier compañía grande pues prefieren aliarse a ellos [E.U.] aunque no estén de acuerdo para salvarse ellos mismos y no piensan en los demás. Pues yo creo que las personas lo que tienen es miedo, por eso es que se juntan con ellos [E.U.] para estar a salvo.”

(“There are people [referring to other countries] who are afraid of the U.S. because this country starts a war for any reason. Business companies are afraid of the larger companies because they think that they could be shot down by larger companies or could go to bankruptcy. So they prefer to ally themselves with the U.S. to earn more money, and although their companies might disappear, they [the ex-company owners] could ensure themselves a position in any larger company. They prefer to be U.S. allies even when they do not agree with the U.S. in everything, so they could save themselves without thinking about anyone else.”
So I think that people are afraid and that is why they get together with the U.S., to be safe.”

Carmen although only 13 at the time, indicates through this statement a sophisticated understanding of the politics of economic power. It is quite remarkable how such a young mind as hers introduces the fear factor into the discussion concerning U.S. power. In her simplistic way, she explains how fear could be created among the countries being threatened by a powerful country, like the U.S, as it could so easily go to war against them. She thinks this fear helps the U.S. to dominate and control these countries’ economies. According to her, the U.S. uses its power in two different ways; first as a bully who tries to inflict fear through war confrontations and second, as it uses its economic power and resources to dominate other countries’ economies by buying out their smaller local markets. This statement shows the participant’s notion about an economic empire and how it works according to her. It is interesting to observe the similarities between this participant’s notion of imperialistic economic power and Galtung’s imperialism theory as it was cited by Phillipson (1998).

Phillipson summarizes this imperialism theory as a type of, “relationship in which one society can dominate another”, through different venues such as, “economic, political, military, communicative, cultural, and social” (Galtung cited by Phillipson, 1998:52). This unequal relationship is developed through the mechanisms of “exploitation, penetration, fragmentation, and marginalization” (Phillipson, 1998: 52).

Carmen includes the fear factor as another way for the U.S. Empire to dominate other countries economically. The participants concluded that U.S. economic power has greatly
influenced the spread of English since English is the lingua franca in which business is conducted globally today.

A very compelling point related to the power of English was added by another participant, Armando, who argued that the application of English as the universal language has a negative effect on other languages. He argued that since people mainly concentrate their efforts in learning English as a second language because of the power it wields, that caused them to cease any attempt at learning other languages. Armando also pointed out that the universality of English has caused people in the U.S. to be reluctant to learn other languages and he challenged their monolingualistic behavior by noting the following:

**Armando:** “Yo he notado que muchas veces la gente que habla inglés son los únicos que no tienen un segundo lenguaje. Mucha gente de otros países para comunicarse con gente de E.U. lo que hacen es hablar inglés y lo aprenden. ¿Pero los estadounidenses no pueden aprender el lenguaje de la otra persona? Yo no se si todos, pero mucha gente allá, espera que los demás aprendan el idioma de ellos… prefieren eso a ellos aprender el idioma de otra gente.”

(“I have noticed that many times people who speak English [referring to the people in the U.S.] are the only ones who don’t speak a second language. Many people from other countries learn English to communicate with people in the U.S. But why can’t they learn other people’s language? I don’t know if everyone, but many people over there [in the U.S.] expect everyone else to learn their language… they prefer that, to learning other people’s language.”)
Right after Armando finished making his point, Carmen agreed with him and provided a real example within the Puerto Rican context of the issue he was describing by stating the following:

Carmen: “Cuando nosotros vamos a EU. tenemos que hablar inglés con los que nos atienden, los de los hoteles, el de la tienda, y ellos vienen acá y tu ves mucho en San Juan que le hablan inglés, , los empleados le tienen que hablar inglés a ellos y no tienen pues que hablar español como “hola” y cosas básicas.” (“When we go to the U.S. we have to speak in English with the people who attend to us, the hotel employees, the store employees and then they [U.S. people] come here and you see in San Juan how everyone speaks in English to them, the store employees have to speak in English to them and they don’t have to speak Spanish not even basic things like “Hello”!

It is interesting to observe that although the participants accept the convenience of having a global language that can serve as a common language everywhere we travel, they also resent to a certain point, the little desire people from the U.S. have in learning a different language. Furthermore they also expressed some resentment towards the situation of the many from the U.S. who have been living on the island for a long period of time and haven’t yet learned Spanish. George asked the following questions while discussing this issue:

George: “¿Por qué nos tenemos que tragarnos el Inglés aunque no querramos? ¿Por qué cuando los Americanos vienen a P.R. ellos van a escuelas bilingües? ¿Por qué ellos no aprenden Español cuando vienen a P.R.?” (“Why do we have to swallow the English language even when we
don’t want to? Why, when Americans come to P.R, they do go to bilingual schools? Why don’t they learn Spanish when they come to P.R.?"

It is interesting to note that George, who claimed learning English was important because it is the second official language of the island, resented both the fact that English is imposed and that people from the U.S. have the opportunity to retain their native language through attendance at bilingual schools (which in reality are English emersion schools) when resident on the island. George also appears to imply through these questions that the reverse is not true when the lack of Spanish bilingual programs for Latinos residing in the U.S. doesn’t allow the Spanish-speaking students to maintain their native language. Armando describes the monolingual attitude found within the U.S. or this preferential selection as part of their egocentrism.

However, the reality is that, since colonial times, the U.S. insistence on developing bilingual citizens was not about solving a language problem, “but a colonial design to facilitate the administration of a colonial territory and a by-product of relations of power and domination” therefore, the colonizers were never interested in learning the language of the colonized (Barreto, 1998). The colonizers impose their language and insure that it is employed in political and economic negotiations between the colonial administration and the colonized subjects, thus avoiding the need to learn the colonized people’s language. In other words, the colonizers used a form of English linguicism (Phillipson, 1998) in which U.S. ideologies and structures were perpetuated through the English language to maintain an unequal allocation of power and resources in Puerto Rico.
Puerto Rican National Identity and Spanish vs. United States National Identity and English

The last three interview questions in the study (Appendix D) related to the national identities attributed to Puerto Rican and the U.S. people because students made the connection between the language and the identity issue in the initial study when they were asked how they felt when they had to speak English. Thirty four percent of the pilot survey participants, which consisted of forty students, answered that they felt both American and Puerto Rican when they had to speak English. Curiously, when confronted with these results the second time we met, they universally responded that they felt Puerto Rican, with the exception of one student. When asked why they answered differently the second time around, they stated that their responses were what they thought I wanted to hear since I was their teacher at that time. When these questions were posed a second time of the selected participants in this study, one hundred percent answered that they felt Puerto Rican. However, when asked to describe what being Puerto Rican or American implied, they had a hard time trying to explain their thoughts in written format. In contrast, the oral discussion that followed, relating to this topic, was very revealing.

Three of the participants initiated the discussion by correcting my use of the terminology “American” by clarifying that they all were “Americans” because they all live in the Caribbean which, geographically speaking, is part of The Americas. They suggested using the term Estadounidense, which is the Spanish word used for U.S. nationality. Curiously, U.S. citizens do not have specific terms to describe their nationality other than “American” or “North American”, very general denominations that in geographical terms
include everyone from Canada to Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean nations. Following this reasoning, many participants decided to use the word *Estadounidense*, which could be translated to “United Statian” in English. This convention would serve to distinguish “Puerto Ricans” from “Americans”, although some others used the terms “American” and “United Statians” interchangeably. Consequently, I employ the term “United Statian” to refer to the people from the U.S. in this research context.

Once again participants’ opinions were divided when discussing the Puerto Rican identity in contrast with the United Statian identity, and the language issue was a crucial element in the discussion. While some participants claimed that being Puerto Rican was all about being born in Puerto Rico, being able to speak Spanish, and having Puerto Rican parents, others claimed that being Puerto Rican was related more to how you felt inside and how you were raised by your parents, not where you were born or whether you spoke Spanish or not. There was a strong debate between those who argued that Spanish was definitely a Puerto Rican characteristic and thus part of our nationality, and those who opposed this view. When asked what they thought about those Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. who don’t speak Spanish but claim to be Puerto Rican, some participants responded that “real” Puerto Ricans would try to learn the language belonging to their culture if they want to be considered Puerto Ricans. Carmen made a strong statement about this issue when asked what she thought about Puerto Ricans residing in the States who don’t speak Spanish but claim to be Puerto Rican:

* Carmen: “Pues que a lo mejor pueden ser parte Puertorriqueños porque es que el idioma es parte de las costumbres Puertorriqueñas. Para mi no”
hay excusas para un Puertorriqueño no saber Español, porque si tus papas no te enseñaron, busca otra fuente y aprende por tu cuenta.”

(“Maybe they could be Puerto Ricans to some extent, but the language [Spanish] is part of our Puerto Rican culture. For me there are no excuses for a Puerto Rican not to speak Spanish, because if your parents didn’t teach you the native language, then you should look for ways to learn it by yourself.”)

Carmen’s statement evidences the fact that, still today, Spanish is a strong representation of Puerto Rican culture and nationality for some Puerto Ricans who live on the island. We have consistently viewed Spanish as among the strongest evidence of our Puerto Ricanness since it is an integral part of our Puerto Rican identity and was also enforced strongly within our educational curriculum. This is why the term Nuyoricans is used to refer to the Puerto Ricans who reside in the States and do not speak Spanish. Even the term Gringo is used in this context to refer to non-Spanish speaking Puerto Ricans. The use of these negative or biased terminologies reflects the reluctance to accept as Puerto Ricans those who don’t reside on the island or exhibit the traditional homogeneous characteristics that we consider definitive of Puerto Ricans, and is due to an essentialist ideology of what we have associated with being a “pure” Puerto Rican.

Spanish also represents the Puerto Rican culture and national identity for many Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. as Ramos-Zayas notes, “Mastery of Spanish is a marker of cultural authenticity among insular and mainland Puerto Ricans” (Ramos-Zayas 1997:24 as cited by Barreto, 2001 p.12). Barreto (1998) also claims that this “defensive posture” should be viewed as resistance to linguistic domination and colonialism since the U.S. imperialistic agenda continues with its “obliteration of [our] national boundaries”. The “relation between Puerto Ricanness and Spanish is part of the arsenal in the struggle
against U.S. colonialism; to abandon this claim could represent a legitimation of English hegemony” (Barreto, 1998 p.122).

George was another research participant who, like Carmen, believed that the Spanish language was a characteristic of being Puerto Rican. He noted in addition that to be Puerto Rican one must not only speak Spanish but also learn about the Puerto Rican culture and practice Puerto Rican traditions. George’s opinions concur with Barreto’s idea about resistance to linguistic domination, however George compares being Puerto Rican with what is expected of someone who wants to be “American”. According to George, if you want to become an “American” then you must learn English and live according to the U.S. culture and traditions.

George’s point of view regarding comparing what is involved in being Puerto Rican or United Statian could also be influenced by the colonial mentality, which leads the colonized to emulate the colonizing country. The fact that the U.S. demands every immigrant who wants to become a U.S. citizen to first learn English and also to assimilate into the U.S. culture probably frames George’s fixed and simplistic notion of what he perceives the Puerto Rican national identity to include.

I admit that, until very recently, I along with many other island-dwelling Puerto Ricans, also held a simplistic and fixed notion of our Puerto Rican national identity wherein I viewed my Puerto Ricanness as an element of unification with people from the same nation. In that view, identity was taken as, “the referential sign of fixed set of customs, practices and meanings, an enduring heritage, a readily identifiable sociological category, a set of shared traits and experiences” (Scott, 1995, p. 5). Being Puerto Rican meant that everyone would share practically identical characteristics. If one was born on the island,
of Puerto Rican parents (who had the specific Spanish, African, and Taino heritage), spoke Spanish, and followed our Puerto Rican traditions and culture, one was definitely Puerto Rican. These characteristics gave our national identity a homogeneous and unifying connotation. There was only one kind of Puerto Rican, pure and simple, with no diversity.

Interestingly some of the participants in this study already had acquired a broader notion of our Puerto Rican identity and at an earlier age, as observed in the following responses. There were participants who defined their Puerto Ricanness, not based on the language, or any other common characteristic like place of birth or even parents’ nationality, but on how one felt. For them, national identity was a feeling transcending any of these characteristics. Rolando for example, explained what he thought were other aspects that could influence the Puerto Rican national identity.

Rolando: “También tiene que ver depende como los papás hayan criado al hijo, si lo criaron como Norteamericano sin ninguna creencia ni actividad Puertorriqueña pues el hijo automáticamente no va sentir, no va a aprender como ser Puertorriqueño. Pero un niño que haya nacido en E.U. que sus papás hayan sido Puertorriqueños y le hayan enseñado las creencias, los festivales aunque no hable el idioma bien, se puede sentir Puertorriqueño.”

No es tanto lo educativo es sentirlo. Ni es que te lo hayan enseñado porque yo puedo aprender de diferentes tradiciones pero no sentirlas.”

(“It also depends on how the parents have raised their child. If they raised him/her like a North American without any Puerto Rican beliefs or activities then the child will not feel anything; will not learn how to be Puerto Rican. But a child
that was born in the U.S. of Puerto Rican parents who have taught the child about Puerto Rican beliefs and festivals, even if that child doesn’t speak Spanish he/she could feel Puerto Rican,

It is not just the educational part of it, it is to feel it. It is not that you have been just taught about it because one can learn about other traditions but not feel them.”

Rolando poses that the way you have been raised, regardless of where you were born or what language you speak, could make a difference in how you feel about your national identity. Other participants, Joan and Ramón, supported Rolando’s view concerning national identity by providing examples of relatives residing in the U.S., who don’t speak Spanish very well or don’t speak it at all, born in the U.S., but still following Puerto Rican traditions and culture and claiming they felt Puerto Rican. For Joan and Ramón, practicing their native culture and traditions was evidence enough that their relatives were Puerto Rican, even though they either spoke Spanish or were actually born in Puerto Rico. They also added the stipulation that one must first accept being Puerto Rican in order to be considered one. Finally, most of the participants were open to a more flexible and broader notion of Puerto Rican national identity that excluded even the Spanish language or territorial boundaries as exclusive representations of our national identity. The majority concluded that being Puerto Rican was something you felt deeply, accompanied by pride in Puerto Rico as a country and your Puerto Rican identity, accepting your Puerto Ricanness, and living and experiencing the Puerto Rican traditions - not exclusively on the island but anywhere else Puerto Ricans may live or were born - regardless of the language you may speak. Rolando and Yolanda stated this idea emphatically in the following responses:
Rolando: “Uno primero aprende a ser Puertorriqueño según lo que te dicen tus padres de P.R. Una vez que te lo digan y tu vivas de esas experiencias si tu lo vives… ser Puertorriqueño no es solo nacer ahí y aprender de el… es sentirlo, un orgullo que tu tienes de haber nacido ahí, es una felicidad, es una alegría, un honor” (“One first learns how to be Puerto Rican by how your parents raise you and tell you about Puerto Rico. Once they show you what it is like to be Puerto Rican and you live the experience of being one…, being Puerto Rican is not only about being born here or learning about it,…, it is feeling it and feeling proud about being born Puerto Rican, it is a feeling of happiness, it is to be joyful, it is an honor.”)

Yolanda: “Y es que depende de cómo tu te sientas. Porque si tu eres Puertorriqueño y te mudaste a E.U. este adoptas las costumbres de E.U. y después decides que no te quieres sentir más Puertorriqueño pues no sigues siendo Puertorriqueño, porque es depende de cómo tu te sientas.” (“It depends on how you feel. Because if you are Puerto Rican and then you move to the U.S., you adopt the U.S. customs and decide that you don’t want to feel Puerto Rican, then you are not Puerto Rican, because it depends on how you feel.”)

This notion of our Puerto Rican national identity as defined by these participants is certainly broader than the simplistic notion I held until recently. As a matter of fact, it is impressive to observe that their notion regarding national identity is more in tune with the views of some scholars such as Anzaldúa (2002), Duany (2000), Flores (1993), and Hall (1996).
Both Anzaldúa (2002) and Hall (1996) see identity as something that can be multiplied and socially constructed, and can be changed and transformed, thanks to pluralistic cultural identities around a post-colonial world caused by constant, forced and free migration and the interaction and relationships among these different cultural identities. This notion is very relevant to the situation of Puerto Ricans who migrated to the United States and have been directly affected by its dominant culture and language. Anzaldúa is more radical and goes beyond the deconstruction of the notion of identity. She advocates openly for resistance toward the pre-made social discourses and the development of agency to construct our very own identity. This concept of developing agency in order to construct our own identity seems to harmonize to some extent with Yolanda’s idea above concerning having the agency to decide how you feel in relation to your national identity. Flores (1993) on the other hand, states that Puerto Rican cultural identity is changing in response to economic and social transformations and describes the national identity of mainland Puerto Ricans as a “creative national identity” rather than a “unidirectional acculturation”. According to Flores, for mainland Puerto Ricans the acceptance of English as part of their culture because of their relationship with the U.S. while simultaneously retaining Spanish as their native language, is no longer a paradox. Moreover, Duany (2000) begins his discussion on national identity by challenging the concept of nation, alleging that, “none of the traditional criteria for nationhood – a shared territory, language, economy, citizenship, or sovereignty – are fixed and immutable in Puerto Rico and its diaspora but are subject to constant fluctuations and intense debate, even though the sense of the people hood has proven remarkably resilient throughout” (Duany, 1992, p.3). If the standard criteria to define nationality require that people share
a territory, a language, and a common history, the third and fourth generations of Puerto Ricans who have been living in the U.S. all their lives, certainly do not share any of these characteristics. Mainland Puerto Ricans frequently were not born on the island, many do not speak Spanish, and most have never participated directly in the politics and economic affairs of Puerto Rico, thus they don’t share the same historical context. Yet they sometimes reaffirm themselves as Puerto Ricans all the while nationalists on the island have difficulty acknowledging their true Puerto Rican identity (Duany, 2002).

This is precisely what a few of the participants stated, such as Carmen and George. It was difficult for them to accept someone as true Puerto Rican unless they spoke Spanish. Yet, the remaining participants seemed to have a view of national identity more in tune with Duany’s notion of it where the sharing of a territory, a common language or history are no longer standard criteria for national identity.

While many of the study participants incredibly held a broader notion of national identity more in tune with the theories described above, it was not until I was exposed to these theories during my doctoral studies that I renegotiated my own, more simplistic view of national identity. At the participants’ age, I held a very simplistic notion of my national identity, never viewing my national identity as consisting of multiples or even constructed, since I espoused this naïve concept that I was born with national identity, an intrinsic part of being me. Within this concept, Puerto Rican identity was something inherited from parents, later emphasized and developed by both the educational process at school and the discourses and practices of Puerto Rican society. So defined, national identity didn’t change but developed as life experiences added to the notion of it. Therefore change and transformation were not considered within my notion of our Puerto
Rican national identity. This new broader and enhanced notion of national identity can assist me to better understand my future students’ background, which I now perceive as essential to acknowledge in my role as an ESL teacher.

Following participants’ discussion of their notions regarding their Puerto Rican national identity, they were asked what they thought the similarities or differences were between United Statians and Puerto Ricans. Although it was difficult for the participants to describe what they thought being Puerto Rican or United Statian was actually about, they all quickly noted that the main difference between Puerto Ricans and United Statians was the culture. Some participants held a fixed simplistic notion of culture by identifying this term, through language, artifacts, food, music, and common traditions while others described culture as something more complex and “multidimensional” that is affected by the socio political context (Nieto, 2001).

Interestingly, when the topic of culture was brought up the first comment proffered related to the idea that the U.S. does not have much of a culture. Jenny was one of the participants who held a very simplistic notion about culture as something related to artifacts and music. She initiated the discussion of culture by stating the following:

**Jenny:** “*Es lo mismo que tú sentirte Puertorriqueño, Estadounidense es sentirte que... que... la cultura, (whispering) aunque no tiene mucha...*” (“It is the same thing as feeling Puerto Rican. Being United Statian is feeling that...that the culture...[whispering] although it doesn’t have much of a culture...”)

**Researcher:** “*¿E.U. no tiene cultura?*” (“The U.S. doesn’t have culture?”)
Jenny: “*Es que para mi E.U.… no es que yo hable mal de E.U. Ok, verdad pero…*” (“It is just that for me… not that I want to speak badly about the U.S. you know…”)

Researcher: “*¿No, pero que es lo que tú piensas que es la cultura de E.U.?*” (“No, but what do you think about U.S. culture?”)

Jenny: “*Es que en verdad como que no tienen ese sabor. Ese sabor que nosotros tenemos. Por ejemplo nosotros los bailes que hacemos…nuestra cultura es mucho más viva que la de ellos.*” (“It is really just that they don’t have this flavor, the flavor that we have. For example, we have the folk dances that we do…our culture is much livelier than theirs.”)

Curiously, the first thing noticeable in this response is how concerned Jenny was about speaking negatively of the U.S., causing her to whisper when explaining what she thought about the U.S. culture. Directly after that, she justified herself by affirming that she didn’t have any intentions of speaking badly about the U.S. This attitude highlights again the colonial mentality some Puerto Ricans exhibit by avoiding any kind of challenge of the colonizer’s power. Jenny is one of the participants who held a paternalistic view of the U.S., since she claimed during the discussions that Puerto Rico depends on the U.S. economically and that all the money in Puerto Rico initiates in the U.S. This colonized loyalty is probably developed by the fact that a large amount of Puerto Ricans on the island depend extensively on welfare benefits, even though Jenny is not among them. Consequently, “food stamps, social security, and other federal funded programs reinforce the notion that money is associated with all things English” and are benefits of our relationship with the U.S. Speaking negatively about the U.S. or rejecting...
English could be. “seen as an affront to the United States, which may respond by reducing or eliminating financial aid to Puerto Rico” (Barreto, 2001 p.29).

On the other hand, when Jenny compares Puerto Rico’s culture with the U.S. culture, she bases her response on tangible things she can observe like music and dance. Her statement implies that U.S. culture is basically boring or lacking when compared to the lively Puerto Rican culture with which she is familiar. She reaches the conclusion that the U.S. doesn’t have much of a culture because she can not easily observe in the U.S. what she can clearly observe everywhere in her own culture - the lively music and dances.

Right after Jenny’s response, Carmen contributed her opinion about U.S. culture, following Jenny’s definition of culture in terms of something with observable characteristics like music and food. She then went beyond the simplistic notion of culture and made a very interesting observation about the U.S. culture as we can see in the following statement:

**Carmen:** “Lo de la cultura, la cultura de E.U. se basa en otras culturas. Por ejemplo el Hip Hop se considera de allá, pero el Hip Hop lo crearon los negros y los negros son de Africa. Y la Bomba y toda la música de Africa ese ritmo es el que tiene el Hip Hop y el Regeton de aquí también. Las comidas son la pizza, los ‘hamburgers’ y eso, la pizza no es de E.U. la inventaron en otro país. Y yo siempre me he preguntado si ellos tienen alguna cosa de ellos solamente. No ellos tienen cosas de todos los países diferentes. Su cultura se basa en culturas de otros países no necesariamente de P.R.” (“About the culture, the U.S. culture is based on other cultures. For example, Hip Hop is considered to be part of the U.S., but Hip Hop was created by the black people who came from Africa. The Bomba (a
Puerto Rican folkloric music) and all the music of Africa which is the rhythm found in the Hip Hop and the Regeton here in P.R. too. Foods like hamburgers and pizza are not from the U.S. either. They were invented in another country. I have always asked myself if they have something that belongs only to them. No, they have things from different countries. Their culture is based in other countries’ cultures, not necessarily from P.R.”)

Although Carmen’s initial idea of culture seemed to be simplistic, she brought to the discussion an impressive afterthought about how the U.S. culture in her opinion, was not a distinctly unique but an amalgamation from many different cultures. Like Jenny, Carmen used tangible characteristics such as food and music to evidence her point that the U.S. has a culture based mainly on other countries’ cultures. This seemed to imply that U.S. does not have a “real” culture, as Carmen understood it. She even made a further statement that the U.S. envies Puerto Rico because we have our own distinctive culture while the U.S. does not have a unique culture of its own. This comparative statement seemed to reflect a kind of “resentment and fierce adherence to Puerto Ricanness” due to the U.S. imposition of language and culture on the island as described by Morris (1995) in her study concerning Puerto Rico’s culture, politics, and identity. According to Morris (1995), the U.S. presence in Puerto Rico may have strengthened Puerto Rican identity, since the U.S. provided a very clear notion of “them” which served as the model against a clear definition of “us”. Carmen was making this clear distinction between what she perceived as the U.S. culture vs. the Puerto Rican culture under colonial conditions.

Other participants like Ruth and Armando demonstrated an even more expanded view of culture when they stated the following:
Ruth: “Pero quizás nos estamos americanizando un poquito porque quizás estamos mezclando un poco de su cultura se esta mezclando un poco con la de nosotros y estamos formando, como que una nueva cultura, mas o menos algo así. Estamos dejando de ser Puertorriqueños, pero no es como dejando de ser puertorriqueños para ser Estadosunidenses, es como para ser otra cosa es como una mezcla entre las dos cosas.” (“Maybe we are getting Americanized a little because, maybe we are mixing a little of their culture with ours and we are building a new culture more or less. We are losing our Puerto Ricanness, but it is not like losing who we are as Puerto Ricans to become United Statians. It is like becoming something else, it is like a mixture between the two things [the two cultures].”)

Armando: “Yo creo que una cultura no es algo fijo, es algo que todo el tiempo esta cambiando, cualquier influencia la cultura cambia pero todavía es la misma cultura, es la cultura con una modificación. Nosotros estamos siendo influenciados por los Estadosunidenses al igual que fuimos influenciados por los Españoles, por los Africanos, al igual que fuimos influenciados por los Tainos mismos. Todo, cualquier influencia trae un cambio en la cultura pero todavía es nuestra cultura, no es la cultura de alguien mas. Se adoptan diferentes aspectos de una cultura, y se modifica la cultura misma.” (“I believe that culture is not something fixed, it is something that is constantly changing. Any influence may change the culture, but it is still the same culture, it is the culture with a modification. We are being influenced by the United Statians, likewise we have been influenced by the Spaniards, by the Africans; the same way we have been
influenced by the Taínos. Any influence brings change to the culture, but it is our
culture not the culture of someone else. Different aspects of another culture are
adopted and the culture itself is modified.

Armando and Ruth exhibit a sophisticated understanding of the notion of culture through
these statements and their view of culture coincides to a degree with Hall’s view of
cultural identity.

In this globalized world, the idea of sameness or individuality is contested by the
pluralistic cultural identities around a post-colonial world caused by constant, forced and
free migration and the interaction and relationships among these different cultural
identities usually within a common space. In his book, *Questions of Cultural Identity*,
Stuart Hall claims that, contrary to this notion of sameness, nowadays “identities are
never unified” but “increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply
constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices, and
positions. [Identities] “are subject to a radical historicization, and more constantly in the
process of change and transformation” (Hall, 1996: 4).

As we can observe, participants’ notions of their cultural identity were quite advanced for
such young students. In these responses, they accepted the fact that culture is something
that changes as it is influenced by other cultures and that it can adapt and even be
modified, which is what Hall is referring to above in his view of cultural identity.

Curiously, the language issue was not mentioned during the discussion about culture.
Actually, the main difference mentioned between Puerto Ricans and United Statians
participants was not the language but the culture itself.

This data highlights very clearly the contradictions and the complexities existent within
the colonial/postcolonial attitudes towards English held by these young participants. On
one hand participants tended to view Spanish as part of their culture and nationality, but on the other hand they also accepted that Puerto Ricans who don’t speak Spanish could also be considered Puerto Rican if they really felt Puerto Rican. Moreover, providing the students the opportunity to discuss openly and critically their perceptions regarding the teaching of English in the context of Puerto Rico, proved that they were much more aware of the colonial socio political reality of the island than anticipated in such young students. The fact that they are so aware of the colonial socio political context surrounding them, and of its connection to the learning of English, demands a serious revision to the English curriculum for the island. A critical pedagogy paradigm as suggested by Canagarajah (1999) and Pennycook (1998) should be included within the English curriculum in Puerto Rico in order that students can discuss and reflect critically, through the venue of the English class, the reality behind this imposed program, with the intent that this could help to empower them as Puerto Rican individuals studying under a colonized mainstream educational system.

Once the participants had the opportunity to talk about their perceptions toward the teaching of English in Puerto Rico as a second language they also had the chance to read and discuss some stories within the textbooks used in the ESL classroom. The fifth chapter describes in detail how these participant students perceived Puerto Rican images of characters and settings located within textbooks used to teach English in Puerto Rico and other stories written in English concerning Puerto Rico and its people.
CHAPTER FIVE

Participants’ Perception of Stories and Images Embedded in English Textbooks

This chapter contains an in-depth analysis of the second portion of the data collection in which participants discuss critically their perceptions concerning the images of Puerto Rican and U.S. culture portrayed in children’s literature and embedded within English textbooks utilized by the public school system in Puerto Rico at the time this research took place. In order to provide for diverse perspectives and to compare and contrast, additional stories published in the U.S., written about Puerto Rico by both Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican authors, but not included in the English textbooks, were also discussed.

As stated previously, the colonial status of Puerto Rico imposes the teaching of English on students, the Puerto Rican education system emulates a similar U.S. education model, and the textbooks used in English class originate in the U.S. Therefore, knowledge portrayed and professed represents the particular points of view and understanding of the U.S. dominant culture.

Always conscious of this context, the idea framing the book club discussion was to use a Freirian critical pedagogy perspective when discussing the images in the English children’s literature as well as their content. Participants were also encouraged to interpret and challenge both content messages of the stories and their images, following Hade’s (1997) view of reading as an activity which is not a mere comprehension of existing messages, but one in which we interpret, “certain signs with which we have a relationship that includes experience, culture, and value” (p.240). Reading by this definition transcends the objective of merely learning the English language and encompasses interpretation and portrayal of
Puerto Rican culture and our image as Latino people, as well as U.S. culture. Exposure to books where Puerto Rican experiences and cultural values are valued and celebrated could empower our students to become more “powerful interpreters” of written text and of their world (Hade, 1997).

In addition to the views detailed above, participants were encouraged to approach their analysis from various other perspectives that could assist with interpreting story meanings. The theories of representation, described by Stuart Hall (1997) in *Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, were applied. Hall’s theories explain how meaning is represented through language. They address questions related to the origins of meaning and assist us to focus on the “true” meaning of a word or image. Halls describes three approaches as, reflective (where meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and language or images reflect the true meaning as it exists in the world), intentional (the author or the speaker imposes his/her meaning on the world through language and words or images mean what the author intends they should mean), and constructionist (acknowledges that neither things in themselves nor the individual users can fix meaning in language as we construct meaning using representational systems, concepts and signs) (Hall, 1997: 228). Participants were encouraged to apply the final approach - the constructionist approach. The intent was that they construct any meaning they assign to illustrations and text, (while considering their own colonial context), instead of relying solely on the author’s or illustrator’s intentions, or on meaning embedded within the pictures or the text.

The concept of stereotyping as a representational practice as described by Hall (1997) was also employed. Stereotyping as Hall defines it, “to get hold of a few, simple, vivid,
memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characteristics about a person, reduce
everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them and fix them
without change or development to eternity” (Hall, 1997:258). Stereotyping also divides the
normal from the abnormal, excluding everything which does not fit in, exaggerating
attributes which are different. “Stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross
inequalities of power.” (Hall, 1997:258) Power is usually directed against the excluded
group. If stereotypes were represented in these stories, how the participants interpret them
is of great interest.

This chapter is organized around the stories and themes that emerged from discussions
noted in the children’s literature reading club section of the data set.

Finally, this chapter also includes a historical overview of literature development in Puerto
Rico and of the selection process for English textbooks by the Department of Education in
order to provide a broader sociopolitical context to the discussion.

**Brief Historical Background of Literature in P.R.**

According to Cesario Rosa Nieves and Félix Franco Oppenhimer in *Antología General del
Cuento Puertorriqueño* (General Anthology of the Puerto Rican Short Story), once Puerto
Rico became a territory of the U.S. the island was isolated both geographically and
culturally, and associated with economic and military capital rather than as a province with
a right to develop itself, socially, culturally, and economically. Consequently, the origins
of literature production in Puerto Rico occurred chronologically much later than in other
Latin American countries like Cuba, the Dominican Republic, or Mexico. No institutions
of higher education such as a university were existent on the island until 1903. Once the
university was established, an educational program for future teachers was created (Rosa-Nieves, and Franco-Oppenhimer, 1959). This historical delay certainly slowed the development of Puerto Rican literacy and literature to a great extent, and might have created distance from any literary life for island occupants as well. Other factors that could have significantly contributed to the delayed development of literacy were poverty, and the lack of mechanical presses available to publish books and newspapers.

On the other hand, even when newspapers and books were eventually published at the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of the population at that time did not have the means to purchase books. The only way unprivileged people and children in particular were exposed to books was in the context of the public school system. During the initial stages of the Americanization process, textbooks used in schools, except for those used to teach Spanish, originated in the U.S. Science, History, and Math texts were either in English or in Spanish depending on the language policy being enforced at the moment (Negrón de Montilla, 1997). Once the first Puerto Rican governor was elected in 1949, and Spanish was reinstated as the medium of instruction in the public school system, Spanish textbooks were then used across the curriculum except for the English class (Pousada, 1999).

Children’s Literature in Puerto Rico Today

Puerto Rico continues to function as a colony of the United States, and consequently the education system on the island emulates the U.S. education model. Although Spanish is the language of instruction in the public school system, English continues to be the medium of instruction in some private schools as they, “are autonomous bodies that can
decide which language will be used to teach which subjects” (Muntaner, 1990: 247). The result is that English textbooks are used in different content areas in these private schools, while in the public schools, English textbooks are used exclusively in the English class. However, the majority of English textbooks used in every school still originate in the U.S. Muntaner (1990) estimates that, “Puerto Rico imports close to 75 million dollars worth of educational material every year. Sixty-five percent of all books come from the States although not all books are printed in English” (p.234).

Many of the textbooks used in the English class are part of basal reader programs, which usually emphasize decoding over comprehension and do not address diversity of language or of culture (Shannon, 1990). According to Sonia Nieto, a professor of bilingual education and a researcher, even when some of the basal reader series from the States have recently adapted to change, and included multicultural stories in their children’s literature repertoire, misconceptions about different cultures and negative stereotypes remain in many versions of these books - including about Puerto Rican people and their culture. Nieto states that, “Rather than simply negative images, there are almost no images of Puerto Ricans in children’s books. Of those books that are published, a few are still full of stereotypical and unconvincing story lines and situations” (Nieto, 1997).

This lack of representation of Puerto Rican people in the textbooks was referenced explicitly by one of the students during the first interview in the pilot study, linking this situation with the island’s colonial status. According to him, this status was the reason for didactic material used in the classroom to originate exclusively from the U.S., and led to the lack of representation of Puerto Rican people in them. This particular insight
motivated the inclusion of discussion in the second part of the data collection concerning
the attributes of textbooks used in the English classroom. If textbooks continued to
emanate from the States, then what does their content say – or not say - about Puerto
Rican culture or concerning U.S. culture? How are these texts and their images being
interpreted by Puerto Rican students?

**English Textbooks in the Public School System**

It is imperative here to discuss the selection process for English textbooks conducted by
the Department of Education in Puerto Rico, since this process blatantly reflects
contemporary colonial status.

An English consultant, who worked for the Department of Education in Puerto Rico, was
interviewed. She has participated in both the selection process for English textbooks and
revision of curriculum guidelines and standards for the English program. This consultant
describes the book selection process as one in which large textbook publishing companies
make their own proposals to the Department of Education, promoting the textbooks
directly to evaluation committee members. This is in direct opposition to the process for
selecting Spanish textbooks when the evaluation committee members are proactive and in
which some guidelines following the Department’s curriculum are a prerequisite.
Therefore, although there is a special committee comprised of teachers, supervisors and
administrators from the Department of Education for the selection of textbooks, the
members of this special committee may not necessarily follow a specific evaluation
criterion. Instead, they are approached directly by the large U.S. publishing companies
with recognized and efficient marketing strategies. According to the interviewee, this
situation is probably attributable to the lack of human resources as well as financial resources within the Department of Education.

Consequently, this selection process appears to benefit the large U.S. publishing companies with powerful marketing strategies and economic resources rather than Puerto Rican students. The majority of textbooks sold by these companies are regular English language textbooks and basal readers geared toward U.S. English native speakers, not necessarily for ESL (English as a Second Language) application. This situation has forced the Puerto Rican public education system to make modifications such as using the English textbooks above the grade level originally intended for within the context of U.S. schools. For example, the textbook used for this research, *Reading Traditions: A Legacy of Literacy* by *Houghton Mifflin* (2001), originally a fourth grade textbook, was being used in sixth grade within the Puerto Rican public school system at the time of this research.

The English consultant alleged that, as a result of various factors, using books above the designated grade level is a common practice in public schools and occasionally in private schools. She explained that even though there are some ESL textbooks available on the market, there is a general assumption among English administrators in Puerto Rico that these ESL texts are too simple and not as efficient for ESL learners in Puerto Rican schools.

This situation highlights another language issue that has been a frequent topic for discourse surrounding the ELT (English Language Teaching) field in Puerto Rico. Some academic sectors argue that English should be taught as a foreign language since English is not utilized in daily living in Puerto Rico, while other sectors argue that English should be taught as a second language due to business being conducted mostly in English on the
island and the political relationship with the U.S. This debate is reflected in how English textbooks are employed within the public and private schools around the island and the chaos created by inconsistencies. Some private schools may use ESL textbooks or may modify the grade level of the regular English textbook while others may use them at the original level intended for native English speakers. In the public schools on the other hand, regular English textbooks are adapted to a higher grade level in order to simplify the language content for the ESL learners. This is the case even though there are ESL textbooks available on the market, including locally produced textbooks, precisely constructed to facilitate the ESL learning process and tending to be more relevant to the students’ culture.

This bureaucratic process and behavior was observed first hand when I participated in a project whereby English textbooks were written and published by a team of Puerto Rican professional educators. In spite of the Department of Education being invited to attend the formal presentation of these locally produced ESL textbooks, they chose to not be present. Their absence was interpreted as a rejection of locally produced ESL textbooks and definitely discouraged hope of any future involvement from the local talent pool. This choice of U.S. English language textbooks over locally produced ESL textbooks which had the potential to be more relevant to Puerto Rican students reflects a colonial mentality still evident within society. English is the language of the U.S. Empire and textbooks produced in the U.S. represent both the power of the U.S. and of this language. It is probable that locally produced English textbooks did not receive validation by the Department of Education on their assumption that such books would be of inferior quality, without the acknowledgement that Puerto Rican educators, experts in the ESL field,
brought to this project the practical experience of educating students in the Puerto Rican context. Colonial mentality would presume that book production quality emanating from native English speakers would be superior, while Puerto Rican textbook productions were not even provided the opportunity to be evaluated. “The underlying assumption here is that anything American is superior to its Puerto Rican counterpart” (Barreto, 2001: 25).

This situation obviously affects the local publishing industry which has difficulty competing with U.S. multinational publishing companies already well established on the island. Local publishing companies do not appear to be well supported by the Puerto Rican government, particularly when publications in English are concerned.

English textbooks continue to originate in the States, and the stories within these textbooks serve as vehicles to, “carry and transmit the ideological assumptions”, of the U.S. culture (Nodelman and Reimer, 2003). As this may be characteristic of many of the English textbooks used contemporarily in the Puerto Rican classroom, I am interested in exploring what their content could be communicating regarding the U.S. culture, how the images of Puerto Rican characters may be commonly presented in these textbooks, and how Puerto Rican children are interpreting these images of themselves and the content in the stories.

These inquiries are examples of what comprises the second part of the data collection.

In addition to the text content, the focus of discussion also included the images or illustrations found in picture book type stories. Eighth grade textbooks lack the abundance of images normally found in picture books where illustrations accompany the narration throughout the story. Thus, although participants were in the eighth grade at the time the research took place, stories within sixth grade English textbooks were critiqued.
Participants also had the opportunity to compare the picture book stories with the literature included in their current English textbook; the results are discussed within this section. Each participant read two different stories and answered in written format the questions located in Appendix B. Written answers were discussed within the group and participants had the opportunity to view each other’s books and also comment on other participants’ responses. Participants shared their opinions and perspectives about the different stories with the result that they addressed two audiences simultaneously, their peer group and their former teacher - now the researcher.

Puerto Rican characters existent within U.S. created stories were also discussed in an attempt to provide a broader variety of images, since very few Puerto Rican characters were located within those textbooks available in the context of the English curriculum in contemporary Puerto Rico. Four stories were written by U.S. authors, three by mainland Puerto Rican authors, three stories by other Latino authors, and only one written by a local Puerto Rican. It was very difficult to locate English children’s literature written by local Puerto Rican authors; the single available story written by a local Puerto Rican author was actually a translation into English from the original Spanish version.

Book club discussion questions were developed to motivate participants to reflect on the story characters, to describe how they felt about the images in the stories, and to then try to determine if the character were Puerto Rican or not. Identifying Puerto Rican characters assisted with observation of any Puerto Rican traits ascribed, which then framed the discussion of what exactly constitutes Puerto Ricanness and how these attributes are being portrayed by the story illustrators.
Discussion of the Stories

**My Name is María Isabel**

The first stories discussed appeared in the sixth grade English textbook series, *Reading: A Legacy of Literacy* by *Houghton Mifflin* (2001), the textbook used in many public schools overseen by the Department of Education at the time of this research. This textbook contained twenty-one stories divided into themes such as Journeys, American Stories, Problem Solvers, Heroes and Nature, and Friend and Foe. Among all twenty one was a single story with a Puerto Rican character *My Name is María Isabel* by Alma Flor Ada, (in the Problem Solvers unit), which is congruent with what Nieto (1997) has stated regarding the lack of Hispanic representation in children’s literature.

Three more stories about other Latino groups in the U.S. were located. These particular stories were included because, although all Latino groups are not the same, there are many commonalities among them, such as common historical experiences and shared conditions of life as experienced within the U.S. (Nieto, 2004) which could be closely related to the Puerto Rican reality. These stories also highlighted U.S. culture, another aspect for discussion with the participants. Additional writings concerning Puerto Rico, written by Puerto Rican as well as non- Puerto Rican authors, were included in the research by design. Each participant had the opportunity to read and critique at least two picture books with two participants reading three books each.

*My Name is María Isabel* is an English version of a Spanish story, possibly translated by the author’s daughter as stated in the *Meet the Author* section of the textbook. The story in the textbook was a reduction to four-chapters from the original ten-chapter book. Copies of the stories selected from the Houghton Mifflin textbook were made available for all
individuals. The illustrations used for the shorter story version in the textbook were large, colorful pictures created by a Latina, Melodye Benson Rosales, who resides in Los Angeles. Rosales created wonderful, colorful, realistic illustrations; she avoided employing any stereotypes, i.e. of a poor, lazy, welfare-receiving, Puerto Rican family. María Isabel is portrayed in these illustrations as a beautiful Latina girl with dark hair and fair skin color. Participants didn’t locate any stereotypes in these pictures and seemed to agree that the images of the Puerto Rican character, Maria Isabel, portrayed what they thought could be a Puerto Rican girl. The illustrations in the original ten chapter paperback book, on the other hand, were created by K. Dyble Thompson, printed in black and white pencil and at a much smaller scale.

The storyline centers around the identity issues created for a Puerto Rican girl who couldn’t respond to her teacher because that teacher had altered her name from María Isabel to Mary after realizing there were two additional Marías in class. María Isabel cherishes her name deeply as it represents her Puerto Rican heritage, her loving grandparents, and especially her grandmother after whom she is named. Her reticent behavior is misunderstood by the teacher, who never questioned María to find out why she wouldn’t respond to the name Mary in class. The United Statian teacher in the story represents the dominant culture, who from her position of power decides to change María’s name without consulting her. María feels oppressed and does not respond to the assigned name of Mary because she doesn’t identify with it or consider herself a Mary. Curiously, the part of the story where the teacher doesn’t seem to understand María’s attitude is located in the first few chapters of the original story and was omitted in the abbreviated English textbook version. These omissions included important culturally-
specific details of the Puerto Rican family. For example, it is implicit in the text that both parents work hard and could be assumed that they migrated to New York from Puerto Rico in search of a better life with more opportunities.

The teacher characterized in this story valued English over any other language since she changed the student’s Spanish name to an English one without consulting the student or asking her permission; she expected the student to comply and respond to Mary without resistance. The teacher’s practice also shows how the lack of knowledge about a different culture can lead to miscommunication and misinterpretation of the Puerto Rican student’s behavior.

Carmen, the participant who read this story, was the first to express her opinion about it. However, she read the original chapter book version and not the abbreviated version found in the textbook. The issue of changing one’s name into another language was the first point Carmen initiated when she was asked whether she, as a Puerto Rican, identified herself with the main character in the story. She responded as follows:

*Carmen:* “*No, porque en realidad la historia se trata de cómo los Americanos la tratan a ella que no la aceptan con su nombre de verdad y yo pues no he tenido esa experiencia porque siempre he vivido en P.R.*” (“No, because the story is really about how Americans treat her, that they don’t accept her real name and I haven’t had this experience because I have always lived in P.R.”)

Carmen makes the distinction right away between how the Puerto Rican girl character was treated in the context of the U.S. and how this is something she doesn’t anticipate happening to her in Puerto Rico. However, this situation does occasionally occur in the context of Puerto Rico, as explained later, yet not necessarily in exactly the same way.
Carmen also interprets the teacher’s renaming of Maria as indicative of her non-acceptance of Maria’s Puerto Rican name. When Carmen was asked to identify the reality framing this story, this is what she had to say:

**Carmen:** “Pues que ella se llamaba Maria Isabel y en el salón ya había dos o tres Marías, y entonces la maestra para poder identificarla y no confundirla con las otras Marías pues le decía Mary López. Y entonces ella no contestaba ese nombre porque no estaba acostumbrada a que le llamaran así. Y ella estaba siempre bien preocupada por eso porque la maestra se enfogonaba con ella por algo que ella no tenia culpa.” (“She was named Maria Isabel and there were three Marías in the classroom, so the teacher would call her Mary Lopez in order to identify her and not confuse her with the other Marías. And then she would not respond to that name because she was not used to being called by that name. And she was always worried about that because the teacher would get mad at her for something that was not her fault.”)

Carmen’s response indicated that she viewed the teacher’s attitude towards Maria as unfair since it was not María’s fault that the teacher had changed her name. She excused Maria’s behavior since it was her understanding that Maria couldn’t possibly respond to a name she couldn’t recognize as hers. For Carmen, this attitude seemed to be simply logical. When the storyline indicated that the teacher did not consider Maria for involvement in the Christmas play, Carmen interpreted this as indication that the teacher was mad at María, which Carmen considered unfair. This response prompted the question for the participants concerning how they would feel if their names were changed from Spanish to English, and caused an immediate reaction. They reacted with very strong opinions about this issue:
Rolando: “Nunca me ha gustado que me digan mi nombre en Inglés. Yo estoy acostumbrado a mi nombre en español y me gusta como lo tengo en español. No me gustaría cambiarlo ni que distingan como mi nombre en otro idioma.” (“I have never liked my name to be changed to English. I am used to my name in Spanish and I like my name in Spanish. I would not like to change it or have it changed into another language.”)

Yolanda: “Nuestros padres tuvieron bastante tiempo pensando en el nombre que nos iban a poner, (bueno yo creo) o sea eso es algo original, para que después nos cambien el nombre así porque sí.” (“Our parents spent a lot of time thinking about our names, (well, I think) it is something very personal for somebody to come along and change our name just like that.”)

Ramón: “Me gusta más así en español ya estoy acostumbrado a que me lo digan así, y pues no me agrada, aunque suena básicamente igual, que me lo pronuncien de la forma que no es.” (“I like it better in Spanish and I am used to be named this way so I don’t like it, even when it sounds similar, that it is pronounced the wrong way.”)

Armando: “A mi me indigna porque realmente el nombre se siente como una identidad o algo que esta contigo todo el tiempo.” (“It infuriates me because the name really feels like an identity or something that is always with you.”)

Ruth: “Es que yo pienso que tu nombre es algo tuyo que en verdad nadie excepto tu, tiene derecho a cambiarlo o a decirlo en otro idioma o otra pronunciación, si tu quieres cambiar tu nombre, tu puedes hacerlo, pero que otra persona te lo cambie pues yo pienso que eso no es justo.”

(“I think that your name is something very yours, that nobody really except you has the right to change it, say it or pronounce it in another language, if you want
Researcher: ¿Qué tú crees que debió haber hecho esa maestra? ("What do you think the teacher should have done?")

Ruth: “Pues preguntarle si ella le molestaba que le dijeran Mary López, o si había otra forma que ella le gustaría que le dijeran, si tiene un seudónimo o si tus familiares le llaman de alguna forma pero no cambiarle el nombre porque eso no debería ser.” ("Well, ask her if it doesn’t bother her being called Mary Lopez, or if there was any other way of calling her, if she had a nickname, or if her family or relatives would call her any other way, but not to change her name because that should not be done.")

The participants felt strongly about their Spanish names and about anyone changing their names to another language. I don’t recall feeling like this about my name when I was their age: what I do recall was happiness when my cousins came from the U.S. and pronounced my name in English. At that time I was going through a personal “Americanization” phase, wanting to be identified as a “Gringa”; changing my name into English, helped me feel like one, which I thought at that time was something cool.

In my role as ESL teacher, I used to change the students’ Spanish names into English, thinking that this could assist them in getting used to the target language in the classroom. I also took for granted the superiority of the English language, as did the teacher portrayed in the story, but I assumed the students would feel cool about it, since their names would sound different or even exotic in English. This was routine English class behavior every year, and there was no reason for me to think that students might reject it.

In recollection, some students seemed to embrace this practice while a very few seemed
to resist it. My response was to not change the names of those very few who spoke up against this practice. However, I understand now that the lack of resistance to this practice from the students’ part could have been a way to avoid any confrontation with the teacher as the authority in the classroom and did not necessarily indicate acceptance of this practice. As a colonized and “Americanized” ESL teacher I blindly followed the dominant culture and conducted oppressive practices in the classroom without reflecting on them. I changed the students’ names, thinking that an English name would be cool or more sophisticated for them than their Spanish name, and therefore it was not necessary for them to be consulted about it. In other words, I was applying what Phillipson (1998) has called *English linguicism* in my classroom. This term refers to how a dominant language like English represents desirable characteristics that I, as an Americanized subject in this case, attributed to this language for the purpose of including English names in the English class while excluding the students’ Spanish names. This is why I was so surprised by the intensity of the participants’ responses regarding their Spanish names. Certainly I can never impose this practice on students in English class again now that I see how strongly students may feel about it, and after acknowledging the validity of their rationale. My consciousness has been raised; however, this illustrates how very easy it is to participate in oppression when institutions and bureaucracies are in place that practice that oppression. One can be co-opted and participate in behaviors without ever feeling the need to step back and critically reflect on those behaviors.

It is interesting to note how the participants claim agency to deal with their names while others respect their parents’ efforts in naming them in a particular way and want to honor this effort. They also indicated in these responses that the name is part of one’s identity,
which for them was reason enough for rejecting any changes to or manipulations of names. Rolando and Ramon seemed to be the only participants to display open resistance to changing their name into English or any other language, which appeared to demonstrate behavior in protection of the Spanish language and their Puerto Ricanness.

Ruth, on the other hand, advocated for giving María Isabel some agency by stating very clearly that the teacher should have consulted the girl in her decision to change the girl’s name. According to Ruth, the girl could possibly have given the teacher an alternative name, which could have immediately solved the problem. Additionally, Carmen summarized her final response to the story by stating that even when the storyline of María Isabel presents the name issue as a small problem, she realized that it is not until we identify ourselves with María that we notice how large the problem really is. It is interesting to observe that Carmen reached this conclusion after she heard other participants’ opinions concerning the personal name issue. She clearly stated in the beginning of her response that she didn’t identify herself with María Isabel because she had never gone through her experience, and she had never lived in the States, yet she ended up identifying with her after listening to the discourse surrounding this issue. This underscores the importance of having students share their literary experiences and providing them with ample time for detailed discussion of literature as Chambers (1996) states in his book Tell Me.

Tomás and the Library Lady

The next textbook story discussed was, Tomás and the Library Lady by Pat Mora, an award-winning Latina writer, with illustrations by Raúl Colón, a Puerto Rican artist. It is a
non-fiction story concerning Tomas as a Mexican migrant boy who traveled to different farm venues around the U.S. with his parents and became an avid reader, thanks to the influence of a caring librarian. The story describes the lifestyle of this little boy who, motivated by his grandfather’s storytelling, desired to learn to read books. The story focuses on the relationship the boy developed with “the Library Lady” the person who introduced him to the world of books, while on the other hand his life as a farm worker is romanticized through the illustrations which portray him playing happily in the fields of labor.

Ruth was the participant who read this story; when asked how the migrant situation in the U.S. was presented in the story, she described it as difficult. According to Ruth, the story described how the boy had to travel for long periods of time, in an uncomfortable junky car on bumpy roads and how he couldn’t attend school. However, when asked to examine the illustrations and then explain if she thought the story indicated how really difficult the life of a migrant is, this is what she had to say:

**Ruth:** “*Es que yo pienso que el cuento así en general pues que refleja más bien el lado positivo o sea, el lado bonito de su historia no te dice mucho todo lo que ellos pasaron. Nada mas te dice en si que dormían apiñados cuando vivían en la casa de los agricultores, pero que no lo dice como una forma negativa, lo dice como si eso fuera nada, cosa normal pero en verdad si tu lo ves no es nada bueno, es algo difícil.*” (“I think that the story in general shows mostly the positive side, the pretty side of the story, it doesn’t say much about what they went through. It only tells things like the way they slept all crowded in the farmer’s houses, but not in a negative
Ruth based most of her initial response on the narration of the text which, according to her, was describing some difficulties associated with migrant life. However, when asked to closely examine the illustrations and tell if the story was indicating whether this life was difficult or not, she gave a completely different response and said she thought the story was only telling the positive side and not how really difficult migrant life was. She stated that the text even catalogued the difficulties in such a way that these appeared normal and not as difficult as they probably were.

This change in Ruth’s response could have been due to the fact that for this story the illustrations do not necessarily reflect what the text describes. Nodelman and Reimer (2003) state that picture books contain at least three stories, “the one told by the words, the one implied by the pictures, and the one that results from the combination of the other two” (p.295). Sometimes contradiction may emerge between the text and the pictures, which can be used for ironic intent. However, in this application the use of contradiction was interpreted as not intended for irony, but as simplification and idealization - via pictures - of a hard reality which was carefully described in the narration.

The picture book contains beautifully rendered illustrations with earthy sun-warmed colors which vividly portray the life of Tomás Rivera. The soft colors and fuzzy backgrounds appear to hide the reality of the environment where Tomás had to live as a migrant worker. One illustration portrays the mother picking fruit and she looks like a magazine model, not a sweaty migrant worker who is working hard under the hot sun as the text describes. Tomás is even portrayed as having time to play happily in these circumstances.
According to Hade (1997), in order to have children read critically they should be exposed to different perspectives of similar stories so that they learn to develop a critical mind and come to their own conclusions. Another story that was not in the textbook, *Harvesting Hope* by Kathleen Krull and illustrated by Yuyi Morales, was introduced in order to contrast it with Tomás Rivera’s story. This story portrays the very difficult life of the Mexican labor activist, César Chávez, as he fought for migrant workers’ rights. Tomás Rivera and César Chávez were contemporary people who represent the various migrant Latino workers in the U.S.

Armando, the participant who read *Harvesting Hope*, described very vividly the terrible life migrants had as he interpreted this story by Krull. He showed the pictures to the rest of the students in support of his interpretation and description of the story. The illustrations in *Harvesting Hope* are much more graphic, showing the difficulties and the hard life migrants had at the farms and in school. The illustration on page 13 shows how Cesar was humiliated at school for speaking Spanish when the teacher put a sign on his chest reading, “I am a clown. I speak Spanish” (Krull, 2003: p.13). *Harvesting Hope* does not appear in the English textbook, Tomás Rivera’s story does. When participants were asked what they thought about this, the first reaction was to ask if the book was written in Puerto Rico or the U.S. When they learned that it was written in the U.S. Ruth stated the following:

**Ruth:** “Pues que ellos quieren mostrar el lado bonito, el lado pues positivo de los inmigrantes, no quieren demostrar el lado negativo, lo que sufrió la gente y también que lucharon pero que si consiguieron sus metas.” “Muestra el que llego lejos haciendo las cosas como a ellos les gustaría verdad porque no protesto, el no hizo ninguna protesta. No dice
“They (the U.S. people) want to show the nice side, the positive side of the migrants’ life, they don’t want to show the negative side, how people suffer and the fact that they worked hard and achieved their goals. It shows a man (Tomás Rivera) who got far in life by doing everything as they (the U.S, people) would like it. He never protested, he never organized a strike. The story doesn’t say how he studied or anything like that, but it doesn’t show the other Mexican migrants who fought and that practically…it can be said that Chávez died indirectly thanks to the struggles, the hunger strike he went through to better the migrant farm workers’ life. It doesn’t show those who fought and died for the cause to achieve their rights and a better way of life.”

For Ruth, the fact that the story of Tomás Rivera was written in the U.S. implies that this country is trying very openly to promote only the positive side of the Latino migrant experience in the U.S. That Harvesting Hope, also a book produced in the U.S., relates a different perspective of the migrant experience but is not included in, (and perhaps consciously excluded from), the textbook. She came to this conclusion without taking into consideration that Harvesting Hope may have not been included in the English textbook for other reasons, i.e. editorial management. She didn’t notice that the author and the illustrators of Tomas Rivera’s story are both Latinos. What is significant here is that even when the author’s intention was to provide a good role model for other Latinos,
this kind of story keeps perpetuating the idea that there is nothing wrong with the migrant farm workers’ life as long as they work hard and learn how to get out of it as Tomás Rivera managed to do. This is precisely the point Ruth also brought into the discussion when she indicated that Tomás Rivera was successful in the U.S. because he was an obedient citizen who never protested against the injustices the U.S. system had committed toward the immigrant population - (a brief biography at the end of the story indicated that Tomás Rivera became the first Hispanic chancellor of a college in the U.S.). While Chávez, on the other hand, wasn’t portrayed as successful since he dedicated his life to advocate for the farm workers rights and did not achieve academic status as did Tomás Rivera. Her response also focuses on how Tomás Rivera’s success is portrayed as an individual gain that didn’t seem to necessarily impact the rest of the community as did César Chávez’ commitment to the farm workers rights. For Ruth, the story is sending the message that, to be successful in the U.S. one can not go against the system even if the system is unfair to the people whom it is serving. This is perceived as a very powerful message hidden within this story as (amazingly) noted by this young participant. This also exemplifies linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1998) in which the dominant culture is transmitting its ideal norms and behaviors of its model structure through education and the use of this English story in a textbook. This message of the obedient citizen who transcended the migrant life to achieve success in the U.S. could have great currency within the Puerto Rican context where people are still colonized by the U.S. and result in obedient citizens who think they would be rewarded with success if only they avoid any resistance or reprisal.
Once Ruth brought out this interesting point, Rolando followed with another very eye-opening point by stating the following concerning this issue of showing only the positive side of the migrant’s life:

Rolando: “Es que están ocultando la verdad, están ocultando lo agresivo que son. Que lo que hacen es que les ocultan a las personas la verdad. Dan a ver de lo bueno que son. Por ejemplo, los otros días yo vi una película que es de Acción de Gracias, hay que los Ingleses están con los Indios y lo celebran…mira eso no fue así, eso hubieron guerras y mataron, ¿me entiendes? Pero lo quieren poner de una perspectiva que crean que Norte América es lo mejor, o sea que la vida es lo mejor, todo el mundo se quiere no hay discriminación no hay nada. Y es algo que en la vida real no esta pasando y eso es un tipo de cosa que hay que batallarlas rápidamente, porque la gente merece saber la verdad.”

(“They (the U.S.) are hiding the truth of how aggressive they are. They hide the truth from the people. They only show how good they are. For example the other day I watched a movie about Thanksgiving showing the English with the Indians celebrating…look, it was not like that; there were battles and killings! You know what I mean? But they want to put it from the perspective so we believe that North America is the best, that life there is the best, that everyone loves each other and there is no discrimination. And this is something that in real life is not happening. And this is the kind of thing that has to be dealt with quickly because people deserve to know the truth.”)

Rolando is quite outspoken about what he thinks the U.S. is doing through media - not only via the literature under discussion, but U.S. history as being portrayed in movies. It
is interesting to note Rolando’s awareness about how the U.S. manipulates history and stories in books, portrays an unrealistic view of itself, promotes the stereotype of a perfect place, and exaggerates and simplifies the migrant farm workers harsh reality into not such a difficult life after all. Rolando goes as far as daring to accuse the U.S. of intentionally hiding controversial information in order to show only its good side to the rest of the world. After listening to Rolando’s response, Armando adds to this issue by claiming the following:

Armando: “El gobierno estadounidense y eso están aprovechándose de la media...la televisión, la literatura, las películas, la radio ¡para lavarnos el cerebro! Para enseñarnos que todos los Estadounidenses son bien buenos y ayudan a todo el mundo y son lo máximo. Eso puede ser verdad para algunas personas pero nunca es para todas. Eso nunca en ningún país. Siempre va a haber gente buena y su gente mala.” (“The U.S. government is taking advantage of the media, the T.V., the literature, the films, the radio to brainwash us! To show us that United Statians are the good ones and help everybody and that they are “IT.” That could be true for some people but it is never true for everyone. That could never happen in any country. There will always be good and bad people.”)

Rolando and Armando are expressing a very important point about how a powerful country like the U.S. takes advantage of its own media to promote a perfect image of its country and its people around the world, which Rolando and Armando clearly don’t believe. The level of awareness these students exhibit concerning how the U.S. manipulates and controls the media to market a positive image of its country is very impressive. Rolando goes further by expressing his feeling that something must be done
about this because, as he believes, people deserve to know the truth. I don’t recall being so aware of this empiric agenda when I was his age and accepted the image of the good old and kind U.S. that the media was showing us consistently through T.V. and history books. The media taught us how to be subjects by fostering specific kinds of identifications and framing how we would understand the world around us (Nealon & Giroux, 2003). Nealon and Giroux’s view is applicable because my education to that point, as I realize from my current perspective, was not based on a critical thinking curriculum and the good guys’ stereotypic images were never challenged. The participants, on the other hand, have been exposed to curriculum for critical thinking as their responses reveal.

The story of Tomás Rivera also seems to be a good example of what Shwarcz and Shwarcz (1991) call a “falsified idealization of childhood” which refers to the idea that it is better to simplify and idealize reality when we think children wouldn’t otherwise be able to handle it. So the reason that stories like Tomás Rivera’s seem to simplify and idealize the harsh reality of the migrants’ life is probably due to this position. With these constraints applied, the story portrays a one-sided view or even an unrealistic view of what happens to immigrants/migrants in the U.S., thus stereotyping their life in the U.S. into a perfect one without any prejudice, as Rolando states in his response above. We should start viewing children as complex beings capable of analyzing and creating different meanings about sometimes difficult realities. The issues discussed through the stories in this research demonstrate that children are capable of thinking at high levels and that if provided the opportunity to engage, they are capable of insight. Furthermore, as Rolando and Armando very strongly suggest, people (including children) deserve to
know the truth rather than remaining ignorant or being brainwashed by the media. Students also deserve to know more accurate details concerning their colonial past in order to better understand their colonial/postcolonial present.

It is important to mention that the discussion of this idea about how the U.S. usually portrayed itself as the perfect society or the perfect system elicited discussion of the (mis)handling of the Hurricane Katrina disaster and the war in Iraq as examples of negative outcomes that could show a less than perfect system after all. This type of discussion can only be accomplished when stories and the interpretation of them follow a critical pedagogy perspective and where our context and our culture are taken into consideration.

A Very Important Day

*A Very Important Day* by Maggie Rugg Herold and illustrated by Catherine Stock is another story contained in the English textbook. This story presents many different immigrant families in New York from the Philippines, El Salvador, Mexico, Egypt, Greece, India, Russia, China, Vietnam, Dominican Republic, Scotland, and Ghana who were on their way to officially become citizens of the U.S. during a snowy day. The realistic watercolor illustrations portray the way adults and children are already Americanized in the way they dress (as is also apparent in their conversation). The illustrations portray them as well settled into the States; some families are shown closing their stores (p.10) and many homes present details of furniture typical of middle class ownership (p.4-6). In the final picture, it is interesting to observe that the snow has stopped and the sun came out to shine over the people who are very happy to celebrate
their new status as U.S. citizens. It is very impressive to notice how a difficult and complex process such as obtaining U.S. citizenship is simplified and idealized in this story. The following judge’s words seem almost unrealistic, especially now that immigration laws in the States have become much stricter after 9/11/2001:

“You are carrying on a tradition that dates back to the earliest days of our country, for almost all Americans have come here from somewhere else. May citizenship enrich your lives as your lives enrich this country. Welcome. We are glad to have you” (p.264).

It is interesting to see this kind of message in this story from today’s perspective when the current political discourse heard in the media concerns tightening or closing the U.S. borders. This story is also stereotypical in the sense that it reduces and simplifies the notion of the U.S. as an open society that does not have any problems with differences. The story finally describes, in a very simplistic way, how all of these families obtained their U.S. citizenship on this very important day as the title suggests.

Rolando was the participant who read this story, and he started the discussion by commenting on how important it was for the immigrants in the story to obtain their U.S. citizenship. He mentioned how the story illustrations show the amazement of children from other countries when seeing snow for the first time, portraying a romantic idea of the beautiful white snow in the context of a city. Those who have experienced snow know very well how chaotic this situation could become in the city. Yet, the illustrations portray beautiful and very white snow falling down gracefully over the city even when the text mentions that four inches are expected to fall. Rolando also noticed how the story portrays the citizenship process as easy and perhaps simplistic. When asked whether
Puerto Ricans go through the process of obtaining U.S. citizenship as described in the story, he brought up a very interesting point when he realized that as a Puerto Rican individual, he doesn’t have to go through this process. In acknowledgment of our status as a colony of the U.S., Puerto Ricans are entitled automatically to U.S. citizenship. However, he was concerned about what citizenship implies for the immigrants who are about to acquire this document. This is what he states about this matter:

Rolando: “Ahí hay algo comodón porque ahí dicen que es como en otras palabras, como te digo vender tu patria o algo así. Porque esta jurando solemnemente a ser parte de ellos a cuidar todo lo que ellos hagan y que América es lo mejor y que nunca habrá algo mejor que ellos. Eso es algo que me enfogonó un poquito porque es como, o sea para poder buscar un buen empleo tienes que vender tu patria.” (‘There is something comfy in there because they say in other words that we have to sell our homeland or something like that. Because you are swearing to be part of them (the U.S.) to agree with what they do and that America is the best and there will never be anything better than them. That is something that bothers me a little because it is like in order to get a good job you have to sell your homeland.’)

Researcher: “¿A que tú te refieres con vender tu patria?” (“What do you mean by selling your homeland?”)

Rolando: “Tu dignidad sabes, tu eres de un lugar y te vas a mudarte a otro y comprometerte a lo que dice ahí que es totalmente lo contrario que tu crees como persona, es algo que me incomoda mucho.” (“Your dignity, you know you are from a place and you are moving to another place and...
commit yourself to what it says there in that document which is contrary to what you believe as a person; it is something that makes me very uncomfortable.”

Researcher: “¿Pero por que tú crees que es contrario?” (“Why do you think it is contrary to what you believe?”)

Rolando: “Porque son gente que vienen de otros países, y ellos vienen con su cultura, su imagen y todo solo vienen aquí para poder tener una mejor forma de vivir, y tener un buen empleo con buen salario.” (“Because these are people who come from other countries and they have their own culture, their own image and everything. They only come here (the U.S.) to have a better life and a better job and a better salary.”)

According to Rolando, becoming a U.S. citizen could create a conflict with our cultural and national identity. He resents the fact that in order to gain any economic benefit, immigrants must commit themselves to the host country, in this case the U.S., to the point of assimilation which could imply replacement of their own cultural ideologies and practices by U.S. practices, including speaking the English language and forgetting their native language. He even mentions how immigrants may have to agree with the U.S. on issues they might not believe in just for the sake of loyalty to a new country that they hope will secure a better life for them. Rolando seems to construct this meaning from the book where the characters have to repeat an oath and say the Pledge of Allegiance, which he interprets as a commitment to agree with anything the U.S. may decide to do in the future. He appears to see this as an unfair situation in which immigrants are subjected to the loss of their national and cultural identity, and even their dignity, for the financial benefit which he thinks is a high price to pay. Rolando’s statement indicates how he generalizes the situation of immigrants in the U.S. He seems to feel that assimilation is
always the final destiny of immigrants in the U.S., yet we know that this is not always the case for everyone. It is possible he arrives at this generalization because the illustrations in the story, *A Very Important Day*, show all of the immigrant people from different countries wearing western clothing, speaking English, and eating what seems to be western food (bagels, pancakes and waffles) (p.18) which could represent assimilation to U.S. culture. This could influence the meaning Rolando is constructing from the illustrations in the story. Then again, the story only highlights the positive aspect of obtaining U.S. citizenship and doesn’t present any possible conflicts this action could also bring about, as Rolando clearly stated above.

Although Rolando describes what he thinks are the conflicts assimilation into a different culture may cause to the immigrant population, he doesn’t seem to identify these conflicts with his own reality as a Puerto Rican who possesses U.S. citizenship but not Puerto Rican citizenship, and whose country has been under U.S. dominance for over a century. Apparently, he seems to take his U.S. citizenship for granted, since it is a documentation that appears automatically on his birth certificate as he states the following:

**Rolando:** “Yo como persona yo no he pasado por ese proceso porque nosotros desgraciadamente somos colonia de Norteamérica y al nacer aquí en P.R. nos salen en el certificado de nacimiento y todo automáticamente como ciudadanos Americanos.” (“I, as an individual haven’t gone through this process because unfortunately we are a colony of the U.S., and when we are born here in P.R., our birth certificate automatically states our U.S. citizenship.”)

Rolando accepts that U.S. citizenship has been imposed on him and that he didn’t get the option of choice. However, he does not question the fact that he does not have Puerto
Rican citizenship. This observation prompted me to question this issue by asking the participants if they thought a Puerto Rican citizenship existed. Their immediate reaction was one of general confusion with positive and negative responses offered all at once. They didn’t seem to have ever thought about this issue before, denoting the fact that U.S. citizenship is taken for granted and is not challenged or questioned. This is consistent with a colonial mentality where the colonizer’s practices are mindlessly accepted without question or any thinking in depth about them. This could also be an example of what Phillipson (1998) describes as how the ELT professional discourse “disconnects culture from structure” by portraying a narrow sense of language and education, since it only focuses on technical matters while excluding social, political, and economic matters (1998: 48). It appeared that the issue of citizenship had never been discussed in the English class before, or any other class, even when the curriculum in their school professed to follow a critical thinking curriculum. English teachers may avoid including the subject of citizenship in classroom discussion since this is a political issue which they believe should be forbidden in schools. That was the reaction from a group of Puerto Rican English teachers to a presentation I made at a private university in Puerto Rico concerning these stories in the English textbooks. This behavior on the part of ESL teachers in Puerto Rico could be indicative of their subscription to a narrow sense of language and education, which becomes a neo-neo colonial way in which the dominant language culture, social, and political views are taught indirectly through the language by “means of ideas”, and not necessarily through “impositional force” (Phillipson, 1998) as had been the process in the past during the first stages of the colonization. Avoiding discussion of political issues in the classroom also reinforces the established education
system, which maintains and justifies the dominant group’s ideology. It is precisely through this perspective that post-modern ideology understands education to be political, according to Canagarajah (1999).

On the other hand, once the issue of citizenship was brought into the open and the opportunity to discuss it thoroughly was made available to them, the participants were very eager to express their opinions about it.

Many participants expressed the idea that they would like to have Puerto Rican citizenship available because they think that their Puerto Rican national identity should be acknowledged by the U.S. through documentation of Puerto Rican citizenship. These are the responses of some of the participants about this issue:

**Margie:** “Yo pienso que nosotros deberíamos tener nuestra propia ciudadanía, porque nosotros nacimos y somos de P.R. y yo pienso que deberíamos tener la ciudadanía Puertorriqueña.” (“I think we should have our own citizenship because we were born here and we are from Puerto Rico and I think that we should have a Puerto Rican citizenship.”)

**Armando:** “Lo encuentro ridículo porque realmente somos de P.R. Esta es nuestra patria y tenemos un papel diciendo que nuestra patria está bien lejos por allá. ¡Nosotros no somos estadounidenses, nosotros somos puertorriqueños! Y yo encuentro ridículo que seamos puertorriqueños pero un papel diga que somos estadounidenses.” (“I think it is ridiculous, because we are really from Puerto Rico. This is our home country and we have a paper that is saying that our home country is far away over there. We are not United Statians, we are Puerto Ricans! And I find it ridiculous that we are Puerto Ricans and a paper says that we are United Statians.”)
These two participants demonstrate a strong opinion about having Puerto Rican citizenship and seem to believe that they are entitled to Puerto Rican citizenship just for being born in Puerto Rico regardless of colonial status. Armando seems to understand that U.S. citizenship also represents what he sees as his nation or homeland, which for him is Puerto Rico and not the U.S. Nevertheless there were other participants who didn’t agree with Margie and Armando on the issue of having only Puerto Rican citizenship. The following is an interesting discussion between two participants responding to Margie and Armando’s ideas and to the question regarding the opportunity to select their citizenship.

**Researcher:** “OK, ¿y si tu pudieras escoger, que escogerías?” (“If you could choose, what would you choose?”)

**Indistinctive voices:** “Puertorriqueño.” (“Puerto Rican”)

**Researcher:** “¿O sea una ciudadanía puertorriqueña?” (“You mean, a Puerto Rican citizenship?”)

**Jenny:** “¿Pero no se podría una puertorriqueña/estadounidense?” (“But couldn’t it be a Puerto Rican/United Statian one?”)

**Researcher:** “Pero OK, ¿Por qué tú quisieras tener una ciudadanía puertorriqueña estadounidense?” (“But Ok, Why would you like to have a Puerto Rican/United Statian citizenship?”)

**Jenny:** “Es que no se como decirlo, es como que uno se siente puertorriqueño pero también E.U. nos esta ayudando un montón.” (“I don’t know how to say it, it is like, one feels Puerto Rican but also U.S. is helping us a lot.”)
Researcher: “¿Y entonces por eso tu entiendes que podríamos tener una combinación de una ciudadanía puertorriqueña/estadounidense?” (“And this is why you understand that we could have a combination of a Puerto Rican/United Statian citizenship?”)

Yolanda: “Yo pienso que, o sea como dice Jenny, que podría ser también de las dos, porque las personas quieren ser parte de E.U. prácticamente por el interés.” (“I think that like Jenny, that it (the document) could have both citizenships, because people want to be part of the U.S. just because of the interest.”)

Researcher: ¿El interés de qué? (“Interest in what?”)

Yolanda: “Material y económico. Pero que, o sea también esta lo de puertorriqueño porque es por sentimiento, son dos cosas muy diferentes.” (“In the material things and the economics. But there is also the Puerto Rican citizenship because that has to do with our feelings; these are two very different things.”)

Researcher: “O sea que tu divides entonces el sentimiento del orgullo de ser Puertorriqueño con… ¿con qué?” (“So, you divide the feeling and the pride of being Puerto Rican…with what?”)

Yolanda: “Es como un interés o beneficio económico.” (“It is like an interest or economic benefit.”)

Researcher: ¿Alguien tiene algo más que añadir a eso? (“Anyone has anything to add to that?”)

Armando: “Yo encuentro que mucha gente quiere seguir con esto de la ciudadanía estadounidense porque le han metido miedo de que si no
This interesting interaction among the participants and the researcher shows the diversity of opinions toward the citizenship issue. Some participants, like Jenny, feel that having or accepting U.S. citizenship is a way of showing loyalty to this country since she feels that the U.S. helps us a lot financially, stating that one of the benefits of U.S. citizenship is that it brings money, clothing, and food to Puerto Rico. As I challenged this opinion, since it sounded as if these basic needs were automatically fulfilled, she accepted that basic needs such as clothing and food are imported by P.R. and are available for purchase. Jenny’s statements indicate her colonized mentality in which she views the U.S. as the benefactor upon whom she depends and to whom she owes gratitude for all of the economic benefits this country provides. Interestingly, this colonial mentality does not let her see the great profits that the U.S. gains through all of its business and corporations established in Puerto Rico. Yolanda on the other hand, sees this loyalty as a purely economic interest, which marks a clear distinction between U.S. citizenship and Puerto Rican citizenship. They emphasized the idea of citizenship based on the sentiments they feel for what they see as their homeland versus the citizenship that brings economic benefits which have nothing to do with feelings. None of the participants
claimed to feel United Statian and seemed to accept U.S. citizenship merely as a commodity.

As Armando listened to this discussion, he reacted with a description for what he believed is the need to have U.S. citizenship. Armando stated that many Puerto Ricans want to retain U.S. citizenship out of fear of being affected economically. This concurs with what Barreto (2001) has stated about how Puerto Ricans have always linked the federal infusion of financial aid to the island with a stable economy, which has also caused reticence concerning any move towards independence. The colonial mentality is demonstrated in Armando’s statement about how people in Puerto Rico feel economic dependency toward their benefactor, which in turn implies that Puerto Ricans can not make it on their own without U.S. support.

This statement instigated a long discussion among the participants regarding Puerto Rican political status. Many participants acknowledged that they fear independence because they are uncertain that people in Puerto Rico are prepared to work hard for their country since there are a large percentage of the population who are supported by federal social aid. They claim that the only way Puerto Rico could successfully become independent would be if everyone joins their efforts and collectively shoulders the burden. They don’t believe this is possible, since too many people have become used to depending upon federally funded programs like welfare, food stamps, and social security. Interestingly, none of the participants’ families receive federal funds with the exception of one participant who claimed her mother had received food stamps for a limited time following a divorce.
Carmen and Yolanda suggested other reasons for Puerto Ricans to reject or fear independence. According to Carmen, the examples of independent islands nearby in the Caribbean are not helpful since they are not in good economic shape, mentioning the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba as examples of nation islands that many Puerto Ricans see as negative examples of what the future of an independent Puerto Rico could be. Once these examples were presented, Armando jumped into the discussion, tried to give examples of other islands that are successful and mentioned Singapore. Nonetheless, he acknowledged that this particular island is very far away compared to the other islands in the Caribbean, which are the ones with whom Puerto Ricans tend to compare themselves. Yolanda finally concluded the discussion, making an impressive observation by stating the following:

**Yolanda:** “Lo que pasa es que todo el mundo tiene miedo de experimentar cosas que nunca hemos experimentado porque nosotros nunca hemos sido libres.” (“What happens is that everybody is afraid of experimenting things that we have never experienced before because we have never been free.”)

It is very interesting to observe how a simple story on citizenship has triggered such a deep and insightful discussion about the Puerto Rican political context and once again shows how aware these participants appear to be concerning the political and economic situation of Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, the colonial educational system, partnered with the colonial infrastructure for mainstreaming the ELT program, with didactic material emanating from the U.S., and carrying its dominant culture ideology, rarely allows teachers and students in Puerto Rico to have rich and critical discussions like this in their English classrooms. It is time to give Puerto Rican teachers and students the opportunity
to learn to read this didactic material critically and to challenge the dominant culture ideology ingrained within these materials.

This discussion also demonstrates the constraints caused by our colonial status and how these participants are so aware of this dilemma. Most of them finally concluded that they would prefer to have two citizenships. They claimed that if Puerto Rico already has a political and economical relationship with the U.S., that Puerto Rican nationality should be acknowledged by issuing Puerto Rican citizenship together with U.S. citizenship in a document similar to the passport. However they would stipulate positioning reference to the U.S. on this document before Puerto Rico’s since they would not like to send the message that Puerto Ricans are rejecting U.S. citizenship by placing it in a secondary position. Moreover, most participants accepted the U.S. colonial power over the island by stating that they would not want to eliminate U.S. citizenship even though they do not feel United Statian, because they are aware of the benefits this citizenship may bring to them. Among these benefits mentioned were the ability to travel to the U.S. and move around the world, the possibility to study in the U.S. without a visa, and the economic benefits to which this citizenship entitles them, the federal aid programs previously mentioned as well as all the products imported from the U.S. As we can observe, the participants are exhibiting the colonial dilemma of being loyal to a powerful country for its economic benefits by accepting its citizenship while demanding some kind of acknowledgement of their nationality with a documented Puerto Rican citizenship.

This ambivalence between two citizenships could also be the legacy of what happened in the 1950’s when Muñoz Marín, the first Puerto Rican governor, was elected and managed to convince many Puerto Ricans of one of the greatest political contradictions by
declaring Puerto Rico a true nation without sovereignty and alleging that we were culturally Puerto Rican and politically United Statian. Muñoz Marín believed that there was no contradiction with this statement and the reality that we could not be culturally Puerto Rican and United Statian at the same time (Duany, 2002). The participants are making this distinction when they claim that they would like to have a documented Puerto Rican citizenship, which could reflect cultural and national identity, and the way they feel as Puerto Ricans, while having what they call a legal political document indicating their relationship with the U.S. This is the way they propose to negotiate their cultural and national identity as citizens of a colony. This argument is also compatible with what Barreto (2001) states in his book, The Politics of Language in Puerto Rico, “Puerto Rico’s heart and soul may speak in Spanish, but the Puerto Rican wallet is filled with greenbacks emblazoned with English” (p. 29).

Ironically, after this research ended a certificate of a Puerto Rican citizenship was issued by the Puerto Rican government for the first time in national history. This certificate finally came about after a prominent advocate for Puerto Rico’s independence, and political figure, Juan Mari Bras, fought many years for it in local courts. However, according to the local government, this document is not valid for traveling as is the U.S. passport, implying that it is just a symbolic document representing the Puerto Rican nationality and acknowledging citizenship at the local level, but without any international currency. Therefore, this new Puerto Rican citizenship certificate is not even considered as a valid legal document by the federal government (Arroyo-Colon, 2007 El nuevodia.com).
Gloria Estefan

*Gloria Estefan* by Sue Boulais is the final story about a Latina appearing in the English textbook. It is a biography with actual photographs of the Cuban singer, *Gloria Estéfan*, an artist famous within the Latino community in the United States and beyond. The biography begins by describing the difficult political situation *Gloria* experienced in Cuba, which forced her family to immigrate to the U.S., where she became rich and famous after she learned how to speak English at school. The text simplifies the complicated relationship Cuba had with the U.S., historically and continuing today, by stating the following:

“In 1959 a war began in Cuba and many Cubans fled to the United States for safety. These people were called refugees…He (Gloria Estefan’s father) went back to Cuba to fight against Castro, who had taken control of the government.”

(Houghton Mifflin- Reading 2001 p.561)

“The U.S. government tried to help get the prisoners back to the United States…Life in the United States wasn’t easy for the family. The Fajardo’s spoke only Spanish. Many Americans didn’t want Cuban refugees badly. But Gloria was determined to succeed. At school she quickly learned English and caught up with the other children.” (Houghton Mifflin- Reading 2001: 562)

The war in Cuba is portrayed here as an event that didn’t have anything to do with the U.S. According to the text, the U.S. tried to help Cuban prisoners and no mention is made of how the States tried to invade Cuba through *Bahía de Cochinos*, with the help of certain Cuban refugees who had economic interests in Cuba. While still a colony of Spain, Cuba had become commercially dependent on the United States, and this dependency increased after Cuba obtained its independence from Spain (Perez-Stable, 1999). The message in the story seems to indicate that the U.S. never had any role in this war. Once again, the story in
the textbook is a shorter version of an original multi-chapter book and many details were omitted. Although the longer version describes in more detail the hardships Gloria Estéfan endured in her life prior to becoming famous, Carmen, the participant who read the book, still thought that the story was an idealized biography of a Latina in the U.S. and this is what she had to say about the story:

Researcher: “¿Cual es finalmente a la conclusión que tú llegas cuando tú lees este cuento en términos de ella como latina en E.U.? ” (“What is the final conclusion you come to when you read this story in terms of her being a Latina in the U.S.?”)

Carmen: “Pues que ella tuvo que pasar por mucho rechazo y que tuvo que luchar mucho para estudiar y que…la familia que tenia tantos hermanos y con sus papas enfermos y no tenia mucho dinero, pero pues no creo que hayan dicho su historia bien porque no dijeron de que era la guerra y por que se tuvieron que ir” (“Well, that she (Gloria) had to go through a lot of rejection and had to struggle a lot in order to study…and that the family had a lot of brothers and sisters and sick parents, and without much money. But I don’t think the author tells the story well since it didn’t tell why a war was going on and why they had to leave.”)

Carmen: “Pues ella fue como el cuento de Cinderela pues ella se metió en una banda y pues ahí la descubrieron y la hicieron cantante principal y se hizo famosa.” (“So, she was like the Cinderella story, since she got into this band and then she was discovered there and she was made the lead singer and she became famous.”)
*Gloria Estefan* is a story that attempts to provide a Latino role model for young readers, as stated on the back cover of the book. However, the author tries to do this by idealizing the real life of the main character as if she were a heroine. Carmen’s response is that she is not buying this idealized image of the Latina’s life in the U.S. as she makes an intertextual connection between Estefan’s biography and Cinderella’s perfect happy-ever-after story.

Gloria Estefan’s biographical story indicates once again the stereotypical U.S. society where by merely learning the English language, the future of the Hispanics in this country is ensured. However no content supports the conservation of one’s native language and the benefits of being bilingual. As a matter or fact, *Gloria Estefan* was able through music to reach a broader multicultural audience inclusive of both Anglo and Hispanic cultures due to her bilingual skills. Yet this significant fact is not highlighted in the story. Learning the English language certainly is advantageous for anyone in the U.S. who desires opportunity in the job market, and some Latinos have been very successful in the U.S. Curiously, we usually know about successful Latinos in the world of popular culture where the life experiences of singers, actors, and athletes are highlighted by the media. Latinos’ success in other areas like medicine, academia, or the business field is not as commonly known or subject matter for the media. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of prejudice taking place in the U.S. today. Even though Latinos have learned English or have become bilingual, they can still be discriminated against in the workplace due to their ethnicity, their racial background, or their social class. This is even more significant today after the immigrants’ tenuous position in the U.S. has been highlighted in the news due to discussion in Congress about the new efforts to reform immigrant law. Walsh (1991) describes the harsh reality of the U.S. attitude towards bilingualism:
“The United States is one of the more parochial and paranoid nations in this regard, for here, while the English language is exalted, other languages are thought to be divisive, detrimental, and unpatriotic. Bilingualism is equated with minority status and with an inability or unwillingness to assimilate to the dominant norm; the possibility that English could co-exist along side other mother tongues is disregarded.” (Walsh, p.99-100)

The exclusion of material crucial to Gloria Estefan’s success succinctly highlights just how serious an issue discrimination in U. S. society can be and portrays a fixed idea of the U.S. as a country of opportunities, which is perpetuated once again through this story. Even when the text describes the difficulties the family had in the States, this is summarized in the brief sentence, “Life in the United Sates wasn’t easy for the family”, (Houghton Mifflin- Reading, 2001: 562); the remainder of the story is dedicated to describing the great success of this artist. There is nothing wrong with writing stories that could provide good role models for Latino children, but these stories must be more accurate and in tune with the reality of the many Latino cultures located within the U.S., and must provide a wider perspective of more complex life experiences.

The remaining stories to be discussed did not appear in the English textbook, but were included in the research in order to provide a broader perspective of children’s literature and to provide Puerto Rican characters, since very few were found in the textbook. The stories were written by both Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican authors, which expanded the possibility for diversity of views about Puerto Rico and its people even further.
Mami Amor’s Little Stories
Vejigante Masquerader
The Red Comb
Creativity

*Mami Amor’s Little Stories* by Rebecca Padilla is a colorful book about a grandma’s life in Puerto Rico and her journey to the U.S. in order to find employment and rise out of poverty. The author worked with Felix Padilla, the Puerto Rican editor of an independent publishing company called *Libros*, and whom I met when he was selling his books at a conference in 2004. The illustrations in the book are by his daughter, Star Padilla, a young Puerto Rican artist residing in Chicago. The illustrations are made in what I consider an unconventional style with plenty of vivid colors and symbolisms with the overall effect of busyness. Padilla states in the blurb on the back cover of the book that one of the objectives for publishing these stories was to encourage cultural literacy. His independent publishing company proposes to do this by exposing children to the rich cultural background of Latin American and Caribbean people and their varied experiences. The story is written in English but integrates some Spanish words throughout the text, which are then instantly translated into English.

Rolando was the participant who read this story, and he began his discussion by telling us that he was glad to see a story written in the U.S. about Puerto Rico showing how the life was for some Puerto Rican people in the old times. He claimed that he was surprised to see a story about Puerto Rico written in English, which implies that he hadn’t been exposed to
stories like these within the curriculum for his English class. This is what he said concerning this circumstance:

Rolando: “Mayormente los cuentos que tenemos de ingles es basado a la visión norteamericana, de su punto de vista de cómo es su lugar.”

(“Usually the stories we have in the English class are based on the North American view, their perspective of how their place is.”)

Rolando claims that most of the stories he has read in the context of the English class have a U.S. perspective. Rolando happens to be the participant who initially stated in the pilot study that our colonial situation affected the kinds of books he had to read in school, since, according to him, they mostly come from the U.S. and carried the U.S. cultural perspective with them. When Rolando was asked how he viewed the images of the Puerto Rican characters depicted in the story, he expressed some racial concerns about them; according to Rolando, all of the characters seemed to look like Africans. Rolando is a white boy with straight golden/light brown hair. When asked whether there are people in Puerto Rico of African origin, he admitted that there are. Jenny spoke up and identified herself as an individual with an African heritage as evidence of the fact that people of African origin reside on the island. Jenny’s interruption prompted Rolando to give the following explanation for his observation in the story:

Rolando: “Hay gente que si se parece, pero mayormente son del mismo tipo de persona. En P.R. hay muchas variedades.Esta el trigueño, esta el negro, esta el blanco, esta el amarillento. Y nada mas lo que demuestran ahí son el trigueño y el negro. O sea puede ser que demuestren algunos blancos pero con partes de africano y eso es algo interesante pero, no ponen a la persona blanca así en general.” (“There
are people who do look Puerto Rican, but they are all of the same kind of people. In Puerto Rico we have a great variety of people. There are the light brown people, the black people, and the yellowish kind. And they only show the light brown and the black people. They may show some white people but with African characteristics, and that is interesting but they don’t include the white people in general.”

It is quite interesting to observe how Rolando expressed what he saw in the story as a generalization of the kind of racial profile representing Puerto Rico. As a white boy, he didn’t see himself represented in the story, which made him conclude that the story was not representative of the diversity of races in Puerto Rico. He seemed to imply that the story was stereotyping the Puerto Rican population as mainly African when he doesn’t consider himself to be of African origin. Yet, he didn’t say anything when the story Yagua Days was displayed and all the characters in it appeared white with no representation of black people, even though he acknowledged that there are people of African origin in P.R. The publisher of this book, Mr. Padilla, is a man with African origins, and he has stated clearly that the objective for the books is to introduce children in the U.S. to different cultures and celebrate differences. Interestingly, when this book was read by a white Puerto Rican boy from the island, his interpretation of the images in it become racially oriented and he failed to see what the illustrator was attempting to do. Rolando didn’t comment about the fact that the author is Puerto Rican; perhaps he would have reacted differently if the author had been from the U.S.

It is important to point out that the racial issue was also brought up by many participants in regards to other stories such as The Red Comb, Vejigante Masquerader, and Creativity. The first two mentioned are written by Puerto Rican authors, while the third is written by
a U.S. author. The participants mostly agree that the images presented in these stories were quite accurate in terms of presenting characters that look like what they understand to be the Puerto Rican people. By accurate they meant that Puerto Ricans for the most part looked a little darker than the U.S. people for example, due to the mixture of ethnicities among the Spanish, the Taíno, and the African. While they accepted the fact that there is an African heritage present in Puerto Rican population, whenever this African influence was represented in isolation and most characters in a story appeared to be of African origin, they noticed it immediately and made comments on any African characteristics observed in the illustrations.

Similar racial issues were brought into the discussion concerning The Red Comb by Fernando Picón. The story is historical fiction about the life of a runaway girl slave in the context of 19th century Puerto Rico and how she was aided by other free black people in the community. The book was written by a well-known Puerto Rican author and published in Spanish for the Puerto Rican market. An English version translated from the Spanish original story was used for this study. The beautiful, colorful illustrations are created by María Antonia Ordóñez, a Cuban/Puerto Rican artist. When Joan, the participant who read The Red Comb, was asked about the characters in it, she plainly replied that they were all black. The following is the interaction that emerged about race in the discussion of this story:

Researcher: “¿Y las personas que hay en este cuento como las ves?”

(“And the people who are in this story, how do you see them?”)

Joan: “Negras.” (“Black”)

Carmen: “De color oscuro.” (“Of a dark color”)
Researcher: “Negros. ¿Y a que creen ustedes que se debe eso?”
(“Blacks. And why do you think that is?”)

Joan: “A que los esclavos se mezclaban con los españoles.”
(“Because blacks mixed themselves up with the Spaniards.”)

Researcher: “¿Hay algún personaje aquí que ustedes entiende que es mestizo?”
(“Is there any character in here that you may see as mixed?”)

Joan: “El Pedro Calderón y la nena.”
(“Pedro Calderón and the girl.”)

Researcher: ¿Vitita? Vamos a ver a Vitita. OK, Pedro Calderón. ¿Como ustedes saben que el es mestizo?”
(“Vitita? Let’s see Vitita. OK, Pedro Calderón. How do you know he is mixed?”)

Carmen: “Tiene la nariz ancha, pero el color no es negro ni es blanco.”
(“He has a wide nose, but his color is not black or white.”)

Reseracher: “¿Y la nariz ancha viene de donde?”
(“And the wide nose, where does it come from?”)

Carmen: “De África.”
(“From Africa.”)

Margie: “De los negros.”
(“From the Blacks.”)

Researcher: “De la herencia africana. Miren aquí esta Vitita. ¿Les parece que es mestiza?”
(“From the African heritage. Look, here is Vitita. Does she look mixed?”)

Some voices all at once: “¡Si!”
(“Yes!”)

Researcher: “¿Por que? ¿Que características tu ves en Vitita que es mestiza?”
(“Why? Which characteristics do you see in Vitita that makes her mixed?”)
Yolanda: “El pelo que parece malo.” (“The hair that looks like the bad hair”)

Researcher: “¿Malo?” (“Bad?”)

Yolanda: “O sea bien rizo.” (“I mean, very curly.”)

Researcher: “¿Qué es pelo malo?” (“What is bad hair?”)

Carmen: “El que se cae.” (“The kind that falls.”)

Yolanda: “El que no se moja.” (“The kind that doesn’t get wet.”)

This storybook showed primarily black characters as it was set during the slavery times, but the story also included some people of mixed ethnicity as well. It appeared that Joan couldn’t see this until she was encouraged to look closer. She even gave an incomprehensible interpretation to the question on why she thought the characters were black when she responded that the slaves were mixed with the Spaniards. This interpretation implies that black people and slaves were the same people. It is possible that she was trying to resist the representation of Puerto Ricans characters generally as slaves. Mestizos are the peoples who share mixed ethnicity with the Spanish, and this is why they are named this way. Perhaps the mention of the Spaniards in her interpretation was an attempt to acknowledge the presence of the whites in order to balance the black slave generalization she seemed to see portrayed in the story.

The participants use certain stereotypical words to describe what they understand to be the physical characteristics of African people such as wide nose, bad hair, etc. Joan finally accepted that in Puerto Rico all are mixed, since even within the group of participants, we had white individuals with curly hair as well as dark skinned people with straight hair. Joan herself was a light brown girl with straight thin hair.
A similar situation occurred during the discussion of *Vejigantes Mascharader*. This story was written and beautifully illustrated by Lulu de Lacre, a Puerto Rican author who lives in the States. Margie, who is white and has long straight dark blonde hair, read this story, commenting that the houses and the scenery in the book looked very much like Puerto Rico, since the architecture and the windows are the same she was used to seeing in the houses on the island. However, when asked about Ramón, the main character in the story, this is what she responded:

**Researcher:** “¿El niño Ramón te parece puertorriqueño?” (“The boy Ramón, does he look Puerto Rican to you?”)

**Margie:** “Sí, pero el pelito es más bien africano.” (“Yes, but his hair is more like the African’s hair.”)

**Researcher:** “Miren a Ramón. ¿Qué les dice a ustedes esta lamina? Fíjense en esta familia.” (“Look at Ramón. What does this picture tell you? Observe this family.”)

**Margie:** “Que es de descendencia Africana.” (“That they are of African origin.”)

**Researcher:** “¿Cómo tú lo sabes?” (“How do you know that?”)

**Margie:** “Mezcla porque…Bueno, la hermanita es…tiene el pelo mas claro y es más clarita si te fijas, pero bueno el pelo y el color de la piel y las facciones de la cara. Mira la portada. Se ve super Africano.” (“Mixed because…Well the little sister is…has a lighter hair and she is lighter if you look at her carefully, but well the hair, the skin color, the features in the face. Look at the book cover. He looks super African.”)
Researcher: “¿Qué tú ves de Africano por ejemplo?” (“What do you see as African for example?”)

Margie: “La nariz, los labios, el pelo, el color de la piel” (“The nose, the hair, the skin color.”)

Researcher: “¿El pelo? ¿Pero, parece un niño puertorriqueño?” (“The hair? But does he look like a Puerto Rican boy?”)

Margie: “Sí, mestizo.” (“Yes, mixed.”)

Once again, we notice how different participants used similar stereotypical words to describe what they saw as African characteristics. Margie acknowledged that the boy looked Puerto Rican, yet she immediately commented on his hair, which she thought looked like African hair, as if this characteristic would not make the boy Puerto Rican anymore.

On the other hand, something very ironic happened when we discussed the story Creativity by John Steptoe and illustrated by E.B. Lewis. The story concerns a young Puerto Rican boy who recently relocated to the U.S. and about his transition process of facing a new culture, a new school and getting to know new friends. When asked who could recognize the Puerto Rican boy in one of the pictures where he is in the classroom with other students, Yolanda responded abruptly the following:

Researcher: “Vamos a ver si ustedes aquí reconocen quien puede ser el niño puertorriqueño.” (“Let’s see if you can identify who the Puerto Rican boy could be in here.”)

Yolanda: “El negro ese que está ahí” (“The black one over there.”) (using a derogatory tone of voice)

(Indistinctive voices laughing at Yolanda’s answer)
Researcher: “Vamos a ver entonces otra lámina. Bueno ya le vieron la camiseta ya saben quien es. Vamos a verlo aquí. Mírenlo aquí.” (“Let’s see another picture. Well, you already saw his shirt and you know who he is. Let’s see him here. Look over here.”)

Yolanda: “Parece puertorriqueño.” (“He looks Puerto Rican.”) (whispering as if she wasn’t sure of her answer)


Indistinctive voices murmuring: “Sí parece…esta muy…” (“Yes he looks like…it is very…”)

Carmen: “Digo en P.R. hay negros africanos así pero…” (“I mean there are black Africans in P.R. like that but…”)

Researcher: “¿En P.R. hay negros?” (“Are there black people in P.R.?”)

Indistinctive voices all at once: “Sí.” (“Yes”)

Yolanda, the participant who so abruptly responded, using what can be interpreted as a derogatory tone of voice, is actually a black girl herself with very curly hair. Carmen made a comment that implies her doubts about there being so many black people in Puerto Rico. Carmen is a mestiza dark skin girl with thick wavy hair. It had been predicted that these participants would actually feel good that their African heritage would be represented in the stories, yet this was not the case. It apparently didn’t matter whether the participant was black or white; they all seemed to use the same stereotypical words to describe people of African origin.

Racial issues were not elicited by other stories like Yagua Days written by a Puerto Rican author where the characters were depicted with a more European-Spanish look.
characterized by lighter skin tone and straight or wavy hair. Participants didn’t seem to mind when Puerto Rican characters were represented as white, but had something to say when Puerto Ricans were represented as people with African origins. This subtle prejudice and ambivalence in relation to Puerto Rican racial profiling may well have its origins in the colonial past. According to Duanny (2002), one of the first misconceptions created around Puerto Rican identity was the ethnic heritage myth. The traditional concept of Spanish, Taino, and African racial integration really served the purpose of creating a, “physical and cultural homogenization of the Puerto Rican population, based on an ideology of mestizaje (racial mixture).” (Duanny, 2002: 25) Population homogenization served different purposes for various groups of people both in Puerto Rico and the U.S. On the island, it was very convenient to think of ourselves as simply Puerto Ricans, since this label could negate any trace of African or Aboriginal heritage which were consistently less valued than the white European roots due to racial ideologies introduced to the island first by Spaniards then later by United Statians. Moreover, this homogenization was officially validated in the 1950s by the commonwealth government when the image of el jíbaro (a white male peasant) became an icon to represent the essence of the Puerto Rican nationhood, ignoring other sectors of the population like blacks, mulattoes, women, gays and lesbians (Duany, 2002). This white, male, and mostly European image was also in sync with U.S. interests in the island. Since the ideology of the Anglo-Saxon supremacy was already developed in the United States by then, the European-origin image made Puerto Ricans appear more “assimilable” to the predominantly white civilization (Duany, 2002). In contemporary Puerto Rico there is not such a clearly delineated racial classification matrix defining
black and white as occurs in the U.S. Puerto Ricans recognize that they are a multiracial people and as such they identify three racial classifications, black, white, and brown, instead of the white/black antithesis prevalent in the U.S. In Puerto Rico social class is a determinate and black or brown people can pass as white depending upon their social class (Duany, 2002). Moreover according to Frau-Ramos (2006), a Puerto Rican professor from Amherst Massachusetts, a great difference in racial ideologies between Puerto Ricans and United Statians exists today. For United Statians “one speck of blackness makes you non-white or black”, while the reverse is true for Puerto Ricans when, “one speck or bit of white blood in your body makes you white” (Frau-Ramos, 2006). These factors could probably explain why 80% of Puerto Ricans identified their racial identity as white in the 2000 census (Duany, 2002).

It is probable that the participants’ efforts to homogenize race by trying, on the one hand to minimize African origins, while accepting without pretext on the other the mostly white Spanish heritage in the stories, are indicative of the colonial legacy that created a national racial inferiority complex. It appears as if the research participants intended to whiten their Puerto Rican Latino ethnicity by implying that the number of Puerto Ricans with African origins was very small in comparison to the rest of the population, which they define as mostly white. According to Duany (2002) “the whitening of the Puerto Rican population is hardly due to the absence of racial prejudice but rather to its very presence; many people prefer to identify as white to avoid racial stigmatization” (p.249). The reality is that Puerto Rican population is very diverse with black, white and mixed races all together in a nation characterized by a wide variety of color shades and skin
tones. In other words, Puerto Rican ethnicity is both racially diverse and doubtfully 80% white.

Puerto Rican authors like Padilla, Picón and de Lacre are possibly attempting to bring the African origins out of hiding by depicting most of the Puerto Rican characters in their stories as people with African origins and openly discussing the history of slavery in Puerto Rico as Picón does. Certainly there should be more picture book stories available depicting the rich diversity of people that really inhabits Puerto Rico today. Meanwhile, stories like *Mami Amor’s Little Stories*, *The Red Comb*, and *Vejigante Masquerader* should be discussed critically and could be vehicles to bring the racial issue into the discourse. As a consequence of this interesting discussion and due to the ambivalent and contradictory responses related to race elicited within this study, it is proposed that Puerto Rican children need to discuss racial issues more than ever. Race does matter in literature and children must be made aware of how, “authors and illustrators use race to convey meaning,” Hade (1997) so they can learn how to critically read constructions and representations of race.

In addition to the racial concerns Rolando mentioned in relation to *Mami Amor’s Little Stories*, he also noticed the words written in Spanish in this story. He thought this practice was a good idea because it could teach some Spanish words to the U.S. children reading the text, and some other participants agreed with him. However, Carmen openly disagreed by stating that while this practice could be good for U.S. children it would not be for Latino children, since she believed that the mixture of languages could be confusing for them. Throughout this research Carmen has always advocated for the Spanish language conservation and stated very distinctly that Spanish is a significant part
of the Puerto Rican culture and that as such anyone who wants to be considered Puerto Rican should speak Spanish regardless of where they live. Carmen appeared to be protecting the Spanish language from being mixed with the English language when she states the following:

**Researcher:** “¿A ti no te gusta que la gente mezcle el inglés con el español? ¿Qué te parece eso?” (“You don’t like that people mix English with Spanish? What do you think about it?”)

**Carmen:** “Así como hablando normal pues no me molesta pero para escribir o algo serio, no es que me moleste, pero no me gusta.” (“When people normally speak in two languages it doesn’t bother me but if they have to write or if they have to speak in a formal setting, I don’t like it if they mix the languages.”)

**Researcher:** “¿Te parece correcto o incorrecto?” (“Is it correct or incorrect for you?”)

**Carmen:** “A mi, yo siempre he pensado que o es español o es inglés pero no que los mezclen.” (“I have always thought that if we are speaking Spanish, then it should be just Spanish and if it’s English, then just English, but not mixing both languages.”)

Interestingly, the influence of the U.S. in Puerto Rico has affected the way Spanish is spoken. It is very common for Puerto Ricans, particularly those in the metropolitan area, to intermix English and Spanish words during speech, (and this practice is commonly accepted by the majority of people on the island). This mixture of languages is also accepted in the business media as can be observed on billboards and store names throughout P.R. which use both languages at the same time in their signage.
Nevertheless, this fusion of both languages has not been observed as often or as commonly in formal writing such as published print as seems to be the case in the United States. Puerto Ricans may choose to not mix both languages in formal writing as a way to express resistance to the strong U.S. assimilation process that assails daily through exposure to the English media. On the mainland United States, the language issue for the Puerto Ricans takes on a different perspective according to Flores (1993) who states that writing in English or in a bilingual form doesn’t necessarily make Puerto Ricans assimilated. Writing with a mixture of two languages could indicate a type of resistance towards the oppressive dominant culture of the U.S. since Puerto Ricans would be violating all the rules of the proper use of Standard English language with this form of writing and it would be a way of making a statement against this traditional view of monolingualistic practices. Flores alleges that, “both material and ideological influences that are counteractive to smooth language shift; Puerto Rican bilingualism seems to resist both political forces and scientific readings that indicate assimilation” (1993, p. 166).

For Carmen, mainland Puerto Rican bilingualism could be a sign of assimilation, yet other participants have already accepted that being or feeling Puerto Rican cannot be determined exclusively by the Spanish language. However, the opposition to accept bilingual writing forms in Puerto Rico could also have other reasons. U.S. made textbooks used in Puerto Rico define correct language usage and do not present the bilingual forms Flores mentions above, which could also influence students’ attitudes towards the use of language. The message indirectly and unintentionally conveyed to students through these textbooks could be that they should only value “standard U.S. English” which implies once again that Spanish is not as valued, although many millions
of Latinos use it in the U.S. every day. Perhaps Puerto Rican students should be exposed to more children’s literature written by mainland Puerto Ricans in order to introduce them to other kinds of language expressions in which Spanish and English are mixed, so they could learn to validate the other ways of communication that many fellow mainland Puerto Ricans use every day in the U.S.

During the discussion of stories like *Creativity* and *Mami Amor’s Little Stories*, many participants claimed that they have never seen the issues of Puerto Ricans living in the States represented in the English textbooks they have used before. They have observed very few stories about other Latino groups, but not about Puerto Ricans particularly. When they were asked what they thought about this deficit, Carmen offered a possible explanation with the following response:

**Researcher:** “¿A que ustedes creen que se debe que esta temática no se trabaje en los textos de Ingles de P.R.?” (”What do you think is the reason for not bringing this theme (the Puerto Ricans living in the States) to the English textbooks in P.R.?”)

**Carmen:** “Pues porque eso habla mal de los mismos Americanos.”

(“Well, because that talks bad about the Americans.”)

**Researcher:** “¿Tú crees? ¿En que sentido habla mal?” (“You think? In what sense does it talk bad about them?”)

**Carmen:** “Pues que están diciendo que al escribir esos libros están como generalizando. Yo lo veo como si estuvieran…si lo escriben como una crítica constructiva para mejorar y eso pues esta bien, pero hay gente que lo percibe como que están generalizando a todos los Americanos que son así como los del cuento. Y a lo mejor por eso es que
Carmen was implying that most of the stories dealing with Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. could depict a difficult picture of their lives in this country due to the discrimination against Latino groups, which could show a negative image of the U.S. She thought that if this reality were portrayed in books for the purpose of “constructive criticism” (which, according to her, should be taken as a benefit to improve this harsh reality), then it should be all right to include this topic in the stories. However, Carmen suspected that showing stories like these in textbooks could lead to generalizations or negative stereotypes about U.S. culture, which she assumed U.S. publishers wished to avoid. Although Carmen had been very critical of the U.S. in her arguments throughout this study, she showed in this response that negative stereotypes could be problematic regardless of which side they emanate from. She understands that for U.S. people to show their negative side in stories could be controversial, just as it is controversial for the minority groups to be stereotyped by the dominant culture. Nevertheless, she is also advocating for more opportunities for critical reading of these kinds of stories, which suggests that students can handle discussion of not-such-perfect realities, the likes of which are rarely portrayed in children’s books.
**Yagua Days**

*Yagua Days* is written by Cruz Martel, which is the pen name of a couple writing team Brent and Magalis Filson. Magalis was born in Puerto Rico and moved to the U.S. when she was seven years old. Ed Martinez, an Argentinean born artist residing in the U.S., illustrated the book with images made in vivid and realistic oil colors. The story describes the visit of a young Puerto Rican boy from New York to the island for the first time. It particularly highlights the excitement of sliding down a hill on a *yagua*, a unique activity practiced mainly in the countryside. The illustrations in this story depict colorful images of the countryside of Puerto Rico and its people. Universally the Puerto Rican characters in the story look like European Spanish people, which the participants did not seem to mind, in contrast to their reactions when Puerto Ricans with African origins were depicted. Although participants mostly agreed that the story portrayed a fairly accurate image of the Puerto Rican people, as the discussion progressed they noticed certain inaccuracies in the illustrations. For example, they mentioned that the oranges in the trees looked more like Florida oranges than Puerto Rican oranges which are more yellowish in color. The countryside appeared to some of them as more like *El Yunque*, the rain forest and preserved area on the island, than the highly populated countryside of contemporary Puerto Rico. They also commented on the picture of the boy sliding down a hill on a *yagua* (the big empty seed pod of the royal palm trees that looks like a sled) while wearing a bathing suit on a rainy day. Even when some of the participants admitted that they have never experienced sliding on a *yagua* they still claimed that it didn’t look reasonable to do such activity in a bathing suit due to the dangers of getting bruised and itchy from the skin contacting the grass. Others who had the experience don’t recall
doing it on a rainy day because they assumed it would be too muddy to do such an activity in the rain. I also have experienced sliding on a yagua, and do not recall doing it on a rainy day, but on a sunny day when the grass was very dry and slippery. At the end of the book are a couple of photographs of Puerto Rican children sliding on yaguas and none of the pictures presents the children in bathing suits or on a rainy day. When the participants were quizzed as to possible reasons for these inaccurate details in both pictures and the story content, the following interaction was part of their response:

Researcher: “Fíjense como ustedes han determinado una serie de detalles que harían de esta experiencia como que una no muy real como la están describiendo aquí. ¿A que ustedes creen que se debe eso?”

(“Notice how you have observed a series of details that make this experience look like not a very real one as it is described here. What do you think are the reasons for this?”)

Carmen: “A la autora.” (“Because of the author”)

Researcher: “La autora es puertorriqueña.” (“The author is Puerto Rican.”)

Carmen: “Pero si se fue a los siete años de aquí…” (“But if she left Puerto Rico when she was seven…”)

Margie: “Tal vez ella no se tiro mucho en yagua y le contaban.”

(“Maybe she didn’t really slide on a yagua much, but she was told about it.”)

Researcher: “¿Y entonces ella esta contando lo que le contaron?”

(“Then she was telling about something she has been told?”)

Ramón: “O tal vez eso es lo que se recuerda, y pues como que se confundió así los recuerdos como eso fue hace tanto tiempo. Y creyó que

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“era cuando llovía.” (“Or maybe that is what she remembers, and like she got
confused with the memories since it was so long ago. And she thought that this
was done on a rainy day.”)

Curiously, the participants blamed the author for what they critiqued as inaccurate detail,
but did not mention the illustrator. Apparently they took for granted that in the
communication between the author and the illustrator, the author determined exactly what
she wanted for the illustrations. In this particular instance the illustrators’ interpretations
were not considered by the participants except as mere replicas of the author’s vision.
Ramón seemed to justify the author’s alleged inaccurate descriptions with the lapsed time
factor as a possible reason for not correctly remembering her experience in P.R. Margie
justified the author’s inaccuracy with her theory that the experience was possibly an
incorrect interpretation of someone else’s account of this experience. Finally, the author’s
description of the yagua activity could have been her personal experience, but
geographically located in a particular area of the island which could be different from our
own experiences.

When reading children’s literature, perceptions of the possibility of inaccurate details as
described by Puerto Rican authors about their own people, are to be taken into
consideration. Perhaps, as Ramon states above, the author, who no longer resides on the
island still holds memories and a romantic view of a Puerto Rico that no longer exists.
Stories that focus mostly on a romantic traditional past may ignore the contemporary
Puerto Rico with all the complexities and challenges the island faces in these modern
colonial/postcolonial times. A romantic view of the past, in the context of the U.S. reader,
may also perpetuate the idea of a traditional Puerto Rico that no longer exists today.
Participants felt free to challenge the author’s accounts in this story as not being accurate.
It is noted that they are not taking the author’s words and illustrator’s images for granted; this is possible when students are given the opportunity to read critically. Through the lens of critical literacy, participants were capable of questioning possible romantic and traditional images of their immediate world which no longer resembles the one in the story.

**Sergio and the Hurricane**

*Sergio and the Hurricane* is written and illustrated by Alexandra Wallner, a U.S. based author who is also an experienced children’s artist. The illustrations in muted colors are neatly drawn scenes of daily life events and of preparations in anticipation of a hurricane. The story describes a young Puerto Rican boy, Sergio, and his first experience with a hurricane. Yolanda was the participant who read this story, and when asked how accurately she thought the hurricane experience was presented, she responded:

**Researcher: “¿Tu has pasado huracanes aquí en P.R.?” (“Have you experienced hurricanes in P.R.?“)**

**Yolanda: “Sí.” (“Yes.”)**

**Researcher: “¿Que te pareció este cuento que trata sobre un huracán que paso por P.R.? ¿Es como lo has visto tú o hay alguna diferencia?” (“What do you think about this story that is about a hurricane that hit P.R.? Is it like you have seen it or is there any difference?”)**
Yolanda: “Bueno…esta mas o menos representado como yo lo he visto. Pero la ultima…a lo ultimo que se bañan en…en la lluvia…” (“Well…it is more or less how I have seen it. But the last…at the end that they are bathing in…in the rain…”)

Researcher: “Vamos a ver esta lámina. ¿Qué paso con esta lámina?” (“Let’s see the picture. What happens in this picture?”) (Showing the picture in the book)

Yolanda: “¡Que se están bañando desnudos!” (“That they are taking a bath naked.”)

Researcher: “¿Eso ustedes lo han visto aquí en P.R.?” (“Have you seen this in P.R.”)

Voices all at once: “¡Noooool!”

The picture Yolanda described presents the entire Puerto Rican family including the mother, the father, Sergio and their dog bathing in the rain. All are naked, screened by some plantain trees, enjoying the rain following the hurricane’s passing (pages not numbered). Yolanda and other participants were very surprised by the picture, saying they had never observed such a scene in P.R. before. They scrutinized the picture carefully and then noticed other inaccurate details such as a towel on the dirty ground, which they thought did not make much sense since it was getting wet and dirty and would not be useful to dry yourself. When Yolanda was asked for her reaction when she saw it for the first time, she responded:

Researcher: “¿Qué tu pensaste Yolanda cuando tu viste esa ilustración?” (“What did you think when you saw that picture?”)
Yolanda: “¡Juuy! Al principio antes de leerlo, yo pensaba que habían salido indios ahí porque, primero que nada Sergio no parece puertorriqueño.” (Giggling) (“Wow! At the beginning before reading It, I thought that there were Indians in the story, because to begin with, Sergio doesn’t look Puerto Rican.”)

Researcher: “¿Por qué no?” (“Why not?”)

Yolanda: “Parece como que un Peruano que se yo. Por el pelo, y los ojos, y las facciones de la cara.” (“He looks like a Peruvian. I don’t know. Because of the hair, the eyes, and the facial features.”)

Researcher: “¿Que ustedes creen que los norteamericanos piensan cuando ven este cuento de P.R.?“ (“What do you think the North Americans think when they look at this story about P.R.?“)

Carmen: “Que todavía somos Taínos y que estamos como, no se medio atrasao.” (“That we are still Taínos [original aboriginal group on the island] and that we are way behind.”)

Yolanda clearly states that this picture makes Puerto Ricans appear primitive, not unlike the first aboriginal inhabitants of the island, Taínos. She didn’t even think that the young boy, Sergio looked Puerto Rican. Other participants thought the same and claimed that the boy looked Mexican, or Taino. They thought the boy’s hair was too straight, and dark, and that he had kind of slanted eyes. This is very interesting because there are Puerto Rican children who look similar to the boy in the story, although those resembling the boy might not be as common. This may be another attempt on the participants’ part to whiten the Puerto Rican image once again, since the character in question looks a little darker, which strays from the Spanish look participants seem to accept more readily.
We should question the author/illustrator’s purpose for portraying a Puerto Rican family in such a primitive manner in a story that otherwise appears to take place in modern times. It is possible this portrayal could be an example, not of the illustrator’s intention, but the publisher’s intention as Zipes (1993) has proposed when noting that Western publishers tend to perpetuate ideologies through signs/symbols (in this instance through images). Zipes suggests that authors are sometimes required to include such materials in stories, perhaps with the idea that the resulting publications could sell better to U.S. readers.

As the discussion of this story progressed, participants noticed more inaccurate details in the illustrations. They commented on the houses, which they thought looked Mexican due to the roof tiles. They laughed at the clothing on one character, which looked like what they thought of as typical tourist attire, claiming that a Hawaiian shirt and the kind of shorts this character was wearing better depicted the kind of clothing they had seen tourists wearing at the beach in P.R. and not the kind Puerto Ricans would often wear. This discussion prompted to question if they thought the author/illustrator had visited Puerto Rico.

**Researcher:** “*Ustedes creen que esta ilustradora ha venido a P.R.*” (‘Do you think this illustrator has come to Puerto Rico?’)

**Voices all at once:** “*Noooo.*”

**Yolanda:** “*A lo mejor vino pero hace tieeeeeempo. Aunque para mi que no porque las casas no parecen de Puerto Rico.*” (‘Maybe she came but a loooong time ago. Although I don’t think so, because the houses do not look like Puerto Rican homes.’)
Jenny: “Tal vez vino, pero no conoció la cultura.” (“Maybe she came but did not get to know the culture.”)

The participants appeared to understand that the author/illustrator of this story, who is United Statian, portrayed mostly a tourist’s view of the island. Jenny very clearly stated that maybe she did visit the island but did not have time to get to know the culture or look around carefully to be able to create more accurate pictures of the Puerto Rico Jenny knows. It is also possible the author/illustrator in this case held a stereotypical notion of an island based on the island state of Hawaii, which would be the closest example of an island within the U.S. territory. This same issue of the author’s misconceptions of the Puerto Rican reality again surfaced within the discussion of the story Juan Bobo.

Juan Bobo and The Horse of Seven Colors is a Puerto Rican legend retold by Jan Mike and illustrated by Charles Reasoner. This story tells about the Puerto Rican folkloric character, Juan Bobo, who as the story described him was a simpleton, and of his adventures during the time of the colonization when the Spaniards were in charge of the island. Jenny, the participant who read this story, identified the setting as the colonial times when the Spaniards were on the island. Jenny also described Juan Bobo and stated that she could tell he was a jíbaro (peasant) because he looked mixed and because of his clothes and hat. The issue of accuracy in the images was again addressed. Jenny claimed that the houses looked more like Mexican houses with tiles on the roof and concrete walls, stating that most houses for the poor people in Puerto Rico in Spanish colonization times were made out of wood. Since Juan Bobo represented a poor peasant, the participants thought that he would certainly not have lived in a concrete home. Many other participants theorized that the people in the story look Spanish or Mexican, which prompted Carmen and Jenny to make the following statements:
Researcher: “Aquí dice que fue ilustrado por Charles Risoner”. (“Here it says that it was illustrated by Charles Risoner.”)

Jenny: “Y es un apersona Americana que obviamente no ha venido a P.R.” (“And he is an American person who has never come to P.R.”)

Margie: “Exacto y quizás el no sabe, o quizás el piensa…” (“Exactly, and maybe he doesn’t know or maybe he thinks…”)

Carmen: “O suponía que P.R. es como México como hablan en Español en los dos sitios, o algo así.” (“Or he thought that P.R. is just like Mexico since in both places Spanish is spoken or something like that.”)

Jenny assumed the author’s nationality was American, due to his English name and how the many inaccurate details in the illustrations made her certain that the illustrator had never visited P.R. Carmen on the other hand, made a very good observation when she gave a possible explanation for some details in the illustrations to look Mexican, claiming that since Spanish is also spoken in Mexico and this is the country bordering on the U.S., it would be easy for U.S. authors or illustrators to generalize and present a stereotypical image of anything Spanish looking like its Mexican counterpart. During my residence in the U.S. for the past four years I have experienced having United Statians asking me questions about Mexico solely because they hear me speaking Spanish. Carmen’s possible explanation for generalization of anything Spanish as Mexican could be valid. There seems to be a tendency in the U.S. for to generalize and classify different cultures and ethnicities into simple, clear-cut groups as has been done until recently with racial classification exclusively on a paradigm of black and white binary.

The last issue of interest discussed in this story was the character Juan Bobo and the image he may represent of the Puerto Rican people. Many participants admitted that Juan
Bobo was just a comic folkloric character who represents the innocent and simple Puerto Rican peasant of the past. They even acknowledged that probably many other countries have folk characters similar to Juan Bobo. However, Carmen and Yolanda were concerned about how this image of the Puerto Rican could be interpreted outside of P.R., particularly within the U.S. The following is the argument some participants had about this issue:

**Reseracher:** “¿El personaje de Juan Bobo como es que representa al Puerto Rriqueño?” (“How does the Juan Bobo character represent the Puerto Rican people?”)

**Jenny:** “Pues, como anormal.” (“Well like an abnormal person.”)

**Margie:** “Bobo, bobo.” (“Foolish, foolish.”)

**Yolanda:** “Como torpe.” (“Like a moron.”)

**Reseacher:** “¿Y que ustedes piensan de eso?” (“And what do you think about that?”)

**Jenny:** “Quizás es como un cómico que lo que hace es reír a la gente que no es necesariamente que nosotros somos unos…” (“Maybe he is like the comedian who only wants to make you laugh, not necessarily that we are a bunch of…”)

**Carmen:** “Nosotros los puertorriqueños lo cogemos así pero a lo mejor en E.U. o en otros países el que lea ese cuento va a pensar que todos los puertorriqueños somos unos bobolones.” (“We as Puerto Rican get the joke, but maybe in the U.S or in other countries anyone who reads the story may think that we are a bunch of morons.”)

**Margie:** “Exacto.” (“Exactly.”)
Researcher: “Pero entonces, que tú crees que habría que hacer para evitar que extranjeros generalicen porque este libro yo lo encontré en E.U. Obviamente allá es que lo están leyendo.” (“But, then what do you think should be done to avoid having foreigners generalize, because I found this book in the U.S., so obviously it’s been read over there?”)

Carmen: “Pues meter otros personajes que al interactuar con otros personajes pues normales, pues a lo mejor pues este ellos cogen mas el chiste. Si ven diferentes personajes de diferentes personalidades que no necesariamente tienen que ser bobos, y son de la misma clase social y del mismo país pues no lo cogen así.” (“Well, include other characters that are normal and then they might see the joke. If they see different characters with different personalities that are not necessarily stupid and that belong to the same social class and the same country then they won’t generalize.”)

Although some participants thought that Juan Bobo’s foolish image did not necessarily have to harm the image of the Puerto Ricans, Carmen was still very much concerned about this matter. She suggested a way for the authors to avoid possible negative stereotypes like this by including other Puerto Rican characters that are not foolish for contrast in the story. Carmen had noticed that the only stupid character in Juan Bobo’s story was a Puerto Rican character and the rest of the characters were Spaniards and seemed to be very aware of the effects negative stereotypes might have on people, since she knows that Puerto Ricans as well as other Latino groups are discriminated against in the U.S. She even suggested that it was convenient for the U.S. to have these stereotypes in English books, since these could help them in perpetuating the existing prejudice
against Puerto Ricans and other Latinos. The following is the excerpt in which Carmen discusses this issue:

**Researcher:** “¿Entonces Carmen tu dijiste que esto podría ser una situación en E.U. de que pensaran que cosa?” (“So then Carmen you said that this could be a situation in the U.S., that they could think what?”)

**Carmen:** “Que generalizan rápido que todos somos iguales como el. Como eso es lo que les conviene.” (“That they [U.S. readers] would generalize quickly that we are all the same like him [Juan Bobo] since that is what is convenient for them.”)

**Researcher:** “¿Por que tú dices que eso es lo que les conviene?” (“Why do you say that it is convenient for them?”)

**Carmen:** “A porque leen eso, entonces como hay mucha gente que rechaza los latinos y eso en E.U. pues a lo mejor para usar un argumento débil...” (“Well because if they read that and since a lot of people reject the Latinos in the U.S. and so forth, then maybe it is used as an argument of weakness”)

**Margie:** “Valido.” (“Valid.”)

**Carmen:** “Para validar su pensamiento pues ya usan eso como para generalización para todos los puertorriqueños.” (“So they can validate their way of thinking about us and so they can use stereotypes for all Puerto Ricans.”)

**Jenny:** “Un prejuicio al igual que nosotros con los dominicanos.” (“A prejudice like the one we have against Dominicans.”)
Yolanda: “Pero tal vez el autor del libro nunca ha venido a P.R. porque se nota bastante en las ilustraciones…” (“But maybe the illustrator has never come to P.R. because we can notice it very well in the illustrations…”)

Carmen: “Uno antes de escribir sobre otro país pues investiga.” (“One should do research before writing about another country.”)

Carmen believes that these non-intended stereotypes in children’s books could actually serve as a way to perpetuate the already existing negative stereotypes about Puerto Ricans in the U.S. Jenny brilliantly provided an example of what Carmen was saying by noting how Puerto Ricans also hold negative stereotypes about Dominicans on the island. They understood that negative stereotypes, once out there, could become fixed and very difficult, if not impossible to change as Hall (1997) states. Her suggestion about including other types of characters in the story was very valid. As a teacher myself, I wonder how these Juan Bobo’s stories are being read by U.S. children and more to the point, if U.S. teachers are discussing them in the right context in order to avoid negative stereotypes. When discussing stories from a different country, it is imperative for a teacher to get some background knowledge on the particular country in order to avoid possible stereotypes that may develop through the stories. This is precisely what Carmen practically demanded in her last statement when Yolanda tried to justify the illustrator’s inaccuracies as just his ignorance about P.R., since she thought he had never visited the island. It is important to point out that this particular book about Juan Bobo had some factual information about the island and a possible explanation of Juan Bobo’s character origins appeared on the last page. However, this information was not enough evidence for Yolanda and Carmen to believe that the author and illustrator had done a good job in representing what they believe to be Puerto Rico and its people. For the most part, the
participants seemed to agree that as long as the author or illustrator does thorough research on the foreign culture, it is okay for them to write about or illustrate the “other.” According to Hade, (1997) it’s been debated extensively in the field of children’s literature, whether authors can effectively write authentic books about people of a different ethnic or cultural background or if they should only write about their own ethnic/cultural groups. In this study, the participants critiqued both Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican authors who had written what the participants interpreted to be mix of inaccurate and accurate details about Puerto Rico. It is recommended to read any kind of story critically since stereotypes can be found everywhere, whether embedded intentionally or unintentionally. When authors are part of the dominant culture and are writing about an “other” that is part of a minority group, the teacher or reader must be ready to challenge any stereotypes that may emerge, since more often than not, “stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power” (Hall, 1997: 258). The majority of the Latino and Puerto Rican characters in these stories were portrayed in a disadvantaged position, where the dominant U.S. culture had power over them. Examples include the immigrants looking for U.S. citizenship in *A Very Important Day*; both Tomás and Chávez as Mexican migrant farm workers trying to survive in the U.S. under difficult circumstances, in *Tomás Rivera and the Library Lady* and *Harvesting Hope* respectively; Maria Isabel struggling as a Puerto Rican student in an English immersion classroom with a United Statian teacher who doesn’t seem to understand her, in *My Name Is Maria Isabel*; a Puerto Rican grandma having to leave the island and look for a better job in the States but finding prejudice and difficulties instead, in *Mami Amor Little Stories*; and a Cuban girl becoming famous after finally learning English and
assimilating into the U.S. culture, in *Gloria Estefan’s* story. The only way most of the characters in these stories seemed to be able to transcend or improve their oppressive situations was by assimilating into the U.S. system and learning the language of the dominant culture.

**Conclusion about Images in Stories**

Participants were able to locate many stereotypes in the stories discussed through this research and to challenge them. All four stories within the English textbook discussed above portray only idealistic narratives of Latinos successful in the U.S. context. (*Harvesting Hope* which was not included in the textbook, was the exception and was discussed precisely to contrast with the idealistic narratives.) Any struggles that these characters may have had were either simplified or excluded from the stories. As Carmen summarized very well, most of these stories were more like Cinderella stories with happy endings. The stereotypical message in most of these stories with Latino characters was clearly that any Latino who comes to the States has a fairly easy opportunity to become successful or rich and famous, as long as he/she follows the U.S. system and does not disagree with the injustices this same system may perpetrate against some people. Moreover, success can be achieved with a relatively small effort, once the immigrant Latino learns to speak the English language. The native language of the Hispanic characters in these stories was not validated since the importance and priority was always given to the English language, even when millions of Latinos in the U.S. still speak Spanish. Learning English should not mean that one should forget his/her native language, yet none of the stories mentioned the advantages becoming a bilingual individual might
bring. Only a few stories written by Puerto Rican authors integrated Spanish words within them, yet these stories were not included in the English textbook.

Most of the stories written by U.S. authors portrayed only one message and one meaning in terms of English learning and success and living the great American dream in a society without prejudice against differences. None of them seemed to be open to a variety of interpretations, since they mostly focused on one fixed meaning. This view of an idealized world controls the meaning of the story and does not provide for the possibility for new meaning or something different than what is presented. Shwarcz and Shwarcz (1991), in their book, *The Picture Book Comes of Age*, discuss the stories that in, “structure, composition, and overall presentation are elaborately repetitive” (P. 7). The constant repetition of these images, plots, structures, and compositions become mere “reproductions of blueprints” and do not provide for opportunities to be creative or think differently (Shwarcz and Shwarcz, 1991). Fortunately, participants in this study were able to challenge many of these stereotypical and repetitive messages within the stories. They were also very creative in their responses, which reflected good critical thinking skills on their part.

When student participants compared the stories discussed in the study with the ones in their actual English textbook, they realized the lack of Latino and particularly Puerto Rican characters in their curriculum. They expressed their desire to have more Latino and Puerto Ricans issues presented in their English textbook, since they were tired of the U.S.-only perspective. Participants also expressed their interest in learning about other cultures through the English text, but this time through the cultural lens of the country of origin.
Student opinion about the English textbooks contrasted somewhat with their ESL teacher’s opinion when she claimed that she was very satisfied with the textbooks because she had the advantage of selecting them. When asked if she thought the textbooks were relevant to the Puerto Rican students she stated the following:

**ESL teacher:** “*I only select stories, poems etc. which are relevant to my students and to myself. Even if the stories were not written with them in mind; I select pieces which show universal truths, ideas, values, different philosophies of life, etc. Through good questioning and different exercises, I make the story or the piece relevant to them and our daily situations.*”

The ESL teacher does not seem to place much importance on whether English textbooks used in the ESL class include any representation of Latino and Puerto Rican characters, or portray any culture other than the U.S. She relies solely on the idea of making the books relevant to students through the discussion of universal truths, ideas, and values; although this may be an excellent reading strategy, participants in this study very clearly expressed their interest in learning about other cultural values through their own perspective instead of the U.S. point of view exclusively. When the ESL teacher was asked whether she incorporated Latino or Puerto Rican authors among the readings in the ESL class she responded that if the English textbook includes Latino stories in it she would use them in class. In other words she doesn’t look for them unless they are already included in the textbook, which by her admission is a rare occurrence. When asked why she thought Puerto Rican English literature is virtually not represented in the English textbooks she alleged that this situation could be due to the difficulty Puerto Ricans have to publish as a minority group and the lack of resources. This educator stated that when
Puerto Rican authors finally published their work they might do so with a small publishing company which would make it more difficult for them to compete against larger publishing companies. Even when the ESL teacher seemed to be aware of the difficulty Puerto Rican authors may have in publishing their work, she did not make an effort to include them in her ESL curriculum, unless they were already included in the textbook she selected for the ESL class. This apparent lack of stronger support for Puerto Rican English literature could be related to some kind of valorization of native English authors over Puerto Rican authors, part of the colonial mentality already discussed when describing how the ESL textbooks are selected in the Department of Education. The colonial mentality usually valorizes anything U.S. made over locally made; the idea is that any U.S. didactic material is superior to Puerto Rican made didactic material, in this case the English literature. She also affirmed that students usually don’t accept Spanish words appearing in the English textbooks, which seemed to indicate that her students’ reaction towards the mixture of languages in a story could influence her decision concerning possible inclusion of Latino authors in the ESL class. It would be interesting if the ESL teacher could have the opportunity to discuss the use of Spanish words in English stories with her students, as accomplished in the context of this research, with the result that student responses could then be compared.

Finally, students need literature that could portray some support of their native language and their Latino identity, not stories in which their language seems to be invalidated and where their Puerto Rican image is stereotyped as primitive or backward. Presenting the idea that only the English language can lead to success, and that the U.S. is a perfect society open to diversity without any kind of prejudice is misleading. The notions of U.S.
assimilation and a successful monolingual society do not support preservation of the native language, the culture, and the traditions that represent Puerto Ricans as a unique segment of the Latino culture and which are directly related to our respective national identity. The words and pictures in these stories could lead children more towards, “a dialectic attitude, which justifies only one opinion, rather than dialogic, which admits several points of view” (Shwarcz and Shwarcz, 1991, p.11).

Puerto Rican children need exposure to a variety of stories that can give them differing perspectives on their situation as individuals who live under the constant influence of the U.S. culture in their daily life and through the media. The classroom could possibly be the only setting wherein U.S. dominance over the island could be challenged and discussed critically. This would occur if teachers could have the opportunity to identify and use quality, artistic literature that could serve the dual purpose of instigating the learning of English and prompting discussion of the political reasons behind the compulsory English program in Puerto Rican schools. Quality literature that bears the characteristics of being amusing, challenging, and that encourages thinking could help our children become not only competent English speakers, but critical thinkers as well. It is time to encourage students to think outside the limiting colonized mentality in Puerto Rico and to stimulate their minds to challenge the dominant culture that surrounds them. Select, quality literature can certainly frame such a challenging task as the inquisitive and intelligent discussions among participants involved in this research have proven.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and Recommendations

The primary research question explored through this study concerned:

How do Puerto Rican children perceive the learning of English as a second language and the English textbooks utilized in the complex context of colonial/postcolonial Puerto Rico?

This final chapter includes reflections concerning involvement as an ESL teacher as well as voices from the study participants. Implications that study results may have for ESL teaching preparation programs and ESL curriculum development in Puerto Rico will also be discussed.

Children’s Perceptions of ESL Learning in Colonial/Postcolonial Puerto Rico

Participants’ perception about English in Puerto Rico revealed the complex colonial/postcolonial mentality that prevails on the island today. Children in this study demonstrated an astute awareness concerning both the learning and teaching of English in Puerto Rico, and of the relationship between language and the colonial political status. Through discussions they expressed genuine concerns and sometimes contradicting opinions about the English language in congruence with that mental ambivalence ascribed to colonial subjects under the simultaneous influence of two differing cultures, one of the colonizer and the other native culture (Tyson, 2006). Students confirmed the power the English language represents when backed by an economic empire like the U.S. and the benefits it could provide to their futures. They considered English, the language
of socioeconomic mobility as many other researchers have, Barreto (1998), Barreto (2001), Crystal (2003), Pennycook (1994) Phillipson (1992) Duany (2002) Canagarajah (1999). Paradoxically, despite all the benefits English might promise, most of the participants agreed that English should NOT be a compulsory subject at schools, even though they stated that they would take the English class anyway. Margie very strongly stated this point in the following response:

“En estos momentos deberíamos coger la clase, pero que no sea impuesta y que sea porque el país quiere y que las escuelas la tengan que no sea impuesta por E.U.”. (Right now we should take the class (the English class) but not let it be imposed as a regular subject because our country wants to, and that schools have the class, but not imposed by the U.S.)

They are challenging the legacy of a colonial language policy by expressing rejection of the imposition of English by the U.S. and this can be interpreted as their postcolonial attitude. Participants also expressed criticism of the English program in Puerto Rico and identified what they perceived as the negative aspects of learning English. Yolanda revealed the tension, the sense of disadvantage, and the feeling of inferiority second language learners may experience due to the difficulties of learning English as she expressed, “One is a nobody without English” (translation mine). Ruth described how low English scores could affect the academic futures for less - competent students in Puerto Rico, since low grades may affect final grade point averages. From the perspective of ESL teacher, this revelation was very significant since I was not completely aware of how severely some children might be affected by the pressure of learning English. It had been easy to assume that students just had fun in my ESL class and I had failed to notice those students who might have felt just like Yolanda. My objective had been to facilitate
the students learning of English without considering about any negative effects attempting language acquisition could have on them. Most students perceived English as the “other” language despite frequent exposure through the media of TV, radio, films, and U.S. propaganda, (and through educational curriculum embedded in Puerto Rico). This attribution of “otherness” towards English is a manifestation of our colonial situation on the island since English has been imposed by the U.S. and is a compulsory subject without immediate practical application in the students’ daily lives in Puerto Rico. Spanish continues to be the language representing Puerto Rican cultural and national identity, relegating English to its status as the “other” language with nothing to do with Puerto Ricanness - at least for those who live on the island. This is not the case, however, for Puerto Ricans residing on the U.S. mainland as discussed in chapter five.

Prior to conducting this research, I had a very limited notion of how students felt about the teaching and learning of English in Puerto Rico and was surprised to observe the participants’ contradicting opinions ascribed to the English language. Although students were very cognizant of the power and the benefits to which this language might entitle them, many participants were also very critical about it and the country it represents. Most students in the context of this study challenged and frequently expressed strong and sometimes conflictive assumptions about the U.S. Empire, its dominant culture, and the extent of its power over Puerto Rico. Postcolonial attitudes were manifested when participants questioned U.S. economic power, which they claimed was based in the creation of fear factors and from unequal economic strategies. Discussions concerning the learning of English in Puerto Rico also triggered interesting arguments related to the Puerto Rican national identity when students were asked to catalogue their feelings
related to having to speak English. All agreed that they felt one hundred percent Puerto Rican and not United Statian. However, the group of participants was divided when defining the notion of Puerto Rican national identity. Some participants showed a more traditional, conservative view of Puerto Ricanness in which the Spanish language, as well as the place of birth, was considered definitive markers of nationality. Other participants astutely demonstrated a much more open and flexible notion of Puerto Ricanness, more congruent with recent theories related to identity development by Hall (1996), Anzaldúa (2002) Duany (2000), and Flores (1993) as reviewed in chapter four. These theorists view national identity as a socially constructed idea that is not fixed but capable of being transformed due to pluralistic cultural identities around a post-colonial world caused by constant migration and the interaction among different cultural identities. Participants promoting this concept of nationality as a social construction supported the position that Puerto Ricans living on the U.S. mainland could be accepted as Puerto Rican even if they hadn’t been born on the island and were unable to speak Spanish. All participants concluded that the Puerto Rican national identity is a very strong, deeply appreciated attachment one feels for people, culture, and what is considered homeland, and which does not necessarily include Spanish, in acknowledgement of Puerto Ricans residing elsewhere. The participants’ choice of vocabulary when discussing Puerto Rico indicated a very strong belief that the island is a distinct country and their very own nation in spite of its colonial status. This consideration of Puerto Rico is congruent with other studies such as those by Flores (2000), García-Passalcqua (1994), and Morris (1994). García-Passalacqua concludes in his book, *Hegemon; Otredad, Mismisidad de la Otra Cara* (*Hegemony; Otherness and Sameness of the Other Side*) that the U.S. hegemony has
finally understood, after a relationship of more than a century, that the Puerto Rican people are indeed a distinctive nation (translation mine).

From my position as an ESL teacher from Puerto Rico formerly identified by a colonial mentality, associated in my youth with a voluntary Americanization process, and characterized during the majority of my teaching years as taking for granted the positioning of the English language in the context of Puerto Rico, learning what a small group of students have to say concerning the teaching of English in P.R. has caused great introspection.

**Children’s Perception of Stories Embedded in English Textbooks**

Participants demonstrated once again their critical thinking skills and colonial/postcolonial mentality in this study when discussing the picture books and the stories published within the English textbook. Students questioned representations of themselves in these stories created by both Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican authors. Participants were able to identify differing stereotypes representing U.S. culture as well as Puerto Rican culture in both illustrations and story content. Those stories included in the English textbook that were written by U.S. and U.S.-Latino authors were responsible for triggering discussions related to stereotypes about the Puerto Rican, Latino, and U.S. culture. Participants concluded that the positive images about U.S. culture were probably created by the U.S. or U.S./Latino authors in order to perpetuate its power; according to some participants, the U.S. employs all media, including children’s literature and textbooks, to promote a perfect image to the world. Latino characters in the majority of
these stories appeared to achieve success once they learned English and assimilated to the U.S. culture.

The only way most of the characters seemed to be able to come out of oppressive situations was by assimilating into the U.S. system and by learning the dominant culture’s language. These stories presented what Nieto (2002) has described as,

“the perception that people of nonmainstream background must completely ‘melt’ in order to be successful; that individual effort is superior to community and collective identity and action: and that all it takes is hard work and perseverance to make it, with no attention paid to the structural barriers and institutional biases that get in the way of equality” (p.215).

Moreover, Latino and Puerto Rican characters were portrayed for the most part with the stereotypical image of poor, disadvantaged people in need of support from the U.S. while other peoples became successful in spite of all odds. It is understood that even though some U.S.-Latino authors were attempting to portray a positive Latino role model through the biographical success stories critiqued within this study, they may have been unintentionally perpetuating the stereotype of a perfect U.S. society and of the “American dream” where Latinos can succeed if only they work hard despite prejudice and the inequalities of the social context in which they live. These biographies do not question the disadvantaged position in which these individuals are located in the first place and thus don’t offer new perspectives on how to deal with prejudice and inequality existent in contemporary society.
Stories written by Puerto Rican authors, triggered discussions related to race and language issues. Students questioned the representation of themselves by both Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican authors based on racial biases and their understanding of race. Although students admitted awareness of their mixed racial background, they still objected to images of Puerto Rican characters indicating African descent which accompanied some stories and they argued for the representation of white Puerto Ricans to be included. This was not the case when the opposite occurred. This racist behavior could be interpreted as a legacy from a historical past that institutionalized colonialism and slavery. While it is generally considered that virtually no racial prejudice or discrimination exists within Puerto Rico due to the mixed racial background and the commonality of interracial marriages, the reality is that racial issues are not openly discussed in Puerto Rico as they are in the U.S. According to Duany (2002), several studies have indicated that blacks are a marginalized minority on the island who still suffer from consistent discrimination, which could explain the children’s racist attitude expressed within this study.

Some participants also objected to the inclusion of Spanish words in the English stories, or to the mixture of English and Spanish. They accepted the mixture of English and Spanish in the verbal colloquial form, but not in the academic field of children’s literature or any other kind of formal writing. This objection towards bilingual forms of writing could express a desire to protect Spanish language from the English media invasion. Some academic organizations in Puerto Rico have developed TV ad campaigns challenging a mixture of English and Spanish and advocating for the use of correct Spanish language instead. Rejection of bilingual text could also be triggered by the fact
that those U.S. textbooks used within the English classroom mostly value “standard U.S. English” and rarely are representations of bilingual language forms to be found in these books.

As a colonized ESL teacher I recall learning through the ESL teaching program about the correct “standard U.S. English” usage which was later perpetuated through the English textbooks. The ESL teaching program advocated for the “standard U.S. English” form while regarding any bilingual usage as incorrect or invalid. As part of this process, therefore, I could also have indirectly caused my former students to view bilingual forms of language as incorrect or inappropriate.

It would be desirable in the future to expose Puerto Rican students to children’s literature written in bilingual format, perhaps by mainland Puerto Ricans, in order to introduce them to other kinds of language usage forms besides “standard U.S. English”, and so they could learn to validate other ways of communication that mainland Puerto Ricans as well as other ethnicities employ in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Linguists such as Pennycook (2001) and Joseph (2006) agree that even when the concept of “Standard English” is well recognized in the English speaking world and is still taught in schools everywhere; the reality is that not everyone including educated people use “Standard English”, particularly in its verbal form. Joseph (2006) states the following about this issue:

“… as English continues its long-term spread as an international auxiliary language, variation in English is on the increase, and speakers of English in many places, including European countries, do not necessarily recognize the authority of a British or American standard over their
particular English but are claiming to have an English of their own, with the right to follow a standard of their own” (p.8).

Validating variations of English or other communication through language could assist children to be more open to difference and to avoid assuming that what the dominant U.S. culture states is the norm with regards to use of the English language in children’s literature or other media.

Participants observed many inaccurate details about Puerto Rico and its people in the depiction of home architectural styles, clothing, and physical appearance. When some of these observed inaccuracies were presented by mainland Puerto Rican authors, the students interpreted these as due to the authors’ forgetfulness or to romantic memories of a Puerto Rico that no longer exists. When the alleged inaccuracies emanated from U.S. authors, they rapidly concluded that the authors were either ignorant about Puerto Rican reality or had never actually visited the island. They vehemently challenged images of the poor, primitive, or foolish Puerto Rican embedded within some stories. Students were extremely concerned about how negative images could contribute in perpetuating what they perceive as a constant prejudice against Puerto Ricans and Latinos in the U.S. today. They demanded that authors should make an effort to do extensive research before they write about a culture different from their own in order to avoid misrepresentations of other cultures and peoples.

Inaccurate details about Puerto Rico as observed by the participants in stories written by U.S. and mainland Puerto Rican authors could suggest that negative stereotypes can be found universally, whether embedded by intention or unintentionally.
Lessons Learned From the Young Participants and From the Study

It is possible to extract many valuable lessons from the young boys and girls who so kindly and eagerly participated in this study. First of all, when students are provided with a respectable and safe environment where they can express their opinions about all kinds of issues relevant to their sociopolitical reality, they are capable of bringing together incredible knowledge and insightful discussions. From the perspective of an English teacher, it was apparent that although students may seem to view English as just another class in the curriculum, they don’t necessarily take it for granted as hypothesized. Students had much to say regarding the teaching of English in the context of Puerto Rico, acknowledging its compulsory status due to the political relationship with the U.S. Students demonstrated astute knowledge and awareness about the colonial political status of the island and how that affected their education, the economy, and their national identity. I don’t recall being as aware and knowledgeable about all these important issues at the same age, which could have been due to the traditional education model in place then which did not include critical thinking curricula such as the students in this study are exposed to as part of their schooling. The most interesting findings discovered through this study were the complexity of the children’s minds and their ways of thinking under the colonial context in which they live. Through their responses one could observe their colonial mentalities as manifested in different forms. Students frequently exhibited some kind of love/hate relationship towards English as they acknowledged the economic benefits English acquisition could bring them while simultaneously they resented the power position of English over Spanish, particularly within the job market. Colonized mindsets were also observable when students were able to internalize one of the greatest
political contradictions of our times as articulated by Muñoz Marín, the first Puerto Rican governor, when he publicly stated in the 1950s that we could be politically United Statians and culturally Puerto Ricans at the same time. This could explain why participants demanded a Puerto Rican citizenship that would acknowledge national and cultural identity while retaining U.S. citizenship, which some see as a mere political commodity and others view as evidence of loyalty to the U.S. Participants openly expressed a postcolonial attitude as they frequently challenged the dominant U.S. culture and its ideologies. They recognized the importance of and benefits from the English language, nevertheless were also able to point out what they perceived as negative aspects of the English language in the context of their colonial reality. It was impressive to observe the high level of thinking and analysis the students displayed during the discussion of the stories when they were able to identify and challenge positive and negative stereotypes about the U.S., Latino, and Puerto Rican cultures being portrayed and when participants described how the U.S. perspective in these stories may veil or simplify the sometimes harsh realities of U.S. society. The students’ capacity to identify and discuss astute and controversial issues relevant to their sociopolitical context demonstrated what this is possible when critical thinking and critical pedagogy strategies are focused on available English materials. This research study, powered by the students’ insightful discussions and interpretations, has engendered creation of a different perspective and a new vision regarding the ESL curriculum. The study and response emphasize the importance of creating safe spaces for students to discuss within the ESL class those issues related to the dominant U.S. culture perspective particularly those embedded within the English didactic materials. More importantly, the students have
helped me reflect on my Puerto Rican identity and my role as an ESL teacher in colonial post/colonial Puerto Rico.

**Implications for ESL and ELT Programs**

Participants’ demonstration of consciousness of the colonial socio-political context surrounding them and connotations regarding the learning of English in Puerto Rico suggests alternative possibilities for the English curriculum and ESL programs on the island.

Through experience as an ESL teacher I observed that we have negated the rights of children in Puerto Rico to have a voice and express opinions about the teaching of English. Colonized educators have been afraid or considered it inappropriate to discuss political issues in the classroom setting, since this could inevitably lead to the challenging of the very U.S. dominant system that imposed this language on the curriculum. Carroll (2005) claimed in his Masters thesis concerning ESL teachers’ perceptions of the English curriculum in Southwestern Puerto Rico, that it was appropriate to have the English Department Curriculum Framework recognize the significance of de-politicizing English education by focusing on English competence merely as a tool acquired for economic advancement. This restrictive framework would be too narrow to implement since the ESL program exists precisely because of Puerto Rico’s colonial, political, and economic relationship with the U.S. Moreover, proficiency in English alone can not ensure economic advancement in an unequal social system where the upper class has the advantage to benefit from the English cultural capital while the middle or lower class may not have the same opportunities as has been demonstrated by Torruellas (1990),

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Muntaner (1990), Barreto (1998), and Barreto (2001). Therefore it would be pertinent to develop an English curriculum in which students are encouraged to question their lived realities within a colonial system and to examine these within the context of dominant and dominated relationships.

As Freire (1998) has stated consistently through his writings, “education is a political practice” in which educators hold some kind of power over their students and therefore must decide in on whose behalf they are working and how to be consistent in applying both their teaching practices and their political choices. ESL educators in Puerto Rico must be aware of students’ realistic needs for learning English under colonial conditions and must take into account the students’ resistance, fears, beliefs, and interests - even when these may not be easily accepted by educators’ belief systems. In order to implement this practice it is imperative that teachers both listen carefully and validate students’ voices in the classroom context.

It is imperative that a critical pedagogy paradigm, as suggested by Freire (1998), Canagarajah (2003), and Pennycook (1998), be included within the ESL program in Puerto Rico in order to allow students to reflect and discuss within the ESL class the dominant context on which the ESL system is based. This type of non-traditional curriculum would empower students currently constricted as Puerto Rican individuals studying under a colonized mainstream educational system. It is important to note that including a critical pedagogy perspective in the contemporary ESL curriculum would be a challenge due to organizational constraints institutionalized by the residual colonial system existent in Puerto Rico. Yet there may be less overt – perhaps even covert ways - to implement a critical pedagogy perspective in the ESL program such as employing the
vehicle of children’s literature. Such a curriculum should include a variety of children’s literature that could expose students to different perspectives on their situation as individuals who live under the constant influence of the U.S. culture in their daily life and through the media. Teachers should also encourage students to read critically the U.S. made textbooks which mostly portray dominant ideology, just as the students did in this study. Through the critical discussions held in this research students became agents of their own educational knowledge and felt free to contest the same system of which they are a part. In other words, through their active participation they caused their voices to be clearly expressed. According to Walsh (1991), “for students to become the experts of their own lives, they must come to recognize and understand the contexts and contents of lived experiences that produce their resistances.” (p.113)

ESL teachers should take the opportunity to identify and employ quality, artistic literature with the characteristics of being both amusing and challenging, and that encourages thinking. This type of literature could help Puerto Rican children become not only competent English speakers, but critical thinkers as well.

In order to implement a successful critical pedagogy curriculum in the island schools it is crucial that ESL teacher training programs include this approach within their curriculum. Future ESL teachers must learn how to critically examine the education system generally and the ESL program specifically which imitate the U.S. dominant culture’s pedagogical system. Otherwise, they will be agents who perpetuate the established educational system in which English is merely viewed as a tool for social mobility, as stated by the English Curriculum Framework, and not as a language in which students could learn how to be critical thinkers, to challenge the actual system and to bring about change in society.
Agbaw (1996) states succinctly in her thesis what could be done to help students be part of this change-making “Our tasks then as scholars and educators is to guide children to be able to identify these dominant forms, question, and strive to change them. By so doing children would disrupt the status quo, which means rising above their different stations in life as dominators, conspirators and subordinate” (p. 43).

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This study was conducted with ten students from a Laboratory school in the metropolitan area of Puerto Rico. The students come from a mostly middle class background where parents appeared to greatly value education. They were also exposed to critical thinking curricula which could explain to a certain point their high level of thinking as demonstrated throughout the discussions.

Future research could explore what the responses to the same or similar questions and the same stories would be for students from different backgrounds and different schools around the island, to ascertain how diverse students would explore the political, social, and cultural issues and what other interesting observations and interpretations they could bring to the study. It would also be interesting to explore how varying factors such as social class, school location, and school curriculum could be reflected in the voices of the children around the island. Ideally, a study like this when universally conducted, might bring the opportunity to give voice to students and also help in developing critical thinkers. Applying a critical pedagogy approach in a future study similar to this could hopefully elicit many fascinating and distinctive insights from different parts of the island.
which we all can learn from and employ for future curriculum development concerning
the ESL field in colonial/postcolonial Puerto Rico.
References


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Appendix A

Informed Consent Forms
Hoja de Asentimiento para los Estudiantes

Título del Proyecto: El Desarrollo del Proceso de Formación de la Identidad Cultural de Niños Puertorriqueños dentro del Contexto Post-Colonial

Investigador Principal: Teresita Santiago, Estudiante Graduada
256 Chambers Building, University Park, PA 16802
(787) 645-9394; tus123@psu.edu

Director de Tesis: Dr. Daniel Hade

Propósito del Estudio: El propósito de este estudio es examinar el sentido que ustedes, como estudiantes Puertorriqueños de escuela intermedia, le pudieran dar al concepto de identidad cultural cuando este es explorado a través de la discusión de literatura infantil en Inglés escrita por autores Puertorriqueños y no Puertorriqueños.

Procedimiento: Diez estudiantes al igual que tu han sido escogidos para participar de este estudio ya que fueron mis discípulos en quinto grado y participaron en un cuestionario que esta servidora llevó a cabo en la clase de Inglés hace tres años atrás. Tus respuestas a este cuestionario han contribuido al desarrollo de mi tema de tesis.
Como participantes de este proyecto se les pedirá que llenen un formulario con su información personal y que contesten preguntas a través de una entrevista. Esto podría tomar alrededor de de 30 minutos. Luego se espera que participen de 3 ó 4 entrevistas grupales para discutir sus respuestas a la entrevista inicial. Estas tomarán alrededor de 45 minutos cada una. Además se les pedirá que lean un cuento en Inglés donde el concepto de identidad pudiera estar incluido y que pudieras discutir este tema con el grupo y expusieras tus ideas y opiniones. Estas discusiones literarias en grupo se dividirán en alrededor de 4 a 6 sesiones de 45 minutos cada una. Las entrevistas y discusiones grupales serán audio-grabadas.

Riesgos: No se anticipan riesgos al participar en este estudio excepto alguna incomodidad que pudieran experimentar como suele ocurrir en cualquier comunicación de la vida diaria. Algunas preguntas podrían ser personales pero, tendrás total libertad para escoger las que desees contestar. Además tu privacidad será protegida a través del uso de seudónimo, el cual sustituirá tu nombre, y solo esta investigadora tendrá acceso a los identificadores.

Beneficios: Entre los beneficios de participar en este estudio se encuentran el que pudieras conocerte mejor a la vez que descubres conocimientos adicionales acerca de tu herencia cultural y tu propia identidad cultural. Además tendrías la oportunidad de expresar tus opiniones en torno a la enseñanza del Inglés en Puerto Rico.

Duración del Proyecto: Como participante de este estudio se espera que puedas comprometer alrededor de 8 a 10 horas de tu tiempo durante el primer semestre del año académico 2005-2006. La sesión inicial en que llenarás tu formulario personal en un formulario y contestarás preguntas en una entrevista tomará alrededor de 30 minutos. Las discusiones grupales tomarán alrededor de 45 a 60 minutos y las discusiones literarias alrededor de 60 minutos cada una. Todas las sesiones serán programadas en un horario a tu mejor conveniencia.

Confidencialidad: Cualquier identificador de tu persona será removido de todo formulario escrito para proteger tu identidad real. Sólo la investigadora conocerá tu identidad a través de seudónimos o nombres ficticios. Todas las grabaciones con la data será asegurada en el domicilio de la investigadora en un armario con llave y todas las transcripciones y análisis de la data sera...
asegurada en la computadora personal de la investigadora la cual tendrá un código secreto de acceso que sólo ella conocerá.

Sin embargo todas las grabaciones y las hojas de consentimiento serán destruidas por la investigadora luego de tres años, alrededor de septiembre 2008, tal como lo estipula el protocolo de investigación.

Es además muy importante que todo lo que se discuta dentro del grupo de participantes se mantenga de forma confidencial. Se espera que no divulgues con otras personas lo que los demás participantes aportaron durante las discusiones grupales para de este modo mantener la confidencialidad del grupo.

La Oficina de Investigación y el Comité Evaluador de las Ciencias Sociales (The Office for Research and the Social Science Institutional Review Board) tiene la potestad para revisar los archivos relacionados a este estudio. De existir la posibilidad de publicación o presentación en público de los resultados de este estudio, cualquier información personal que te pueda identificar no será compartida o publicada.

Preguntas o Dudas: Tienes todo el derecho de hacer cualquier pregunta a la investigadora, Teresita Santiago, en cualquiera momento. De ser así puedes comunicarte con Teresita al siguiente número: (787) 645-9394. Si tienes alguna pregunta en relación a tus derechos como participante de este estudio, puedes contactar a; Penn State’s Office for Research Protection al (814) 865-1775.

Participacion Voluntaria: Tu decisión de participar en este estudio es totalmente voluntaria. Tienes la libertad de decidir si quieres participar de ciertas discusiones. Además tu decides que preguntas quieres contestar. Por otro lado tienes la potestad de terminar tu participación en este estudio en cualquier momento. Tienes también el derecho a recibir una copia de de este documento una vez lo hayas firmado. De tener alguna razón por la cual pienses que la investigadora no siguió los acuerdos arriba mencionados, puedes contactar a su supervisor, Dan Hade a la siguiente dirección electrónica: ddh2@psu.edu.

De tener alguna pregunta sobre tus derechos como participante o reclamación o queja relacionada con tu participación puedes comunicarte con la Oficina de Cumplimiento o la Decana Auxiliar de Investigación del Recinto de Río Piedras de la Universidad de Puerto Rico al teléfono (787) 764-0000, extensión 215 o a cipshi@degi.rrp.upr.edu.

Debido a que eres menor de edad la investigadora necesita el consentimiento de tus padres para participar en este estudio. Por lo tanto si estas de acuerdo con la información descrita anteriormente y decides participar y tus padres dan el consentimiento por escrito con su firma, favor de asentir firmando tu nombre en el espacio provisto para ello más adelante. Muchas gracias.

Firma del Participante                   Fecha

_________________________________  ____________________

Persona que obtiene el asentimiento                   Fecha

_________________________________  ____________________
Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research (Students)
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: The Development of the Identity formation Process of Puerto Rican Children within the Post Colonial Context

Principal Investigator: Teresita Santiago, Graduate Student
256 Chambers Building, University Park, PA 16802
(787) 645-9394; tus123@psu.edu
Advisor: Dr. Daniel Hade

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the meaning you as Puerto Rican middle school students make or try to make when exploring questions of identity while reading children’s literature in English by Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican authors.

Procedures to be followed: Ten students together with you have been chosen to participate in this study because you were one of my students in fifth grade and participated in a survey I conducted in the classroom as part of the class three years ago. Your answers to that survey have helped in developing my research topic. You will be asked to fill out a participant profile and answer interview questions. This may take approximately 30 minutes. Then you will be asked to participate in 3 or 4 focus group interviews of about 45 to 60 minutes each, where your responses to the questions will be discussed. I will also ask you to read a story where the identity theme could be found and expect you to discuss it and share your opinions about it with the group members in four to six sessions of about 45 minutes each. The discussions and interview sessions will be tape-recorded.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research other than those commonly experienced in everyday life communication. Few questions may be personal but you are free to decline answering any of them. Also your privacy will not be affected since a pseudonym will substitute your name and only the investigator will have access to the identifier.

Benefits: If you decide to participate in this study, you might learn more about yourself, your cultural heritage, and your own identity. You will also be able to express your opinions towards the English program in Puerto Rico.

Duration: For this research project you will be asked to commit at least eight to ten hours of your time during the course of a month and a half in the Fall of 2005. The initial session where you will fill out your profile and answer the interview questions, will take about 30 minutes. The focus group sessions may take about 45 to 60 minutes and the book club discussion sessions will take around 60 minutes each. All of these sessions will be schedule to your own convenience.
Statement of Confidentiality: Any identifiers will be removed from all written documents. Only the investigator will know your identity, through pseudonyms. The recording tapes with the data will be secured at the investigator’s home in a locked cabinet and all transcriptions and data analysis will be saved with a password protected file in the investigator’s personal computer which only the investigator will have access to. However, all tapes and informed consent forms will be destroyed by the researcher after three years of the investigation, around September 2008. Also if you speak about the contents of the focus group outside the group, it is expected that you will not reveal to other people what individual participants said. The Office for Research and the Social Science Institutional Review Board may review records related to this project. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research no personal identifiable information will be shared.

Right to Ask Questions: You can ask any questions about the research to the investigator, Ms. Teresita Santiago, at any time. You may contact Teresita at the following telephone number (787) 645-9394. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, feel free to contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protection at (814) 865-1775.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to participate in this research project is completely voluntary. It is expected from you to read at least one children’s book to discuss it with other members of the focus group, however you decide whether you want to participate in the discussion or not. You also have the right to choose the questions you want to answer or do not want to answer. Moreover, you may stop your participation at any time. If you have any reason to believe that the researcher is not following this agreement, please contact her supervisor Dan Hade at ddh2@psu.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your participation, a claim, or any concern in relation to it you may contact the Compliance Office or the Research Associate Dean of the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus at (787) 764-000, extension 215 or at cipshi@degi.rrp.upr.edu. You are also entitled to receive a copy of this document after you have signed it.

Due to the fact that you are a minor the researcher must get your parents’ consent for your participation in this research. Therefore if you agree with the information described above, and decide to participate in this research study, and your parents authorize you to do so, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

_________________________________  ____________________
Participant’s Signature    Date

_________________________________  ____________________
Person Obtaining Consent    Date
Hoja de Consentimiento para los Padres

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Riesgos: No se anticipan riesgos al participar en este estudio excepto alguna incomodidad que se pudiera experimentar como suele ocurrir en cualquier comunicación de la vida diaria. Algunas preguntas podrían considerarse personales, pero su hijo/a tendrá total libertad para escoger las que desee contestar. Además su privacidad será protegida a través del uso de seudónimo, el cual sustituirá su nombre, y solo esta investigadora tendrá acceso a los identificadores del mismo.

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asegurada en la computadora personal de la investigadora la cual tendrá un código secreto de acceso que sólo ella conocerá.

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Preguntas o Dudas: Su hijo/a tiene todo el derecho de hacer cualquier pregunta a la investigadora, Teresita Santiago, en cualquier momento. De ser así puede comunicarse con Teresita al siguiente número: (787) 645-9394. De tener alguna pregunta en relación a sus derechos como participante de este estudio, puede contactar a, Penn State’s Office for Research Protection al (814) 865-1775.

Participacion Voluntaria: La decisión de su hijo/a participar en este estudio es totalmente voluntaria. Tiene la libertad de decidir si quiere participar de ciertas discusiones. Además su hijo/a decide que preguntas quiere contestar. Por otro lado tiene la potestad de terminar su participación en cualquier momento. Usted como padre debe ser mayor de 18 años para autorizar la participación de su hijo/a y además tiene derecho a recibir copia de este documento de consentimiento firmado por usted. De tener alguna razón por la cual piense que la investigadora no sigue los acuerdos arriba mencionados, puede contactar a su supervisor, Dan Hade a la siguiente dirección electrónica: ddh2@psu.edu.

Por otro lado si tiene alguna pregunta sobre los derechos de su hijo/a como participante o reclamación o queja relacionada con la participación de su hijo/a puede comunicarse con la Oficina de Cumplimiento o la Decana Auxiliar de Investigación del Recinto de Río Piedras de la Universidad de Puerto Rico al teléfono (787) 764-0000, extensión 215 o a cipshi@degi.rrp.upr.edu.

Autorizo a que mi hijo/a, __________________________, participe del proyecto de investigación descrito en este documento si el/ella asiente a participar.

_________________________________  ____________________
Firma del Padre/Madre del Participante   Fecha

_________________________________  ____________________
Persona que obtiene el consentimiento   Fecha
Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research (Parents)
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: The Development of the Identity formation Process of Puerto Rican Children within the Post Colonial Context

Principal Investigator: Teresita Santiago, Graduate Student
256 Chambers Building, University Park, PA 16802
(787) 645-9394; tus123@psu.edu
Advisor: Dr. Daniel Hade

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the meaning your child, as a Puerto Rican middle school student, makes or try to make when exploring questions of identity while reading children’s literature in English by Puerto Rican and non- Puerto Rican authors.

Procedures to be followed: Ten students together with your child have been chosen to participate in this study because they were one of my students in fifth grade and participated in a survey I conducted in the classroom as part of the class three years ago. Their answers to that survey have helped in developing my research topic. Your child will be asked to fill out a participant profile and to answer questions in an interview. This may take approximately 30 minutes. Then he/she will be asked to participate in 3 or 4 focus group interviews of about 45 to 60 minutes each where his/her responses to the interview questions will be discussed. I will also ask him/her to read a story where the identity theme could be found and expect the child to discuss it and share his/her opinions about it with the group members in four to six sessions of about 45 minutes each. The discussions and interview sessions will be tape-recorded.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research other than those commonly experienced in everyday life communication. Few questions may be personal but your child will be free to decline answering any of them. Also your child’s privacy will not be affected since a pseudonym will substitute his/her name and only the investigator will have access to the identifier.

Benefits: If your child decides to participate in this study, he/she might learn more about himself or herself, his/her cultural heritage, and his/her own identity. She/He will also be able to express his/her opinions towards the English program in Puerto Rico.

Duration: For this research project your child will be asked to commit at least eight to ten hours of his/her time during the course of a month and a half in the fall semester of 2005. The initial session where he/she will fill out their profile and answer the interview questions, will take about 30 minutes. The focus group sessions may take about 45 to 60 minutes and the book club discussion sessions will take around 60 minutes each. All of these sessions will be schedule to his/her own convenience.
Statement of Confidentiality: Any identifiers will be removed from all written documents. Only the investigator will know his/her identity, through pseudonyms. The recording tapes with the data will be secured at the investigator’s home in a locked cabinet and all transcriptions and data analysis will be saved with a password protected file in the investigator’s personal computer which only the investigator will have access to. However, all tapes and informed consent forms will be destroyed by the researcher after three years of the investigation, around September 2008. Also if the students speak about the contents of the focus group outside the group, it is expected that they will not reveal to other people what individual participants said. The Office for Research and the Social Science Institutional Review Board may review records related to this project. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research no personal identifiable information will be shared.

Right to Ask Questions: You as a parent and your child as a participant can ask any questions about the research to the investigator, Ms. Teresita Santiago, at any time. You may contact Teresita at the following telephone number (787) 645-9394. If you have any questions about your child’s rights as a research participant, feel free to contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protection at (814) 865-1775.

Voluntary Participation: Your child’s decision to participate in this research project is completely voluntary. He/she will be asked to read at least one children’s book to discuss it with other members of the focus group, however your child decides whether he/she wants to participate in the discussion or not. He/She also has the right to choose the questions he/she wants to answer or does not want to answer. Moreover, he/she may stop his/her participation at any time. You as a parent, must be 18 years of age or older to let your child participate in this project and you are also entitled to receive a copy of this document once you have decided to sign it and authorize your child to participate. If you have any reason to believe that the researcher is not following this agreement, please contact her supervisor Dan Hade at ddh2@psu.edu. If you have any questions regarding your child’s rights as a participant, a claim, or any concern in relation to his/her participation you may contact the Compliance Office or the Research Associate Dean of the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus at (787) 764-000, extension 215 or at cipshi@degi.rrp.upr.edu.

“I authorize my child, ____________________________, to participate in this research project if he/she decides to do so.”

_________________________________  ____________________
Parent Signature     Date

_________________________________  ____________________
Person Obtaining Consent    Date
**Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research** (Teachers)

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: The Development of the Identity Formation Process of Puerto Rican Children within the Post Colonial Context

Principal Investigator: Teresita Santiago, Graduate Student
256 Chambers Building, University Park, PA 16802
(787) 645-9394; tus123@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Daniel Hade

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the research is to examine the meaning Puerto Rican students make when exploring questions of identity while reading stories written by Puerto Rican authors.

To further extend the study it is important to explore your professional opinion on the English textbooks and children’s literature you use in the classroom. The responses provided will be compared to the students’ opinions on the textbooks.

Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to answer five questions during an interview in which you will give your opinion about the English textbooks you are actually using in your class. This may take approximately 20 to 45 minutes.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research other than those commonly experienced in everyday life communication. Also your privacy will be respected by using a pseudonym instead of your name.

Benefits: Your participation in this project may help you reflect on the textbooks you are currently using in class and will allow you to express your expert opinion about them.

Duration: For this research you will be asked to commit just 20 to 45 minutes of your time during the interview session since only five questions will be asked.

Statement of Confidentiality: Any identifiers will be removed from all written documents. Only the investigator will know your identity through a pseudonym.

The recording tapes with the data will be secured at the investigator’s home in a locked cabinet and all transcriptions and data analysis will be saved with a password protected file in the investigator’s personal computer which only the investigator will have access to. However, all tapes and informed consent forms will be destroyed by the researcher after three years of the investigation, around September 2008.

The Office for Research and the Social Science Institutional Review Board may review records related to this project. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research no personal identifiable information will be shared.

Right to Ask Questions: You may ask any questions about the research to the investigator, Ms. Teresita Santiago, at any time. You may contact Teresita at the following telephone number (787) 645-9394. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, feel free to contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protection at (814) 865-1775.
Voluntary Participation: Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose the questions you want to answer or do not want to answer. Moreover, you may stop your participation at any time. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this project. If you have any reason to believe that the researcher is not following this agreement, please contact her supervisor Dan Hade at ddh2@psu.edu. If you have any questions regarding your participation, a claim, or any concern in relation to it you may contact the Compliance Office or the Research Associate Dean of the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus at (787) 764-000, extension 215 or at cipshi@degi.rrp.upr.edu. You are also entitled to receive a copy of this document after you have signed it.

If you agree to participate in this research study and with the information described above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

_________________________________  ____________________
Participant Signature     Date

_________________________________  ____________________
Person Obtaining Consent     Date

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely;

_______________________
Teresita Santiago
Graduate Student
256 Chambers Building
Penn State University
Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research (Teacher Consultant)
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: The Development of the Identity Formation Process of Puerto Rican Children within the Post Colonial Context

Principal Investigator: Teresita Santiago, Graduate Student
256 Chambers Building, University Park, PA 16802
(787) 645-9394; tus123@psu.edu

Advisor: Dr. Daniel Hade

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the research is to examine the meaning Puerto Rican students make when exploring questions of identity while reading stories written by Puerto Rican authors. To further extend the study it is important to explore how English textbooks are selected in the Public School System in Puerto Rico.

Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to answer three questions during an interview in which you will explain the protocol used by the Department of Education in Puerto Rico to select the English textbooks. This may take approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

Discomfort and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research other than those commonly experienced in everyday life communication. Your privacy will be protected by using a pseudonym instead of your name.

Benefits: Your participation in this project could help an administrator like you to reflect in depth about the English textbooks selection policies in Puerto Rico.

Duration: For this research you will be asked to commit just thirty to forty five minutes of your time during the interview session since only three questions will be asked.

Statement of Confidentiality: Any identifiers will be removed from all written documents. Only the investigator will know your identity through a pseudonym. The data will be secured at the investigator’s home in a locked cabinet and all data analysis will be saved with a password protected file in the investigator’s personal computer which only the investigator will have access to. However, informed consent forms will be destroyed by the researcher after three years of the investigation, around September 2008.

The Office for Research and the Social Science Institutional Review Board may review records related to this project. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research no personal identifiable information will be shared.
Right to Ask Questions: You may ask any questions about the research to the investigator, Ms. Teresita Santiago, at any time. You may contact Teresita at the following telephone number (787) 645-9394.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose the questions you want to answer or do not want to answer. Moreover, you may stop your participation at any time. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this project. If you have any reason to believe that the researcher is not following this agreement, please contact her supervisor Dan Hade at ddh2@psu.edu. If you have any questions regarding your participation, a claim, or any concern in relation to it you may contact the Compliance Office or the Research Associate Dean of the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus at (787) 764-000, extension 215 or at cipshi@degi.rrp.upr.edu. You are also entitled to receive a copy of this document after you have signed it.

If you agree to participate in this research study and with the information described above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

__________________________________________________________________________  ___________________________________________________________________
Participant Signature                                                                 Date

__________________________________________________________________________  ___________________________________________________________________
Person Obtaining Consent                                                                 Date

Thank you very much for your time:

Sincerely;

_______________________
Teresita Santiago
Graduate Student
256 Chambers Building
Penn State University
University Park, PA 16802
Appendix B

Invitation Letters
Invitation Letter for Parents and Students

Queridos Padres y Estudiantes:

Mi nombre es Teresita Santiago y estoy actualmente estudiando en la Universidad del estado de Pensilvania. Mi objetivo es obtener un doctorado en Currículo y Educación. Este grado me ayudará a obtener mayor conocimiento en el área de Educación lo cual me convertiría en una educadora mas competente.

Para lograr este objetivo y como parte de los requisitos para obtener el doctorado es importante hacer un trabajo de investigación. Es aquí donde necesito de tu ayuda ya que esta investigación requiere de tu opinión en relación a la identidad cultural Puertorriqueña y el estudio del idioma Inglés en Puerto Rico. Has sido escogido para participar de este estudio ya que fuiste uno de mis estudiantes en quinto grado y participaste en un cuestionario que esta servidora llevó a cabo en la clase de Inglés hace tres años atrás. Tus respuestas a este cuestionario han contribuido al desarrollo de mi tema de tesis. El propósito del estudio es que estudiantes Puertorriqueños como tu puedan explorar preguntas relacionadas a la identidad cultural Puertorriqueña a través de la lectura de cuentos en Inglés escritos por autores Puertorriqueños y no Puertorriqueños.

Además como estudiante participante, se estaría solicitando información personal la cual puedes declinar en contestar si así lo decidieras. También tendrás la libertad de contestar sólo las preguntas de la entrevista que así desees y puedes declinar participar del proyecto en cualquier momento.

Sin embargo, tu participación es sumamente importante para obtener más conocimiento en torno al tema de la identidad Puertorriqueña y llegar a conclusiones en este estudio. No existe riesgo físico o personal alguno en participar y se utilizará un nombre ficticio para proteger tu identidad real. Por otra parte podrías beneficiarte ya que aprenderías más sobre ti mismo, tu identidad cultural y tu herencia cultural Puertorriqueña.

Si tienes alguna otra pregunta relacionada a este estudio, puedes sentirte en la libertad de llamar a la investigadora a cargo del mismo al (787) 645-9394. Adjunto estoy enviando las hojas de consentimiento para que tu y tus padres las lean cuidadosamente. Como participante menor de edad será necesario el permiso de tus padres para participar del estudio. Yo me comunicaré con ustedes cuando llegue a Puerto Rico el próximo semestre y programaré una reunión para recoger los permisos. Gracias anticipadas por tu colaboración y la de tus padres en este importante proyecto.

Cordialmente;

____________________
Teresita Santiago
Ph.D. Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction
Pennsylvania State University
Dear Parents and Students:

My name is Teresita Santiago and I am currently studying at Penn State University. My goal is to obtain a doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction, which will help in advancing my knowledge in the Education field and become a more competent educator.

In order to fulfill this goal and as part of my studies requisites to obtain this degree I must conduct a research in which your personal opinion in relation to Puerto Rican cultural identity and the study of the English language in Puerto Rico is very important. You have been chosen to participate in this study because you were one of my students in fifth grade and participated in a survey I conducted in the classroom as part of the class three years ago. Your answers to that survey have helped in developing my research topic. The purpose of the study is to examine the meaning you, as a Puerto Rican middle school student, make or try to make when exploring questions of identity while reading children’s literature in English by Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican authors.

Moreover I would be asking for some personal information, which you as a student participant will be free to answer or decline to answer. You will also have the freedom to decide which questions from the interview you want to answer or not. Your participation is voluntary and you may decline to continue participating whenever you wish.

However, your participation is very important in order to gain knowledge regarding the topic of the study and to come to conclusions. There are no personal or physical risks involved in this study and you will be assigned an invented name (pseudonym) to protect your identity. On the other hand you may benefit by learning more about yourself and your cultural identity and heritage. Due to the fact that you are a minor I will be asking your parent’s consent for your participation in this project. If you or your parents have any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact the investigator in charge of the study at (787) 645-9394.

I am enclosing the consent forms for you and your parents to read them carefully. I will be contacting you, the student participant, when I get to Puerto Rico the next fall semester to schedule the first meeting and collect the forms. Thank you very much.

Cordially,

________________
Teresita Santiago
Ph.D. Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction
Penn State University
Invitation Letter for Teachers

Dear Teacher:

At present I, Teresita Santiago, former English teacher at the Elementary School of the University of Puerto Rico am currently at the final stage of my doctoral studies at Penn State University.

As part of the partial requirements to obtain my degree I am conducting a research project regarding Puerto Rican cultural identity and children’s literature. The purpose of the research is to examine the meaning Puerto Rican students make when exploring questions of identity while reading stories written by Puerto Rican authors.

To further extend the study it is important to explore your professional opinion on the English textbooks and children’s literature you use in the classroom. The responses provided will be compared to the students’ opinions on the textbooks. You have been chosen to participate in this study because you are the English teacher of some of the research participant students.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to answer any of the questions in the interview. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any moment, and the anonymity of your participation will be protected. Moreover, you must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this project. If you have any questions in reference to the study please feel free to call me at (787) 645-9394.

Please have my anticipated thanks for your voluntary participation in this study.

Sincerely,

________________

Teresita Santiago
Dear English Consultant:

At present I, Teresita Santiago, former English teacher at the Elementary School of the University of Puerto Rico am currently at the final stage of my doctoral studies at Penn State University.

As part of the partial requirements to obtain my degree I am conducting a research project regarding Puerto Rican cultural identity and children’s literature. The purpose of the research is to examine the meaning Puerto Rican students make when exploring questions of identity while reading stories written by Puerto Rican authors.

To further extend the study it is important to explore how English textbooks are selected in the Public School System in Puerto Rico. Therefore I understand that as an English Program Consultant for the Department of Education in Puerto Rico your expertise in this matter could be very helpful to my research. This is why you have been chosen to participate in this research.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to answer any of the questions in the interview. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any moment, and the anonymity of your participation will be protected. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this project. If you have any questions in reference to the study please feel free to call me at (787) 645-9394.

Please have my anticipated thanks for your voluntary participation in this study.

Sincerely,

________________

Teresita Santiago
Ph.D. Candidate
Curriculum and Instruction
Penn State University
Appendix C

Profile Questions
Profile Questions

English with Spanish version

1- How old are you?
¿Cuántos años tienes?

2- What grade are you in?
¿En qué grado estás?

3- What is your sexual gender?
¿Cuál es tu género sexual?

4- Have you lived in Puerto Rico all of your life? If not, where else did you live? How many years did you live there?
¿Has vivido en Puerto Rico toda tu vida? ¿Si no es así, donde más has vivido? ¿Cuántos años has vivido en ese lugar?

5- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
¿Cuántos hermanos y hermanas tienes?

6- Which school are they attending to?
¿A qué escuela van tus hermanos y hermanas?

7- What do your mother and father do for living?
¿En qué trabajan tu padre y tu madre?

8- Do you think your parent’s political affiliation influence your views of yourself as Puerto Rican or American? How or how not?
¿Crees que la afiliación política de tus padres tiene algún efecto en cómo te ves como Puertorriqueño o Americano?
Appendix D

Interview Questions for Students
Interview Questions for Students

English with Spanish version

1- Do you like to speak English? Yes or No? Explain.
   ¿Te gusta hablar inglés? ¿Sí o No? Explica

2- How do you feel when you have to speak English?
   ¿Cómo te sientes cuando tienes que hablar en inglés?

3- Do you think we should learn to speak English in Puerto Rico? Yes or No? Explain.
   ¿Crees que debemos aprender inglés en Puerto Rico? ¿Sí o No? Explica

4- Do you like to have an English class? Yes or No? Explain.
   ¿Te gusta tener la clase de inglés? ¿Sí o No? Explica

5- Would you take the English class even if it would not be required? Yes or No? Explain.
   ¿Tomarías la clase de inglés aunque no fuera requisito? ¿Sí o No? Explica.

6- Do you think that learning to speak English is important? Yes or No? Explain.
   ¿Piensas que aprender inglés es importante? ¿Sí o No? Explica.

7- Do you feel Puerto Rican? If the answer is yes, how do you know you are Puerto Rican? What does it mean to be Puerto Rican for you?
   ¿Te sientes Puertorriqueño? Si contestas que sí, como sabes que eres Puertorriqueño? ¿Qué significa ser Puertorriqueño para ti?

8- Do you feel American? If the answer is yes, can you describe what does it mean to be an American for you?
   ¿Te sientes Americano? ¿Si la contestación es sí, podrías describir qué significa ser Americano para ti?

9- Do you think American and Puerto Rican are the same? Yes or No? Explain.
   ¿Piensas que ser Americano o Puertorriqueño es lo mismo? ¿Sí o No? Explica.
Appendix E

Book Club Discussion Questions
Book Club Discussion Questions

English with Spanish version

1- Did you identify yourself with any character from the story? Yes or No? Why?
   ¿Te identificas con algún personaje del cuento? ¿Sí o No? ¿Por qué?

2- Could you identify any Puerto Rican character in the story? Yes or No? Explain. If yes, how did you know the character is Puerto Rican?
   ¿Podrías identificar algún personaje Puertorriqueño en la historia? ¿Sí o No? Explica. ¿Si lo hay, cómo sabes que el personaje es Puertorriqueño?

3- Tell me how this book compares to the ones you like to read.
   ¿Cómo se compara este libro con los que a ti te gusta leer?

4- How does this book compare to the one you are using in the English class right now? Are there any differences or similarities? Explain.
   ¿Cómo se compara este libro con los que estas usando actualmente en tu clase de inglés? ¿Hay algunas diferencias o similitudes? Explica

5- Do you look for books with Puerto Rican characters in them? Why or why not?
   ¿Cuando lees, buscas libros que tengan personajes Puertorriqueños en ellos? ¿Por qué o por qué no?
Appendix F

Interview Questions for Teachers
Interview Questions for Teachers

1- Are you satisfied with the English textbooks you use in your English class? Yes or No? Explain.

2- Do you think these textbooks are relevant to your Puerto Rican students’ lives? Yes or No? Explain.

3- Are these English textbooks a good tool for your students to learn English? Yes or No? Explain.

4- If you could change anything about the English textbook you are using right now, what would that be? Why?

5- Do you think your students can see themselves portrayed in these textbooks? Yes or No? Explain.
Appendix G

Interview Questions for English Consultant
Interview Questions for English Consultant

1- What is the Department’s of Education’s protocol in selecting English textbooks for the public school system in Puerto Rico?

2- What is the evaluation criteria used by the Department of Education to select English textbooks?

3- Are English books written by Puerto Rican authors selected to be used in the English class? Yes or No? Explain.
VITA

Teresita Santiago

Education:
PhD. in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Bilingual Education and a minor in Language Literacy, May 2008. Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.

M.A. in TESOL (Teaching English to Students of Other Languages) Education Program, English Department, June 1990. Interamerican University, San Juan, Puerto Rico

B.A. in TESOL Elementary and Secondary Education, College of Education, May 1984 University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Professional Experience:
Instructor, World Campus Children’s Fantasy Literature, Spring 2008

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Children’s Literature Course, August 2003 to May 2007 Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

Instructor, Interactive TV Children’s Literature Course, January, 1999 to April, 2003

ESL Certification Grant, Metropolitan University, Ana G. Méndez, San Juan, P.R.

ESL Teacher, Kindergarten to Sixth Grade, August 1992 to May 2003

Elementary Laboratory School of the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus

Adjunct Faculty Member of the English Department, August, 1990 to May, 1991

Interamerican University, Río Piedras Campus, San Juan, Puerto Rico

ESL Teacher and supervisor, Elementary and Secondary, August, 1987 to May 1992

Cupey Maria Montessori School, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico

Elementary Bilingual teacher (English and Spanish), September 1984 to June 1987

Cincinnati Board of Education, Cincinnati, Ohio

Publications

Big Books Use in the ESL Classroom in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico TESOL GRAM, Vol. 23 No.2 Spring, 1996

Problem Solvers to the Rescue; Frances V. Figarella-García, Lizette M. Velázquez-Rivera, and Teresita Santiago - Rivera, Science Children, Vol. 41 No. 7 April 2004

Professional Organizations
Puerto Rico TESOL Association, (PRTESOL) National Association of Laboratories School, (NALS) International Research Society of Children’s Literature (IRscl)