Wisdom and activism come to us sometimes in the smallest and most unexpected ways through soft, previously silenced, yet passionate voices. Critical theory, critical literacy, and related approaches to learning about the world and many forms of knowledge can be a potentially effective way to address complexities of our changing world society. Critical pedagogists and other postmodern scholars speak often of the importance of educators taking on the risk and responsibility of being intellectual participants. By attending to both the sense of opposition and the sense of engaged participation intellectuals can explore the possibilities for action.

This book reports on qualitative research following educators—including parents, community elders and teachers using critical literacy—in several countries and documents the ways the educators use various funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 2005) for self-advocacy. It modestly attempts to address the funds of knowledge of educators (families and community members) in a variety of contexts from a variety of cultures, continents, and situations of living.

Thus, this book is for all of us striving to make connections with migrating people through our work—educators, researchers, community activists, classroom teachers, family advocates, and readers interested in the changing dynamics of societies.
Refugee and Immigrant Family Voices
Bold Visions in Educational Research
Volume 21

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Books on teaching and learning to teach focus on any of the curriculum areas (e.g., literacy, science, mathematics, social science), in and out of school settings, and points along the age continuum (pre K to adult). The purpose of books on research methods in education is not to present generalized and abstract procedures but to show how research is undertaken, highlighting the particulars that pertain to a study. Each book brings to the foreground those details that must be considered at every step on the way to doing a good study. The goal is not to show how generalizable methods are but to present rich descriptions to show how research is enacted. The books focus on methodology, within a context of substantive results so that methods, theory, and the processes leading to empirical analyses and outcomes are juxtaposed. In this way method is not reified, but is explored within well-described contexts and the emergent research outcomes. Three illustrative examples of books are those that allow proponents of particular perspectives to interact and debate, comprehensive handbooks where leading scholars explore particular genres of inquiry in detail, and introductory texts to particular educational research methods/issues of interest. to novice researchers.
Refugee and Immigrant Family Voices

Experience and Education

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Voices of Experience

To survive the Borderlands
you must live sin fronteras
be a crossroads.

(Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 195)

The poet, Anzaldúa speaks of surviving in borderlands...of being a crossroad. I believe that the current world, in which borders are in a state of flux with tenuous peace and where governments come and go, families and schools become the crossroads. The voices of teachers, of students, of families and friends in our communities around the world can be voices of possibility if only we can listen and learn from each other.

Our cultural, human roots that we pass on to children are no longer neatly contained within borders. Human community, history, and politics have become more and more complex over the past decades. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1996), stories are the nearest we can get to experience, as we tell of our experiences. They say that the act of our telling our stories seems “inextricably linked with the act of making meaning, an inevitable part of life in a ...postmodern world” and only becomes problematic “...when its influence on thinking and perception goes unnoticed” or is ignored (Goldstein, 1997, p. 147).

No one develops or learns out of the current context of family, community, country, or world at the present time or without a connection to the past--the stories of those who have gone before. Learning develops among particularities, among persons and objects in families and communities. I believe that by using critical theory and critical literacy as a perspective in our interactions with immigrant and refugee families that the stories of people who are not currently “heard” will open up an environment of possibility for students and society. The complex issues of a world in conflict and confusion can be addressed in an on-going dialogue when people are listened to and respected.

Educators around the world have been facing stark challenges that seem to only become more complex as the months proceed. On the one hand, all over the Middle East, the Balkans, and into Africa, successive generations have handed down a legacy of loss, desperation, and betrayal to their offspring. Political and economic conditions affect all aspects of education. On the other hand, economic
globalization—with all its disadvantages and advantages—has uprooted families and brought people together in previously unpredictable circumstances. Critical theory and critical literacy in research, teaching and project implementation gets at all these issues in a related way and gets at the most important questions in literacy, learning, teaching, education, and living.

Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former Director of the United Nations Higher Commission for Human Rights, implores us to “…put a human face on migration…” (Robinson, 2005). Wisdom and activism come to us in sometimes the smallest and most unexpected ways through soft, previously silenced, yet passionate voices. Interactions with refugee and immigrant families during this research have put a human face on migration for me and the teachers I work with.

**Who are immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers?**

Immigrants are people who move from one country to another for the purpose of permanent residence. It has become accepted knowledge that a refugee is a person seeking asylum in a foreign country in order to escape persecution. Those who seek refugee status are sometimes known as asylum seekers and the practice of accepting such refugees is that of offering political asylum. The most common asylum claims to industrialized countries are based upon political and religious grounds. Refugee status may be granted on the basis of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

Refugees are a subgroup of the broader category of displaced persons and are distinguished from economic migrants who have left their country of origin for economic reasons, and from internally displaced persons who have not crossed an international border. Environmental refugees (people displaced because of environmental disasters are not included in the definition of “refugee” under international law. The practical determination of whether a person is a refugee or not is most often left to certain government agencies within the host country. This can lead to abuse in a country with a very restrictive official immigration policy. Under the 1951 Convention on Refugees and 1967 Protocol, a nation must grant asylum to refugees and cannot forcibly return refugees to their nations of origin. However, many nations routinely ignore this treaty. [http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_c_ref.htm](http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_c_ref.htm)

**What is critical literacy and what is the connection with this population of voices?**

For my work, I define critical literacy as using language, both oral and written, as a means of expression, communication and transformation for ourselves and for those around us. I will make the case throughout this book that critical theory, critical literacy, and related approaches to learning about the world and many forms of knowledge can be a potentially effective way to address complexities of our changing world society. The power of critical literacy relates to comments by the late Edward Said about the responsibilities of writers and intellectuals:
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I think it is generally true that in all cultures writers have a separate, perhaps even more honorific, place than do “intellectuals”... Yet at the dawn of the twenty-first century the writer has taken on more and more of the intellectual’s adversarial attributes in such activities as speaking the truth to power, being a witness to persecution and suffering, and supplying a dissenting voice in conflicts with authority (Said, 2000, p. 11).

A young child labeling a drawing of himself and a friend in his home language and in English, a refugee parent recently in a country demanding that information from her child’s school be written in her home language, and a musician using his song writing and performing to address issues of a past life as a child soldier in Africa are all forms of critical literacy that speak truth to power.

My feelings about the importance of intellectual and inventive capabilities lead to my affiliation with critical theory and critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogists and other postmodern scholars speak often of the importance of educators taking on the risk and responsibility of being intellectual participants. By attending to both the sense of opposition and the sense of engaged participation intellectuals can explore the possibilities for action. Said (2000) reminds us of the assumption that even though one can’t do or know everything, it must always be possible to discern the elements of a struggle or problem dialectically, and that others have a similar stake in a common project. He reminded us that at least since Nietzsche, the writing of history and the accumulations of memory have been regarded in many ways as one of the essential foundations of power.

Who are the voices represented in this book?

This book reports on qualitative research following educators—including parents, community elders and teachers using critical literacy—in several countries and documents the ways the educators use various funds of knowledge (Moll, 2005, 1990) for self-advocacy. This story began some years ago when I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a group of parents and teachers to design and implement a Bilingual Family Literacy Project in El Paso, Texas. Later, I initiated a similar project with another group of teachers and families to create a family literacy project in Minnesota with Hmong and Somali families. In summer of 2002, in Ankara, Turkey, I met refugee families on the run, seeking asylum, who taught me a lot about strengths of human spirit and determination for learning and positive family support in deplorable conditions. In London, in early 2004, I met families of Asylum Seekers from 68 countries who, with the collaborations of the Refugee Council, private foundations and committed teachers, had created one of the most dynamic and exciting elementary schools in the absolute poorest neighborhood in London. And currently, on an on-going basis, in New York City, students and I work with families from Chinatown to Brooklyn to Queens to the Bronx—Latino, Syrian, Palestinian, Pakistani, Orthodox Russian Jewish, and Central American families. Sometimes the work takes the form of a family literacy project, sometimes it takes the form of parent support groups, sometimes it takes the form...
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of parents designing curriculum through art and history to augment a school’s standard curriculum. All encounters involve participants’ use of critical literacy and personal historical and cultural knowledge.

I believe that students’ family histories must be on-going and a part of education. What does history mean when studying teaching and learning? Critical literacy is a process of both reading history (the world) and creating history (what do you believe is important?) Large sweeps of history take meaning from the small stories. Family histories can be studied by making language and culture visible through multicultural literacy events for students in school and for all people through public discourse and media. To belong is to be recognized as a full participant in the practices that shape knowledge, identities, and action. Yet, to learn is to draw upon one’s own and others’ knowledge sources, to transform these, and formulate conceptual frames for future learning. Many of the students today in schools around our country have exquisitely complex stories of going and coming. They have gone from a home country for a myriad of reasons, and they have come to their new country with a multitude of experiences. Rudolfo Anaya (2004) writes “The history of la gente was embedded in the oral tradition, but it had to be mined if one was to know the ways of the ancestors” (p. 2).

PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The philosophical and theoretical framework for this research is critical theory. Some scholars label critical theory, critical social theory (Leonardo, 2004). Whatever label critical theory is given, most scholars believe that through critical social theory the discourse will be broadened in terms of the horizon of possibility (Leonardo, 2003). The multidisciplinary knowledge base of critical social theory affirms the role of criticism and rejects the radical differentiation between theory and practice as two separate poles of a dualism. Critical social theory encourages the production and application of theory as a part of the overall search for transformative knowledge. Of course, critical social theory is not a unified field and contains debates. Critical social theory and critical pedagogy were popularized by the late Paulo Freire.

According to Freire (1997), freedom can only occur when the oppressed reject the image of oppression “…. and replace it with autonomy and responsibility” (p. 29). Those who adopt Freire’s pedagogy must be aware that it is not made up of techniques to save the world. Instead, he felt that “...the progressive educator must always be moving out on his or her own, continually reinventing me and reinventing what it means to be democratic in his or her own specific cultural and historical context” (Freire, 1997, p. 308). Freire’s work has given education a language to discuss the effect of oppression on people and their ability to intervene on their own behalf.

As a teacher researcher, I believe that at all of us must consistently reflect on our work and our convictions. This constant clarification of our own values and action in all areas of pluralistic work with students is the ongoing aim of education. I see this clarification as Freire (19854) does when he defines conscientization (based on
the Brazilian conscientização), as “the process by which human beings participate critically in a transforming act” (p. 106). I see our world as a community of learners which reflects characteristics of the many contexts from which students come and the global community where we all struggle to live together peacefully. In 1970, Freire published his first work in English, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which outlined the foundation of his principals illuminating the following points:

– People can be Subjects (rather than Objects of subjugation) who act upon and transform their world, and in so doing move toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively.

– Every human being is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others.

– Provided with proper tools for this encounter, the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it (Freire, 1998, p. 14).

Paulo Freire (1973) and critical pedagogists going back to the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory in the 1920s advocated that all new learning be based on personal experience in a way that encourages critical reflection. All learning must include active participation. Critical social theory, which has grown out of critical theory, encourages the production and application of theory as a part of the overall search for transformative knowledge. Leonardo (2004) acknowledges that it is “…Freire’s work that promotes ideology critique, an analysis of culture, attention to discourse, and a recasting of the teacher as an intellectual or cultural worker” (p. 12).

Although different forms of critical social theory may debate the nature of oppression—such as economics in Marxism, discourse in Foucauldian analysis, gender in feminism, or race in critical race theory—they unite in the idea that social inequality is persistent and it subverts learners’ full learning potential. Thus, critical social theorists are not in the habit of justifying that oppression exists, but prefer describing the form it takes. Said (2000) prefers the phrase “historical experience” because it is not esoteric (therefore accessible) but not without its theoretical moorings that a critical social theorist like Said proceeds to unpack.

In addition to standing on the shoulders of the activist work and philosophy of Paulo Freire (1973, 1985), this particular research has been also informed by the writings of Benjamin (1987) and Bakhtin (1988) scholars also working in the tradition of critical theory. According to Benjamin (1987), history should not be seen as “what has happened,” but rather as something that is “to be done,” a possible action. Time is not considered to be fixed. Benjamin argued that people do not believe in an unalterable past, an unalterable present, and an unalterable future. He believed that an avenue, a vase of flowers, reading children’s books, washing dishes, eating, and other elements of everyday life became the objects of critical scrutiny. A view of this sort set him apart from the analysis of unexpected events of official Marxism and placed him squarely within a certain current of critical theory (Eagleton, 1990). Benjamin (1984) believed that truth resides within language. Only in language can the comprehensio take place and can the multiplicity of knowledge be understood. Thus, the intention of this research is not
to sacrifice either authenticity or significance, but to provide opportunity for the participants to speak out for themselves.

This qualitative research focuses on the fragments, the small stories, histories, and events that inform and compose bigger human stories. Kramer (2005) believes that in much social science research, there is compromise and loss when people are converted into objects or demographics of ethnicity, race, gender, and statistical analyses of standardized test scores. People’s own histories are the contexts for developing identity, learning cultural information, and the basis for learning all new information—from academic English to the most complex of mathematical functions. Life histories—which are often explored through various forms of story—are considered to be a collective memory of the past, a critical awareness of the present, and an operational premise for the future (Kramer, 2001).

According the Benjamin (1987), in order to escape isolation, it is necessary to establish alternative relationships with tradition and culture, and this underlines the importance of memories. Reviewing the past enables us to view the present in a critical way and to effect changes in the future. Thus, history is no longer understood in a chronological way, but rather as a process in which meanings are recreated. Life histories and literacy histories are examples of this process. Once participants—both adult and child learners—start recalling, participants see new meaning in their own lives and begin to see possibilities for change as well. Therefore, to recall is at the same time to reenact, reconstruct, and rethink past experiences, a process that involves a relationship both with history and culture. Rereading one’s history and reviewing past and present experiences autobiographically entail rewriting that history, and lending new meaning to it.

Critical literacy and a critical approach to teaching and learning are powerful because they situate the participants as the activists in the dance between lived experience and new information. Critical perspectives focus on the process of question formulation, as opposed to Cartesian modernism/positivism’s concern with question answering or problem solving (Kincheloe, 2001). Critical literacy and critical learning encourages a natural movement from reflection toward action.

My work using critical literacy and the postmodern frames which give utmost importance to cultural and social history as well as communal and individual transformative action is enhanced also by the work of the New Literacy Studies movement (Gee, 1991; Street, 1995). This tradition looks at the nature of literacy as a social practice and recognizes multiple literacies, always considering “whose literacies” are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant.

Brian Street (2003) reminds us that literacy is loaded with ideological and policy pre-suppositions that make doing ethnographic studies of the variety of literacies across contexts a complex task. Street (2003) developed a working distinction between “literacy events” and “literacy practices.” Prinsloo and Breier (1996) offer a series of case studies of literacy in South Africa. They used the concept of “events”, but then extended it to “practices”, by describing the everyday uses and meanings of literacy among people. For example literacy took on meaning among urban taxi drivers, struggle activists in settlements, rural workers using diagrams to build carts, and those involved in providing election materials for mainly non-
literate voters as went about their daily work. The concept of literacy practices in these and other contexts links them to broader cultural and social meanings (Street, 2003).

I, with my teacher education students, address what such understandings might mean for creating environments for learning and for developing practice both inside and outside school. The teacher education students practice using this critical literacy framework and document their journey of creating literacy and opportunities that extend beyond the classroom to use the words of their families and communities for education.

For example, in Ms. Rafiq’s first grade class, every child came to this country from another country, recently. Some never spoke English before Kindergarten last year. Some speak the English of Guyana and don’t qualify for English language services, but the dialect is so different that it is as if the children are working with a second language. Some children are from Central America, some are from India, some are from Russia, and others are from Haiti. And they become engaged participants in the poetry that Ms. Rafiq adores and introduces them to.

She began her collaborations in qualitative action research with her first graders, by sharing with them part of a poem she had written as a part of a “Where I’m From” List Poem activity. Her belief is that teaching and learning involving sharing and disclosing personal stories as a collaboration to learn others’ stories and encourage critical literacy. Ms. Rafiq’s poem includes the following stanza.

I am from spices and scarves,  
hand-me downs and baseball cards  
I am from friendly neighbors and bus stops  
and a place where we walk and not drive  
I am from Ahmed and Razia  
who came here to give me a better life.

With this type of beginning, she involves them in writing their own poetry through her literacy program. They also make dioramas for a social studies project. The dioramas are set in a country where their families come from, and after a mini-lesson on voice as a part of the week’s Writers Workshop, the children plan what the characters in the dioramas are talking about in their own voice. They write the words, sometimes in English, sometimes in the home language of the families.

Lisa Delpit (1995) maintains, “We all carry worlds in our heads, and those worlds are decidedly different (p. xiv).” We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don’t even know they exist? Growing up as members of a family and community, children learn explicitly and implicitly the rules and expectations of their cultures. Individual children may be members of more than one cultural group and may be embedded in their cultures to different degrees. The cultures borrow and share rules and cultures change over time.
As Csikszentmihalyi (1996) reminds us, “As cultures evolve, it becomes increasingly difficult to master more than one domain of knowledge...Therefore, it follows that as culture evolves, specialized knowledge will be favored over generalized knowledge” (p. 9). So, there is need for students to learn specific knowledge from practicing teachers in a variety of contexts and educators must learn specific knowledge from the students and their families.

Deep understanding of the assumption that words, deeds, policy, practice, and theory application are inseparably linked in our world today underlies this work. We cannot pretend that education is neutral, nor can the practice be done in isolation. Thus, a study of history, social science, and the humanities must underlie a study of education. In this perspective, community becomes a context for studying education.

One example illustrates a type of lived experience which is often viewed from a perspective of deficit, when, in fact, Raúl Quintanilla describes a complex and positive learning environment in his early family life. Now an English as a second language teacher, Mr. Quintanilla grew up in a family of farm workers who migrated yearly from Texas to Minnesota. He explains,

My parents lived in Mexico and then they crossed to the United States. I was born right on this side of the border. I have eight brothers and eight sisters. In the summer I would work every day from 5:00 A.M. ’til sundown. We didn’t work during the school year except for weekends (Quintanilla, 1997, p. 165).

He goes on to describe the days in the fields,

Everything was very positive. Your father is there, your mother is there, and your brothers and sisters are there too. You are all working together and your father is saying good things all day, every day for a long time. I didn’t know at that time, but it was a close family unit. They talk about supporting a family now with two incomes. With the migrant families we were doing that long ago (Quintanilla, 1997, p. 165).

This family story certainly points out family strengths in the situated reality of difficult day-to-day survival of migrant farm worker life. The voices of the family members’ lived experience helps to problematize the analysis of family strengths, family support for learning, and other related issues.

Moll, Gonzalez, and Amanti (2005) give long-awaited documentation to the theoretical and practical issues of *Funds of Knowledge* as important contributions to our knowledge in the various fields of education. One reviewer (Carney, 2005) of the book pointed out that there are not enough accounts of this type of work outside of the contexts of the southwestern United States. This book modestly attempts to address the funds of knowledge of educators (families and community members) in a variety of contexts from a variety of cultures, continents, and situations of living.

As previously stated, my research questions based upon critical literacy are: Whose stories are important and in what ways? What ways can we learn from the
As Gleick (1987) reports that scholars of chaos theory see order in apparent experiential randomness of people’s lives and “sensitive dependence on initial conditions” (p. 29), so do I. I use this metaphor, not as a thoughtless application of one area of science to another, but as a metaphor to structure my conversation about a complex qualitative study. Non-linear dynamics, of which Chaos Theory forms an important part, is currently an active and fashionable discipline that is having a profound effect on a wide variety of topics in the hard sciences. Recently these ideas, particularly those of chaos theory, have found applications in economics, ecology, population dynamics, the health sciences (including the dynamics of processes in the human body) and sociology (Eve, 1997).

The points of my research are 1) that often teachers—knowledgeable and informative—come to us in the persona of refugee and immigrant family members, 2) that effective learning is a continuum, and 3) that participatory learning is multidimensional, when learners and teachers often reverse roles. There is never one finding as a result of this research about effective learning; learning effectively is the interrelationship of life and teaching in a continuum looping around forever. And as in the Lorenz butterfly, the system (the data) never exactly repeats itself, the trajectory never intersects itself (Gleick, 1987). Instead it loops around and around forever and illustrates information we can learn from our informants’ lives.

The three fixed points are for me the theoretical perspectives relating to critical theory and critical literacy through which I view the data. The system that changes is the interaction of the themes, outlined by each chapter, changing constantly according to the individuals and the contexts. In other words, theory changes in light of different families and contexts. This approach to research uses experience as central to theorizing and to understanding practice and, as Clandinin and Connelly (1994) maintain, “For us, keeping experience in the foreground comes about by periodic returns to the works of Dewey (1916, 1934, 1938). For Dewey, education, experience, and life are inextricably intertwined” (p. 5).

Situation, the central term in Dewey’s theory of experience, is specified by two criteria, interaction and continuity. Interaction refers to the intersection internal and existential conditions…Continuity refers to the temporal positioning of every situation. Situations don’t just happen; they are historical and temporally directional according to the intentionality of the organism undergoing experience. (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994), p. 6)

I have seen through the process and content of my research that, in the construction of narratives of experience, there was a relationship between living a life story and telling a life story. This telling a life story often is made in the language of metaphor. Clandinin (1986) found that verbal imagery of teachers often clusters around metaphors such as planting a seed or making a home and that these metaphors reveal the “complex coalescence of personal and professional experience and of theory and practice. In an exploration of the relations among families’ histories, the historical text in which they move and the broader patterns
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which release the participants’ imaginations, metaphor takes on central importance. Metaphor often provides the possibility of communicating what cannot be expressed literally. We make the world familiar with metaphor, Maxine Greene (1992) says, “We feel less powerless when we can name and explain.” This empowerment is the essence of critical transformation.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study uses an observational case study format described by Bogdan & Biklen (1998). Central to this research design are data-collection techniques such as participant-observation and formal and informal interviews. It is believed that by using these methodological techniques, the intersection of teaching and learning, the intersections of different languages and literacies, and the intersections of the relationships among students and teachers can be documented in the type of rich contextual detail that will be useful to educators in the field. Further, because the study is designed to learn from a varied, but specific population of learners in contexts with a critical literacy focus, the design lends itself to the data collection and analysis purposes that can show a variety of forms of meaning.

This book is based on the stories and observations of real educators at work in families, communities, and schools. The complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, and tension which the reader will see in each participant’s contribution and story form the vitality of the information which I have presented here. While the information falls into the educational themes addressed, the different life experiences don’t repeat themselves, but yield information about educator’s variations on the themes. As Lather (1994) suggests, I, the researcher, move beyond referential naiveté in a way that doesn’t simply collapse the referent, that doesn’t dismiss what Cornell West (1990) terms “a reality that one cannot not know” (p. 20). I believe, as Freire (1998) explains, we must consistently try to “diminish the distance between me and the perverse reality of the exploited” (p. 123). Freire goes on to say that we must be passionate about gaining “the knowledge of how to uncover hidden truths and how to demystify farcical ideologies, those seductive traps into which we easily fall” (p. 123).

PARTICIPANTS

In the past when I asked teachers to participate in my research, I used Casey’s (1993) concept of teacher as “artisan,” implying the possibility of changing the world through work. These exemplary teachers create curricula which weave their knowledge with the needs and interests of their students. In most cases they create or participate in organizations which impact larger systems of school or society. Casey defines the activist teachers whom she interviewed as “progressive” because they “advocate social change which will benefit the constituencies they work with, they acknowledge conflicts, and recognize contradictions and inequalities in society. I used the same criteria as I searched for wisdom and participation from
refugee and immigrant families. I chose samples of work, interviews, and stories from parents, community elders, family members, and students to contribute to this book. I have included educators—parents, community members, teachers, and students—from a wide spectrum of racial, class, and gender backgrounds who live in a variety of contexts. I have found that these experts I have met and interviewed, like Casey’s (1993) participants, resist labels. They just want to do their work. Family members and teachers, both in and outside of the classroom, have the power to change their own and their children’s lives. Through my research I have strengthened my belief that learning is an interrelationship of life’s activities and priorities both inside and outside the classroom.

Bateson (2004) acknowledges that in much qualitative research, the “anthropological sample” is usually …not representative or random or clearly stratified—it is simply available and articulate …their work has often included long hours with individuals whose very aberrancy made them self-conscious and who were stimulated by it to find the communication of their traditions to the outsider useful or interesting for themselves. In order to use the statements and actions of such informants in the construction of a measured view of a whole culture, field-workers have had to look carefully at how each informant fits in to the whole, at the way in which informants’ views might be expected to complement or counterpoint or indeed contradict—but never be simple irrelevant to—the views of other members of the community. They are not representative but are indicative (p. 19).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data is analyzed using the framework of critical theory. The findings have been categorized according to the themes which emerged, mentioned previously. In addition, the framework also demands that the politics of knowledge and the origins of sustained inequities of modern society be examined by participants in the context of their studies (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. They say that the word qualitative implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously measured or measured at all in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. The qualitative design supports the study of the intersection of languages (native and target), culture, instructional contexts, and the critical use of language by the learners. The design is the most appropriate for looking at teaching and learning that uses a critical theory framework.

With previous studies on gender and education, I interviewed parents and community members, mostly women, at various geographical locations and in various cultural and political contexts….how they educate—in the broad sense—children in their care. Insights from Gilligan’s (Gilligan & Spencer, 2003) Listening Guide Method, a voice centered, relational approach to understanding the
human world guided my coming up with a listening guide to structure my understanding of the participants’ information. Combined with strategies described by Patton (2001) as “interview guide” and “informal conversational interviewing” techniques gave our informants’ voice in order to relate how their values and decision making in the context they are in affects the education of their children. Depth interviewing such as this consists of asking questions, rerecording the informant’s answers, and then following up with more relevant questions. In the interview guide approach, topics and questions to address are decided in advance and documented in outline form. The interviewer decides on the order and specific wording of questions as the interview progresses. In informal conversational interviewing, the questions emerge from the immediate context, and are asked in the normal course of events, such as a visit in the parent-informant’s setting. As Patton (1989) states, “The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter the other person’s perspective” (p. 109).

I then designed my listening guide that illustrates the relationships among personal cultural and social history, literacy, language, metaphor, and transformative action. The listening guide was used as I listened to the taped interviews, as I analyzed information from the transcribed interviews, and as I analyzed field notes. The listening guide consists of four stages. First, I listened to the informants’ comments in terms of what factual information was being related. Second, I listened to voice, which often resonated with realities of race, class, and gender embedded in what the person was saying. Third, I attended to the ways families talked about literacy and relationships. Fourth, I listened again to the whole voice with attempts to adhere to guidance from feminist literary critics who have contributed to what Rich (1979) calls “revision…the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old test from a new critical direction” (p. 35).

When a metaphor is proposed it generates questions….A metaphor goes on generating ideas and questions, so that a metaphorical approach to the world is endlessly fertile and involves constant learning. A good metaphor continues to instruct. (Bateson, 1994, p. 135)

After interviewing the participants, as Gleick (1987) saw, I saw order in apparent experiential randomness of the parents’ lives and “sensitive dependence on initial conditions” (p. 29). I saw through the parents’ experience a fine structure which shows the changing relationships among the variables (theoretical perspectives). And as in the Lorenz butterfly, the system (the data) never exactly repeats itself, the trajectory never intersects itself. Instead, it loops round and around forever and illustrates information we can learn from the informants’ lives.

The participants’ stories point to expected and unexpected information. In order to reflect on the wisdom shown by these parents, I look at issues related to the themes of history, culture, power, and transformative action. Yet, in light of my belief in the continuum, the stories and the interaction of all themes in different ways in all cases, the reader sees overlapping patterns in the stories told. The relationship of the themes is not an intersection of categories, but is akin to a gravitational field in which the themes interact. The apparent randomness in the
variables is predictable when viewed using a metaphorical framework borrowed from chaos theory and can inform teacher education.

This information provides more evidence with which to examine, as Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997) urge, the politics of knowledge and the origins of the sustained inequities in current societies.

FINDINGS

The families, parents, and teachers who share their wisdom in this book wear the mantle of expert. I have used the ideas of trusted educators in various related fields to guide the work and set a frame for the expression of the findings, grouped thematically in each chapter. Through the process of critical literacy, or critical literacies, and the human layers of story that result, complex intellectual issues are addressed. The data from this qualitative research have been categorized into themes which fall into categories addressed by the questions below in chapters that follow:

– What are the issues involved as refugees and immigrants move across the world? How do we as citizens of the world support the people and their children to critically address their needs? How can we learn about ways that “Place” tells stories of local and regional politics that are sensitive to the particularities of where people actually live? How is local place connected to global trends that impact local places?

– How, as scholars, can we observe and participate in cultures different from our own? How can one observe the layers of power relations, culture, access, and possibility? How do we maintain respect in all situations? How do we promote activism and avoid voyeurism?

– In what ways does our acknowledgement of the location from where we speak become important for scholars who are concerned with transnational issues that bridge communities or national boundaries and with issues of power?

– How do studies of issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality (that are of concern to contemporary critical scholarship) become situated within geopolitical arrangements, and relations of nations and their inter/national histories? How does this illustrate the need for more complex analyses of ethnicity and race?

– How may critical pedagogues advocate “Reading the World” (Freire and Macedo, 1985), the “texts” students and teachers “decode” the images of their own concrete, situated experiences with the world and the transnational global realities of neighbors, near and far as a way to radically redefine conventional notions of print-based literacy and conventional school curriculum?

– How do acculturation and language acquisition become impacted by the process of aligning new societal expectations and requirements with previous cultural norms, individual perceptions, and experiences preeminent in immigrants’ lives (Ullman, 1997; Zou, 1998)?

– How can we focus on the importance of people telling their own stories (reading the world) in a place where people may be both affirmed and challenged to see
how individual stories are connected in communities to larger patterns of domination and resistance in a multicultural, global society?

– How can we place these complicated findings into practical and hopeful programs?

One more glimpse at Ms. Rafig’s first grade class gives us the hope for the potential of our learning from the variety of families’ backgrounds. Marta’s family from Ecuador for centuries has practiced weaving, the chemical knowledge of making dyes from natural substances, and the complex synthesis of native spirituality and Catholicism. Leo’s family from Guyana represents generations of people who know the sea, the value and nutrition of seafood, and community organizing that would put any NGO to shame. Yinan’s family, from China, is bilingual in Chinese and Russian, as she learns English she uses both an ancient calligraphy technique and a storytelling tradition that has been handed down for generations in her family. Of course, all the children are studying English and addressing the Standards of Literacy and Mathematics for First Grade in New York City and the State of New York. And they are sharing and learning so much more.

One of the greatest mistakes made by social scientists is overstating the degree of sameness—of homogeneity—needed for a society to function.

(Bateson, 1994, p. 165)
WHERE FAMILIES COME FROM – WHAT KIND OF COMMUNITY THEY HOPE TO CREATE

What are the issues involved as refugees and immigrants move around the world? How do we as citizens of the world support the people and their children to critically address their needs? How can we learn about ways that “Place” tells stories of local and regional politics that are sensitive to the particularities of where people actually live? How is local place connected to global trends that impact local places?

Today no region or continent lacks refugees--people caught between danger at home and loss of identity in a strange land. Millions in fear have fled their homes and seek safety in strange societies where they may be isolated, different, and often impoverished. The new refugees are different from refugees in the past in that the new refugees are culturally, racially and ethnically vastly different from their hosts. They come from less-developed countries, at a greatly different stage of development than the host and they are likely to lack kin, potential support groups, in their country of resettlement. These are reasons that schools and agencies assisting refugees in daily life and in resettlement need as much information as possible about them.

Educators can learn from families in a variety of situations. I have conducted qualitative research in a variety of communities where refugees and immigrants have settled and other communities of migration around the world. The information gleaned from the interviews with the participants informs both educators and policymakers about the strengths and needs of refugee families and students in terms of critical literacy and learning. This information can be used around the world in creating pedagogy for literacy, using local knowledge of particular sites, and drawing on a range of strengths and histories for families to advocate for their rights to literacy and learning in difficult times.

CRITICAL THEORY AND COMPLEX AGENDAS

In past research and educational projects (Quintero & Rummel, 2000; Quintero & Rummel, 1998; Rummel & Quintero, 1997; Quintero & Macias, 1995, Quintero, 1994). I have learned much about critical literacy and learning in a global context. While migration affects millions of people a year from all corners of the globe and virtually every nation state, rational analysis and policy discussion on migration and its effects on families are severely lacking. Often policy and educational forums consider the topic of migration to be too politically sensitive or overwhelming to
address. As a result, countries are unprepared to deal with recent developments in the area of international migration and generally make decisions related to migration in an uninformed manner without the benefit of a participatory dialogue.

Mariam, a woman I met in Minnesota, a Somali, gave birth to twins in her home city in Somalia literally in the middle of civil war. When she woke up after almost dying from the difficult birth, she was told by her husband’s family that both baby boys had died. She eventually gained asylum in the United States, and twelve years later, she settled in a small city in Minnesota with a preschool child and a toddler. She took advantage of Head Start for her children and various social services for her health issues which included Traumatic Stress Disorder. Her life was complicated. Then Ali, age thirteen, was brought to her doorstep by a cousin who had been raising the boy in Texas. This was one of the twins that she didn’t know had survived his traumatic birth back in Somalia. The relative left the boy with her. She had no information about his past years, his history, his life. She had no financial support from the child’s father. And as one might imagine, the boy had many issues of his own. This family exemplifies issues of complex history from a war-torn country, a contentious relationship among extended family, childrearing issues, cultural conflicts and misconceptions in a new country, and a desperate need for empowerment and advocacy skills.

In the same group of women in a family literacy class, was Pa from Laos, by way of refugee camps in Thailand. She had grown up and continued for her 55 years to grow the food for her family. She also grew herbs for medicine and flax for making the cloth to make the clothes. Imagine her frustration with the climate, the soil, and ecosystem in her new home in northern Minnesota.

These stories are not particular to the United States. Emmanuel was born during war in Sudan. At age seven or eight, he was taken from his family and forced to fight as a child soldier. A few years later he escaped to Kenya where he was adopted by a British aid worker. In spite of being free of the army, Emmanuel still had a soldier’s mentality and found it difficult to adjust to his new conventional and more loving life. “It’s hard to experience love when you’ve never had any” (STAR, 2005, p. 1).

Emmanuel Jal started writing and performing songs to cheer up his fellow school mates. It was during his time as a student at The University of Westminster in Kenya that Jal’s music became known and he was made an international music star. Yet, he is still haunted by his experiences as a child. He is enormously positive about his life and his future he believes, “The normal people [of Sudan] are for peace” (STAR, 2005, p. 1).

Sadly, no international migration institution or mechanism manages the rights of people who move between countries. At the national level, policies tend to focus overwhelmingly on the legal exclusion of unauthorized migrants, making the need for a policy framework to guide this phenomenon ever more urgent. As population and poverty trends continue to further divide the world into stark divisions of overpopulated, young and poor states on one hand, and wealthy, aging and declining population states on the other, migratory pressures will only intensify, making the
need for a policy framework to guide this phenomenon ever more urgent. These needs for policy considerations directly affect education. (http://www.eginitiative.org/)

A CRITICAL PEDAGOGY OF PLACE

A conjunction of issues illustrated by migrating families and their strengths and needs combines critical theory and issues of place—where people live their lives. Gruenewald (2003) presents a critical pedagogy of place as a much needed framework for educational theory, research, policy, and practice. He advocates for place-based pedagogies so that the education of citizens may have direct influence on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually live. I agree that critical pedagogies are needed to challenge many assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in conventional education in the United States and other countries. In these changing times it is urgent that we re-examine several assumptions. Should education mainly support individualistic and nationalistic competition in the global economy? Is an educational competition of winners and losers in the best interest of public life in a pluralistic society?

Also making a strong connection between cultural context and environment, Mary Catherine Bateson discusses her professional writings, which were influenced by both the anthropological and scientific writings of her parents’ (Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson) ideas:

I continue to feel that the concept of “culture,” which Mead did so much to insert into the thinking of ordinary Americans, is indispensable in working for understanding across lines of difference. I continue to feel that Bateson’s call for systemic thinking is key to developing non-destructive environmental policies. (Bateson, 2004, p. 11)

Gruenewald (2003) tells us that place becomes critical because it focuses attention on analyzing how economic and political decisions impact particular places (Berry, 1992; Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Orr, 1992; Theobald, 1997). Place, in other words, relates to local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live, and that is connected to global development trends that impact local places.

For example, the resilience of children and families from immigrant and minority communities is dramatic. All his life, with a passionate loyalty to and love for his Mexican roots, Raúl Quintanilla has worked for change in communities and in schools. He was born the son of migrant farm workers in Minnesota who had emigrated from Mexico. He has lived and worked in various contexts with people who represent many diverse groups. Now he is an English-as-a-Second-Language teacher for the St. Paul Public Schools in Minnesota. His activism demands that his convictions about people, learning, democracy, discrimination reach far beyond the classroom walls. His background, his reading, and his current work take him throughout the state and region as an advocate for various Latino groups, their potential, their differences and similarities.
Quintanilla’s personal story illustrates how his family’s strengths supported him as a learner and teacher. Quintanilla noted that by third grade, he was blatantly aware that Dick, Tom, Jane, Paul, Tim and Sally, the old reading books in school. I couldn’t understand the one where mommy dropped daddy off at the airport, with a suitcase. And daddy always had a tie. We would go home and say, “My father never wears a tie,” and we didn’t know anything about airports. But that is what the book was teaching us. The food, too. You know, if there was a breakfast, it was eggs, milk, and toast and orange juice. But with our breakfast it was cup of coffee and a piece of Mexican sweet bread. We could make no relation between the school and the home setting (Quintanilla, 1997, p.165).

However, the home setting for him and his brothers and sisters was conducive to learning.

My parents never read to us, but I saw them reading. They read novels and magazines. They read magazines like Superman, these were Spanish, the comic type. Very simple. That is how I learned to read. Nobody taught me to read. (Quintanilla, 1997, p.166).

Unlike critical pedagogy, which evolves from the well-established discourse of critical theory (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993; Freire, 1995; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2003), place-based education does not have a specific theoretical tradition. Its practices and purposes can be connected to experiential learning, contextual learning, problem-based learning, constructivism, outdoor education, indigenous education, environmental and ecological education, bioregional education, democratic education, multicultural education, community-based education, critical pedagogy itself, as well as other approaches that are concerned with context and the value of learning from and nurturing specific places, communities, or regions (Gruenewald, 2003). In recent literature, educators claiming place as a guiding construct associate a place-based approach with outdoor (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000), environmental and ecological (Orr, 1992, 1994; Sobel, 1996; Thomashow, 1996), and rural education (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Theobald, 1997). These ecological and rural associations made with place-based education are often considered separate from the urban, multicultural education most often claimed by critical pedagogues.

In its early stages, critical pedagogy grew out of the efforts of Paulo Freire and his literacy campaigns among peasants in rural areas of Brazil. Recent generations of North American teachers, and cultural workers influenced by Freire’s work have used the theoretical framework and methods with urban minority populations in major metropolitan centers. These different contexts and emphases of each tradition don’t negate the contextual and theoretical relations between the two.

For example, Quintanilla explained a common problem for young Mexican Americans in terms of identity. As a child in school Quintanilla realized:
The Mexicans didn’t want us because we were Chicanos, and Americans didn’t want us because they think we’re Mexican. We didn’t have any heroes to identify with. We didn’t have General MacArthur, we didn’t have Roosevelt. We couldn’t identify with them because we were Mexican Americans. People that they would consider heroes like [James Bowie] and [Davy Crocket] were white people. To Texas history or American history they are heroes. But if you look at Northern Mexican history they are not heroes. They are the crooks who kicked people out of areas. In fact the school I went to was Sam Houston Elementary, and they would praise him. We didn’t know him so we tried to learn. We didn’t really have anything or anyone to identify with, except for the “Cinco de Mayo.” We had one person, General Zaragoza. The reason that we identified with him is because he was born in an area of South Texas…, and he was the one that won the final battle…Then came John F. Kennedy. He was a hero for us.

When I got into high school there was a Chicano movement so I got into that. I got into migrant Mexican American Chicano literature. I did a lot of that type of literature reading...All of my favorite authors were from Southern California: Valdez, Sipuedes, Guerra, más y más. I got very involved. When teachers asked us to write a report I would use one type of literature. I would say, “Why can’t I use Mexican American books?” Everybody else did the opposite. But it was good because the teachers started to learn or understand about diversity (Quintanilla, 1997, p. 163).

McLaren and Giroux (1990) addressed migrant education, issues of race, class, gender, and corporate hegemony as they affect rural community life and education (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Weyer, 2002). Similarly, some place-based educators are undoubtedly Freireian “cultural workers” (Freire, 1998). These teachers often embrace urban contexts and are involved in ecological projects such as naming environmental racism, organizing community gardens, and initiating other community development activities that make urban and rural, social and ecological connections (Hart, 1997; Smith, 2002; Smith & Williams, 1999). Articulating a critical pedagogy of place is a response against educational reform policies and practices that disregard local and regional histories and preferences and leave unexamined the relationship between education and the politics of economic development.

Yet, critical pedagogy often fails to acknowledge that culture is based in ecological systems (Bowers, 1997, 2001) and, place-based education has developed an ecological and rural emphasis that is often addressed separately from the cultural conflicts in mainstream, dominant American culture. The focus on local, ecological experience of place-based approaches is sometimes hesitant to link ecological themes with critical themes such as urbanization and global capitalism and the homogenization of culture (Greunewald, 2003). These missed opportunities to strengthen each tradition can be addressed by a study of parents of immigrant learners in the United States and around the world.
The notion that wisdom and love might have to do with systems that go beyond individuals, of which the individual is only a part, turns up again and again in my writings, whether about environmentalism or fidelity or the communication between mothers and infants. (Bateson, 2004, p. 29)

SUPPORTING MIGRATING FAMILIES

Acknowledging the need to examine the relationship between education and politics of economic, the current sociopolitical context of the early 21st Century, we may look to the work being done on an international level around the issue of global migration. The Global Commission on International Migration was launched by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in December 2003. The Commission’s aim was to analyze gaps in current policy approaches to international migration and provide a framework for a coherent, comprehensive and global response. The Commission was committed to “reframe the current debate on migration in a way that grips the public and political imagination.”

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) was an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think-tank in Washington, D.C. dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provided analysis, development, and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national, and international levels. It hoped to meet the rising demand for pragmatic and thoughtful responses to the challenges and opportunities that large-scale migration, whether voluntary or forced, presents to communities and institutions in an increasingly integrated world. The project conducted a set of coordinated activities carried out by a membership of research, policy and non-governmental organizations who share a vision of strengthened migration policy by means of applied academic research. The Metropolis membership was composed of representatives from over twenty countries and a number of international research and policy organizations representing a wide range of policy and academic interests. Members worked collaboratively on issues of immigration and integration, always with the goal of strengthening policy and thereby allowing societies to better manage the challenges and opportunities that immigration presents, especially to their cities. (Migration Policy Institute, 2004). (http://www.migrationpolicy.org; retrieved November 21, 2005)

In The United Kingdom, the Refugee Council operates numbers of programs for the vast and urgent needs of migrating families. This is the largest organization in the United Kingdom working with asylum seekers and refugees. The Refugee Council is governed by a Board of Trustees, which includes strong refugee representation. It is an organization consisting of various member organizations. Since 1983, the Council has increased its membership base from 50 to nearly 180, a significant number of which are refugee community organizations. The council regularly consults with its membership base.

The Refugee Council is a strongly independent organization and registered as a charity. It is funded by local, central and European government grants, grants from trust funds and corporations and funds provided by individuals through one time
WHAT KIND OF COMMUNITY

donations, standing orders arrangements, legacies and their attendance at Refugee Council events.
The Refugee Council’s work includes:
− giving advice and support to asylum seekers and refugees to help them rebuild their lives;
− working with refugee community organizations, helping them grow and serve their communities;
− caring for unaccompanied refugee children to help them feel safe and supported in the UK;
− offering training and employment courses to enable asylum seekers and refugees to use their skills and qualifications;
− campaigning and lobbying for refugees’ voices to be heard in the UK and abroad; keeping them high on the political agenda and discussed in the media;
− producing authoritative information on refugee issues worldwide, including reports, statistics and analysis. (http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/refugeecouncil/therefugeecouncil.htm, retrieved, January 21, 2006)

While the work of the Refugee Councils is by and large very effective, a critical perspective requires a closer look at difficult issues affecting the work of the organization. The Refugee Council has complex job of being strong advocates for asylum seekers and criticizing the Home Office for not enough support and strong enough action, while at the same time working with this political, government bureaucracy (Maw, 2006).

Just to name a few of the many services provided for asylum seekers and refugees in the London area, there is a One Stop Service in which assistance is given based upon Geneva Convention 1951, (with the assistance of a staff of interpreters of a wide array of world languages) in the tasks of registration for needed services, application issues, and multiple family supports. There is a large Children’s Sector which provides general services for families with young children and through their work with the Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture, very specific services for children and unaccompanied minors.

The office in Brixton supports a large Day Center where a staff cook and a few volunteers provide hot meals for 250 people a day. The Day Center has hot showers available, toys for children, and space and volunteers for various classes such as English as a Foreign Language. The staff provides a get together for youth every Tuesday evening for young people to get together, listen to music, eat, and talk with others their age in similar situations.

STUDY WITH AND LEARNING FROM MIGRATING PEOPLE

As we consider needs of migrating populations, rights, issues of neighborhood including cultural and ecological place, and critical literacy, a look at recent work in the area of New Literacy Studies is appropriate. In terms of theory, Brandt & Clinton (2002) have warned of the limits of only focusing on the local contexts as many New Literacy Studies projects have done. They advocate recognizing the extent to which literacy does often come to local situations from outside and brings
with it both skills and meanings that are larger than the emic perspective favored by New Literacy Studies. Brandt & Clinton’s (2002) work provides a way of characterizing the local/global debate in which everyday literacy practices play a central role. Therefore, we educators working on local literacy issues can draw from new efforts to learn globally. The question raised in the early New Literacy Studies work concerning how we can characterize the shift from observing literacy events to conceptualizing literacy practices does provide both a methodological and empirical way of dealing with this relation and thereby taking account of Brandt and Clinton’s (2002) concern with the “limits of the local”. Collins and Blot (2002) believe that, while New Literacy Studies has generated a compelling series of ethnographies of literacy, there is a danger of simply accumulating more descriptions of local literacies without addressing general questions of both theory and practice.

I believe that by considering literacy issues surrounding the complex lives and learning in immigrant and refugee families through a lens of critical theory and critical literacy, taking guidance from a critical pedagogy of place and New Literacy Studies we will be able to get at a more authentic consideration of literacy theory, practice, and advocacy. For example, issues regarding bilingualism and biliteracy are always complex. Mr. Quintanilla told us,

I was curious because I went across the border. My cousins in Mexico, across the border, were learning to read in Spanish. They had all these magazines laying around. I can still remember reading, La Bruja, and many others. Spanish seemed really easy to me. I learned to read and not to write. There is a difference because we were right on the border. We were sometimes criticized because they would say you can’t speak English correctly and you can’t speak Spanish correctly.....Like still in the 8th grade, I’d turn the radio on and I’d be listening to a song and I still couldn’t understand what they were saying; it was too fast. Because when we went home from school you know, we didn’t speak English at home. Because the parents didn’t speak any English and it would be disrespectful. The other thing was that we were all Mexican American and you spoke English and your brothers would say, “Hey, he thinks he is a big shot, because he knows English.” It was kind of a shame thing to do. That doesn’t help you when you are learning the language. I didn’t have trouble with reading and comprehension because I had very good teachers. I think. I learned the library quickly.... A lot of teachers need training on this. (Quintanilla, 1997, pp. 165-166).

These are issues that are at the center of some developments in New Literacy Studies. Maybin (2000) connects New Literacy Studies to other social-critical work, offering a way of linking Foucauldian notions of Discourse, Bakhtinian notions of intertextuality, and work in Critical Discourse Analysis with the recognition from New Literacy Studies of the articulation of different discourses which are dynamically interwoven in people’s everyday literacy activities. Janks (2000), located in South Africa, also relates literacy studies to broader social theory as a means of synthesizing the various strands of critical literacy education.
WHAT KIND OF COMMUNITY

Freebody (2003), in Australia, writes of the relationship between New Literacy Studies and “critical literacy”, an approach to the acquisition and use of reading and writing in educational contexts that takes account of relations of power and domination.

THE HUMAN FACE OF GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM FOR MIGRATING FAMILIES

Also in the United Kingdom is a unique organization giving university students and young people the opportunity to learn from and be advocates for migrating families. This group, Student Action for Refugees or STAR, has a three-fold mission to:

– learn about and raise awareness of refugee issues in innovative ways
– support refugees in a practical way in their local communities through volunteering and
– campaign with and for the rights of refugees everywhere

The STAR network is made up of university based student groups, other young people involved in the STAR Youth Network and Friends of STAR (individuals and organizations who support the work of STAR). The group believes that refugees and asylum seekers are a vulnerable group of people who often have a long and difficult struggle to secure their safety in another country. As people fleeing persecution, torture and prejudice they need and deserve support. Furthermore, as a new generation it is vital that students and young people have a positive attitude towards refugees, asylum seekers and displaced people (King, 2006).

Natasha King, the Student Outreach Officer for STAR, said in response to a question about maintaining and sustaining work in contexts where the needs are so great and the issues so complicated, that

At the national level of issues, racism, lack of information, fear on the part of native Britons about their jobs being “taken” by asylum seekers is really depressing, but that at the local university-by-university level the small projects can be so effective that it is really encouraging…(King, 2006)

THE HUMAN FACE OF FAMILY STRENGTHS

Freire states in his last published work (1998),

There are times when I fear that someone reading this... may think that there is now no place among us for the dreamer and the believer in utopia. Yet, what I have been saying up to now is now the stuff of inconsequential dreamers. It has to do with the very nature of men and women as makers and dreamers of history and not simply as casualties of an a priori vision of the world. (p. 55)

There is no question about the power of personal histories, art, and imagination that has a definite role in creating a sense of place, a community. A few years ago, a colleague at Middle Eastern Technical University in Ankara, Turkey and I began
CHAPTER 2

interviewing refugee families in Turkey. The interviews were framed by the following questions: In what ways are caregivers able to educate their children within the context of refugee camps or other refugee contexts? Are programs available to support the children’s learning? We were interested in documenting parents’ strengths and challenges. We found that those fifteen interviews just barely touched on what are grave and dramatic worldwide problems for refugees and their children. We were struck by the severity of the needs and the lack of information both for the refugees themselves and the agencies and educational institutions which may be in a position to ultimately provide some assistance.

We interviewed the Director of the Turkish Office of United Nations Higher Commission on Refugees. We learned that the 1951 Geneva Convention dictates that refugees can be in Turkey temporarily as asylum seekers; and that they must apply to be recognized as refugees in order to receive services. On average, the refugees register within 10 days of being in the country (Turkey, in this case). There are three steps to process: First there is an interview, and then the refugee must wait 2-3 months for a decision. The second phase waiting period for resettlement in U.S., Canada, Australia, and Scandinavian countries and other countries which accept refugees. The average total time for resettlement is 1 ½ to 2 years. There is an appeal process when refugee status is denied. There is a limit to the number who can be asylum seekers. Some estimates of refugees granted and denied asylum status indicate that only one in ten of refugees who apply for asylum status are granted the status (Icduygu, 2000). If asylum status is granted, the refugees have financial, medical, social and psychological counseling. If asylum status is not granted, the refugees receive nothing. No money, no medical assistance, no schooling, no work permits. Nothing.

In August of 2002, our interview informants for the most part, had been denied status. The first woman we interviewed, whose husband had been a police officer in Iran and then because of refusal to carry out an “unethical and inhuman” procedure, he and his family were driven from Iran at gunpoint. The family applied for asylum status and was denied. I asked the interviewee if they were told why they were denied, “No. Not even when I tried to find out, they wouldn’t talk to me. They said my file was closed.” (Quintero, 2004, p.51)

Still this woman does her best to help to educate her own two children and those young children of other refugees in the same situation. She said:

I borrow books (in Farsi) that some other refugees have or have made for the children. I use the books so that don’t forget their culture and language. It is important to have contact with other refugees... (Quintero, 2004, p.51)

Her children are not permitted to go to school. Because they fear for their safety, they cannot return to their country.

Another woman we interviewed explained that her family has been in Turkey for 4 years. She has three children, twin boys and a daughter. They were rejected for asylum status by United Nations Higher Commission on Refugees, so she slept in front of their office door for 40 days and nights to learn why they were rejected and to protest their decision. She was never told. She explained:
We are political refugees. My two brothers were sentenced to death and killed. They were members of Halkın Mücahitleri which is an opposition organization. My other brother ran away from Iran without a passport. We are not members of that organization, but because of my brothers the government always bothered us. My kids could not go to school freely. Then we had to run away from the country to be safe....My sons forgot their mother tongue. I can not teach them because my stress level is very high. I also have to work because my husband is sick and he cannot work. (Quintero, 2004, p.52).

We interviewed another family. The mother did not speak English or Turkish, so her husband interpreted. They are from Iraq. They have 4 children, ages 7, 9, 12, 14. They have been here in Turkey for 18 months. The UNHCR denied him asylum status and closed his family’s case. He can not find a job because people did not want somebody who does not have an identity authorized by the Turkish Government. At the same time they don’t have anybody who can be a guide for them to find an illegal job. The church pays their rent and gives them 18 dollars for food every two weeks. They can only buy bread with that money. The father said he tries to teach the children English. He said, “There is no play, no pictures, no picnics...nothing for my children.” The only activity they engage in is coming to church, but sometimes they can not come because they don’t have money to give dolmuş (bus). Sometimes they have to walk a long way. When we asked what were his hopes for his children in the future, he said, “To have a country.” He went into detail about his reasons for being a refugee.

I could not betray my conscience and become a spy working for the Iraqi regime. All my problems were due to the simple fact that I did not deceive and surrender three persons working for the UN Oil-for-Food programme as inspectors to the Iraqi intelligence on espionage over Iraq. My torturers told me that they would be accuse fo espionage working for the Americans against Saddam. Every Iraqi working for the projects under Oil-for-Food programme has been expected to report on international staff back to Bagdad. As I refused to collaborate in that, I was being accused of espionage as well and I was severely subjected to torture and ill treatment by the Muhabarat.(He and his wife were both assaulted and thugs broke the arm of is seven-year-old son. When agents showed him his death warrant signed by Hussein, he and his wife and children fled.) I had been working for the United Nations under contract for four and a half years, I had a very good life, house, a shop, a car. I had to leave all that and flee to Turkey seeking asylum. (Quintero, 2004, p.52).

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

An often unpublicized aspect of world migration that is particularly complicated and disturbing is that of Unaccompanied Minors. In the United Kingdom alone in April 2004 there were an estimated 6,500 unaccompanied minors under age 18 in
social services care and 2,500 separated young people over 18 entitled to leaving care support. (NRUC, 2004). The majority of young people who have been separated from their families are between 16 and 18 years of age. While these young people, in the UK, are protected under the Children Act of 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act of 2000, they face intolerable problems and barriers. For example, the housing made available to them is scarce and of poor quality, they are prone to emotional or mental health problems, they lack English language skills, and they face racism and discrimination. They have difficulty in accessing services such as medical care, school, college, and they don’t understand the workings of the social system they have entered. Often these youth have their age disputed and are treated as an adult, which in some instances results in them being held in immigration detention centers. (Young Refugees, 2005)

Many people in the United States have experienced exile in one form or another. Edward Said (1990) explained, “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home…” (p. 357)

Keeping this poignant acknowledgement in the forefront, we can at the same time learn from the exiled peoples and those who have been uprooted. Bateson (2004) finds hope in families she has met:

As I write about the lives of individuals, I hope to show how they both adapt to and create their environments so that they in turn are able to grow within them. Ultimately, I see this process as related to the question of how humankind is to make a home on this planet without soil ing or incinerating its nest. (Bateson, 2004, p. 5)

NOTES

1 All names have been changed to protect privacy.