The High-Stakes Literacies of Undocumented, Unaccompanied Immigrant Youth Detained in America

BY

ALEXIS CULLERTON
B.A., University of Kansas, 2005
M.Ed., Portland State University, 2007

THESIS

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction: Literacy, Language and Culture in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Chicago, 2013

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:
William H. Teale, Ed.D., Chair
Taffy Raphael, Ph.D.
Alfred Tatum, Ph.D.
Aria Razfar, Ph.D.
Patricia Enciso, Ph.D., Department of Teaching and Learning-The Ohio State University
This dissertation is dedicated to…

*My previous students*—for your resiliency and hope, and by whom I am endlessly inspired

*My family and loved ones*, thank you for your unwavering support and affection

*Boompa y mi abuelo Monty*—who were with me every step of the way

In honor of…

*All of the youth who have risked their lives to come to America in hope for a better future*—may you remain brave and encouraged.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dissertation Committee: I would like to thank my dissertation committee (Bill Teale, Taffy Raphael, Alfred Tatum, Aria Razfar and Pat Enciso) for your tremendous support throughout this process. Four years ago, I started talking about unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth as my area of research interest. Although I wasn’t able to cite a single study on the topic in the fields of literacy or education, you believed in me, encouraged me to follow my passion, not compromise my interests and stay true to my voice. I have learned so much from each of you and am extremely grateful to have you on my team. It has been an honor working with you and I appreciate your willingness to take a gamble on supporting research in a relatively untapped area. In all sincerity-I could not have done this without you.

World’s Children House: Thank you for welcoming me into your world, allowing me to observe, and for participating in my timely interviews. All of the participants in this study were very helpful, encouraging and supportive of my work—which made my job very easy. You represent the best there is in residential centers. You have taken these children into your hearts and created a family. The youth are incredibly fortunate to have you in their lives.

Professional Colleagues: Throughout my time at the University of Illinois at Chicago, numerous people have come into my life-two of whom have taken every step alongside me. Joe Rumenapp, you are a genius and fellow warrior, I am so grateful to have gone through this experience with you. Gholdy Muhammad (otherwise known as my “A.P.”) I am inspired by you on a daily basis. Some of my fondest memories of my Ph.D. career involve coffee shops, late night study sessions, first conference visits and all the while-having you by my side. I am excited to see the change you create in this world.

Family: My loved ones were instrumental in accomplishing this goal. Certainly, my closest friends, parents and all of my siblings have received panic-stricken phone calls from me at some point over the last four years. Thank you for letting me freak out, for hearing me out, and for knowing that I could do this before I knew I could. Mom and Dad, you think your children are capable of anything that they put their minds to. Somewhere along the line, I started believing this too. I love you very much and hope to make you proud.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Statement of the Research Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Undocumented youth</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Detainment of unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant youth in the United States of America</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Federal immigration legislation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. World’s Children Home</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Rationale for and Scope of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Need for the study: embarking on a journey</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Literature Review</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The literacy divide and the educational debt</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Research on adolescent ELL literacy</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. comparisons among ELL adolescents and English-speaking adolescents</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. (re)examining literacy</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. (re)examining ELLs</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. voluntary immigrants</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. involuntary immigrants</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. (Re)examining context</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Literacy practices</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Literacy events</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Language and literacy brokering</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. literacy/language brokering as a tool exceeding translation purposes</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. literacy/language brokering adjusting traditional view of adolescent roles</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Literacy as a transformative tool in identity negotiation</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Conclusion</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A. Theoretical Framework: Critical Sociocultural Theory .............................................. 48
   1. Role of context in theoretical framework ....................................................... 50
B. Definition of Key Terms ....................................................................................... 52
C. Methodology ........................................................................................................ 53
   1. Setting ................................................................................................................. 56
   2. A researcher’s journey ....................................................................................... 58
   3. Participants-youth .............................................................................................. 60
   4. Participants-staff ................................................................................................. 62
   5. Data collection .................................................................................................... 66
   6. Data analysis ....................................................................................................... 71
       a. phase one ......................................................................................................... 71
       b. phase two ....................................................................................................... 72
       c. phase three ..................................................................................................... 73
       d. member checks .............................................................................................. 74
       e. inter-rater agreement and triangulation .......................................................... 74
   7. Document analyses ............................................................................................. 75
       a. Coh-Metrix ..................................................................................................... 77

IV. FINDINGS ............................................................................................................ 80
A. The WCH Environment ........................................................................................ 82
   1. The first 48 hours ............................................................................................... 86
   2. A day in the life .................................................................................................. 93
B. Overview of Findings from Interviews, Field Notes and Document Analyses .... 101
C. Decision-Making Domains of Activity .............................................................. 106
   1. Youth-enacted legal decisions .......................................................................... 107
   2. Youth-enacted family reunification decisions .................................................. 108
   3. System-imposed legal and family reunification decisions .................................. 111
D. Decision-Making Documents .............................................................................. 114
   1. Legal documents ................................................................................................ 114
   2. Family reunification documents ........................................................................ 116
E. Orientation Domains of Activity ....................................................................... 117
   1. Youth-enacted reflection ................................................................................... 117
   2. System-imposed orientation ............................................................................. 123
F. Orientation Documents ..........................................................127
   1. WCH-created screening and entry documents..........................127
   2. Federal screening and entry documents.................................130
G. Academic Domains of Activity .............................................131
   1. Youth-enacted student roles...............................................133
   2. system-imposed academic expectations ................................134
H. Downtime.............................................................................137
   1. Youth-enacted entertainment and religious practices ..............138
I. Summary of Findings.........................................................139

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS .........................................141
   A. The Travelers: Youth-Enacted Literacies ...............................142
   B. The Destination: The WCH Contexts .....................................146
   C. The Guides: System-Imposed Literacies .................................148
   D. The Currency: Document analyses ......................................150
   E. Limitations ........................................................................151
   F. Implications for Practice ....................................................152
      1. immigration policy .........................................................153
      2. social services ...............................................................155
      3. education .................................................................159
   G. Implications for Research ..................................................163

APPENDICES ............................................................................166
   Appendix A .........................................................................166
   Appendix B .........................................................................175
   Appendix C .........................................................................177

CITED LITERATURE .....................................................................187

VITA .........................................................................................194
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 MAJOR FINDINGS AND SELECTIVE CODES</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 INSTANCES OF LITERACIES ACROSS DATA SETS</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 DOCUMENT ANALYSES</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 DOCUMENTS RELATED TO DECISION-MAKING</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 DOCUMENTS RELATED TO ORIENTATION</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 STUDENT ARTIFACTS, ESSAY 2</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 DOCUMENTS RELATED TO ACADEMIC SYSTEMS IN THE WCH</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 YOUTH ITINERARY FROM APPREHENSION TO DISCHARGE</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 DOMAINS OF ACTIVITY: TIME AND IMPORTANCE</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 AVERAGE GRADE LEVEL OF DOCUMENTS</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ABBRREVIATION</th>
<th>TERMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DCFS</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DHHS</td>
<td>DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUCS</td>
<td>DIVISION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN SERVICES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICE</td>
<td>U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILC</td>
<td>IMMIGRANT LAW CENTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB</td>
<td>INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDWEST NPO</td>
<td>ORGANIZATION THAT OVERSEES THE WCH (PSEUDONYM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORR</td>
<td>OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD</td>
<td>POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVPRA</td>
<td>TRAFFICKING VICTIMS PROTECTION REAUTHORIZATION ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAC</td>
<td>UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URM</td>
<td>UNACCOMPANIED REFUGEE MINORS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>WORLD’S CHILDREN HOUSE (PSEUDONYM)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY

Every year, thousands of undocumented, unaccompanied immigrant youth take dangerous journeys to the United States only to be apprehended by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) upon arrival. These youth, who are both involuntary and voluntary immigrants, are then faced with the challenge of having to navigate the complex contexts of the legal and social services systems. While detained, youth begin their family reunification and immigration legal cases. Within this navigation, youth enact unique literacies as well as make use of documents in order to mediate domains of activities within their detention centers. Immigrant youth face many obstacles and challenges while detained in America. The current inquiry focused on the experiences of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant adolescents (henceforth referred to as youth and/or minors).

The current research employed descriptive case study methodology (Yin, 2006) in order to examine the literacy practices and events of minors detained in the World’s Children Home (WCH). Within this inquiry, the expectations placed upon youth by the contexts of the WCH were also examined. All findings have been embedded within a contextual analysis, which served to describe the environment of the center, the first 48 hours of detention and a day in the life of an unaccompanied immigrant adolescent detained in America. A variety of sources of data were collected including: WCH staff interviews, observations, student artifacts, and document analyses. The document analyses involved an independent examination of features of the text as well as a Coh-Metrix (McNamara, D.S., Louwerse, M.M., Cai, Z., & Graesser, A., 2005) analysis in order to determine the difficulty levels of texts that mediated literacy events for the adolescents within the center.
Findings revealed that all literacy practices and events present within the WCH can be categorized into youth-enacted and system-imposed literacies. Additionally, the literacy activities present in the center and the documents mediated the following domains of activities: Decision-Making, Orientation, Academic and Downtime. The literacy practices, events and documents used to mediate the domain of Decision-Making activities played extremely large roles in the youths’ futures. Additionally, minors were observed having to participate in numerous high-stakes meetings with little knowledge of their purpose and inadequate preparation. Moreover, the documents used to mediate domains of activity were written at a level far beyond the ability of detained youth. The significance of these findings bring forth implications that speak to the need to revise documents, create a comprehensible timeline to accompany adolescent immigrants in their navigation of contexts, and provide additional systems of support to increase transition into life upon discharge.

This study sought to add knowledge to the fields of education and adolescent literacy research, yet its implications cross additional boundaries and speak to the fields of policy, immigration and social services. The current research challenges scholars within the field to add the literacy needs and experiences of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth to the larger dialogue on immigration, English language learning, and adolescent literacy in the United States. In doing so, the voice of a marginalized population that is growing at a staggering rate can begin to be accounted for and the needs of youth navigating a new land can be further examined.
I. INTRODUCTION

They [youth] are saying, ‘I want to stay here and support my family back home or have a better future for myself.’ They think about that. Long term I don’t know if they think about what the challenges are that they will have to face after going outside, what life will be like for them here (Sabina, Caseworker at the World’s Children Home, Interview, September 6, 2012).

Statement of the Research Problem

Every year, thousands of unaccompanied immigrant youth risk their lives to make around-the-world journeys to the United States. Some make the journey voluntarily; others do so against their will—as refugees of war, as asylum-seekers, and even as victims of human trafficking ("The Campaign to Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking Fact Sheet: Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000," 2000). Since 1980, over 12,000 unaccompanied refugee minors have been apprehended by immigration (Haddal, 2008). These are unaccompanied alien children (UAC), the term used by the federal government to describe children who are in the country without documentation, under the age of 18, and separated from their families. Apprehended unaccompanied alien children are sent to detention centers shortly after their arrest. The detention center functions to provide temporary housing and services to youth as they begin immigration court proceedings. Apprehended youth reside in such centers under care of The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) while their cases are reviewed by officials and family reunification specialist’s work to find a longer term living situation for youth.

This research focuses on unaccompanied alien children. No term is neutral, however, and the ‘alien’ label represents a deficit ideology (Gee, 1990) that serves to ‘other’ unaccompanied
immigrant youth. Thus, rather than refer to this population, as ‘aliens’, I henceforth use the terms ‘immigrants’, ‘minors’ and ‘youth’ interchangeably to refer to unaccompanied and undocumented adolescents separated from their parents. The current study sought to understand the role that literacy plays in the lives of immigrant youth in a detention center, examining both the literacy expectations placed on youth within the center and the literacy practices and events engaged in by the youth. The study examined these literacy expectations and practices in one detention center for minors—the World’s Children Home (WCH) (pseudonym). The WCH is located in a large Midwestern city and houses up to 70 youth at a time who have journeyed to America from all over the world.

**Undocumented Youth**

All of the youth at the center where the current research is being conducted are undocumented. There are approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States today, up from only 2.5 million in 1987 (Gonzales, 2011). Acquiring accurate statistics on a population aimed at keeping themselves hidden for protection is challenging, yet approximately 1.8-2.4 million of this group are under the age of 18 (Immigration Policy Center, 2012; Krebs, 2013). In 2008, 20 percent of young people growing up in the United States had immigrant parents; and it is projected that by 2040, one in three children will be growing up in an immigrant household. In fact, one quarter of all immigrants in the United States are undocumented (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez, & Todorova, 2008). Although the tension in the current political climate surrounding undocumented immigrants is tangible, children are often overlooked in such debates. Failure to create comprehensive immigration reform legislation at the federal level has resulted in a situation in which several states have approached reform independently. This has led to extreme immigration laws being passed in some states. Arizona,
Utah, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, and Indiana, for instance, have all passed legislation against undocumented immigrants (Anti-Illlegal Immigration Laws in States, 2012). The long-term consequences of the enactment of such laws are yet to be seen. For undocumented youth in the U.S., however, their transition to adulthood involves exiting the legally protected status of K-12 students and entering into adult roles that require legal status (Gonzales, 2011). This context collision makes for a turbulent transition that has profound implications on identity formation, friendship patterns, aspirations and expectations, and social and economic mobility.

Undocumented children move from inclusion to exclusion as they transition from being protected to becoming unprotected. During the transition process, they are forced to learn to be “illegal,” a transformation that involves changing daily routines, survival skills, aspirations and social patterns (Gonzales, 2011).

**Detainment of unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant youth in America**

Once youth are identified as undocumented and unaccompanied immigrants, they are typically shifted between government custody, foster care and other sponsors, often with little regard for their psychological well-being (Williams & Berry, 1991) or basic human rights. In fact, approximately one-third of detained minors experience harsh, jail-like conditions while under governmental care (Yoder Nafziger, 2006). When unaccompanied immigrant minors are apprehended by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), they are sent to secure detention centers throughout the country for unauthorized presence in the United States (Haddal, 2008). In 2010, ICE detained 363,000 youth in a network of 350 detention centers (Wessler, 2011). The United National High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR, 2005) has defined two separate categories of unaccompanied immigrant minors:
unaccompanied children: children under 18 years of age who have been separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible to do so

separated children: children under 18 years of age who are separated from both parents or from their previous legal or customary caregiver

The 2002 Homeland Security Act (2002) defines an ‘unaccompanied alien child’ as one:

a) Who has no lawful immigration status in the United States;
b) Who has not yet attained 18 years of age; and
c) With respect to whom i) there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States or ii) there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States who can provide care and physical custody

It is imperative to note that many of the apprehended minors in America are not recent immigrants but are youth who have been raised in the United States. When these children are apprehended by immigration, if they are not with their parents at the time of arrest and the parent is unwilling to come forward, they are sent to detainment centers. This group of immigrant youth then faces the threat of being deported to a country they know very little about, and in many cases, where they hardly speak the language.

Youth in detainment centers fall into two categories: involuntary and voluntary immigrants. Involuntary immigrants include refugees, asylum-seekers and victims of trafficking. Voluntary immigrants, alternatively, often cross the border to be reunited with a family member or to seek economic opportunity. Upon detainment, depending on the child’s plea, immigration proceedings may take a variety of routes. The conclusion of such routes includes temporary placement in the United States with a sponsor, family member, group home, or foster care; or detention in an adult jail; or deportation.

Unaccompanied immigrants come to America in a variety of ways from all over the world. The journey to the United States for many youth can be perilous and long and take a considerable emotional toll. The route is often overrun by gang control or other criminal action.
Moreover, many youth suffer trauma and/or abuse on their journey. Children who survive the journey are often arrested upon arrival in the United States. Others, who are not apprehended, attempt to navigate the country without documentation, living in the shadows for protection. After arrest by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), children are placed in the care and custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Division of Unaccompanied Children’s Services (DUCS), which inherited care, custody and placement responsibilities for these children pursuant to the Homeland Security Act of 2002.

Human Rights Watch has found Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) policies and practices to be in contravention of standards, such as those established in the settlement of 1997 Reno v. Flores case, which addressed the detainment of unaccompanied immigrant children based on principles of juvenile justice (Georgopoulos, 2005). As many as one-third of children in INS detention nationwide are placed in secure detention centers for juvenile offenders (Georgeopoulos, 2005). In these centers, minors are often held with immigrants who are detained for violent crimes. Here, they are denied personal possessions and held in severely restrictive and punitive environments.

The children then face administrative removal proceedings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review, an agency of the Department of Justice. These proceedings position the child against a trained DHS trial attorney before an immigration judge. According to the American Immigration Lawyers Association, approximately 90% of the children lack representation when they are tried before the immigration court. This occurs because there is no right to government-appointed counsel, and pro bono resources are scarce and relatively untapped for such cases in most areas of the country (Levinson, 2005; Nugent, 2006).
Detained youth participate in self-advocacy as they navigate the contexts of their detainment centers as well as the experience of life in a new country. Youth in detainment centers find themselves living with other minors from all over the world, many of whom share similar immigrant experiences. While detained, youth begin the process of immigration proceedings, which involves numerous meetings with lawyers and advocates. Concurrently, a family reunification specialist works with youth, constantly fact-checking their stories, to ensure a safe transition to a somewhat more permanent living condition. The average length of detainment depends on the circumstances of the child’s experience. Whereas, as recently as three years ago, it was common for minors to be detained for six months to two years, the current average length of detainment at the WCH is only one month. This change reflects recent pressure on the government to address the needs of undocumented, unaccompanied immigrant youth and an increasing effort to understand this growing population in America.

**Federal Immigration Legislation**

The enactment of the Trafficking Victims Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) in 2000 (United States Department of Labor, 2012) aims to protect victims of trafficking at an international level and to persecute their traffickers. Before this protocol, numerous minors, particularly those from Mexico, were simply being taken back across the border upon apprehension. Recent protocol, however, and the need to intake all apprehended minors, has led to staggering growth in the population of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrants entering detainment centers. The numbers have increased so quickly, in fact, that in the city where current research is being conducted, numerous emergency shelters were forced to open, solely to house the minors entering the country. Within the year that data were collected for the current study, local centers had to create space for over 400 additional youth. Prior to the emergency shelters being opened,
youth were held temporarily in airports, community centers and even army dorms with armed guards. In a reaction to the effort to hurriedly open emergency shelters, one director at a local center stated, “What I’ve heard in general is that we are not calling this an influx anymore. I think that what we are calling this is ‘the new normal’. These are the numbers” (Liz, WCH Director, Interview, August 17, 2012).

While over three million students graduate from U.S. high schools every year and are able to follow their aspirations after high school, a group of approximately 65,000 undocumented youth, many of whom were raised in the United States, do not get this opportunity. A large number of undocumented youth do not go on to college due to their immigration status. For undocumented immigrants, obtaining the identification necessary to apply for college or financial aid is extremely challenging. Currently, approximately 4,875 of the 65,000 youth that graduate high school (7.5%) of undocumented youth go on to college (Immigration Policy Center, 2012).

**World’s Children Home (WCH)**

In 2011, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) reported that 8,244 of the children entering the United States were both unaccompanied and undocumented. All of these children eventually ended up in ORR custody. The state where the current research is being conducted received between 500-1000 of these youth. This state is one of a dozen with federal centers for unaccompanied immigrant youth taken into custody by the Department of Homeland Security. At the start of research, this state offered 147 beds to unaccompanied immigrant youth (Knight, 2012). By the end of the study, the number had increased to well over 500 beds. The World’s Children House (WCH) (pseudonym) is one of these facilities.
The World’s Children House (WCH) is a detainment center in a large Midwestern city, focusing especially on providing temporary living facilities, family reunification services and education to unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth. The WCH is run by a human rights agency, Midwest NPO (pseudonym), and is considered one of the best facilities for unaccompanied immigrant youth in the nation. Children at the center receive education, pro-bono attorneys and translators, clinicians, caseworkers, advocates, access to health care, and are assigned a family reunification specialist. The culture of the WCH is human rights oriented, wherein staff members go above and beyond the federal standards in order to care for the participants within the center. The location of the center is highly confidential in order to protect the youth living there. Many minors, for instance, are still indebted to their “coyotes,” or traffickers; and exposing their location could be extremely dangerous. Strict intake protocol is conducted to ensure the facts of the child’s story upon entrance into the center. This story is revisited often by family reunification specialists.

The majority of youth detained at the WCH are discharged to family members, sponsors, foster care, or group homes in the United States. A minority of detained youth are deported directly from the center. While youth who remain in the U.S. are required to continue their immigration proceedings from the context of their new placement, it is unknown how many of them follow through with their court cases. Additionally, many of the participants face challenges in their transition into life in America. This process typically involves a deep negotiation of identity as youth navigate a new land. Minors in the WCH practice self-advocacy in numerous meetings as they plot a route through a variety of contexts including: school, immigration court, family reunification and intake procedures. Throughout this experience,
youth rely on both their native literacies and English literacy. Since many of the youth are English language learners (ELLs), the act of self-advocacy may be increasingly challenging.

Many minors at the center associate the WCH with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, an entity they have largely been told to fear, avoid and/or lie to in order to protect themselves and their families. For this reason, building trust between youth and a family reunification specialist often takes time. As children begin to distinguish the WCH as an entity separate from ICE, however, they become more willing to share their story honestly in hope to build a legal case and find a living placement.

While detained at the WCH, youth embark on an immigration case overseen by an outside agency, and on a family reunification case, internal to the center. The goal of the family reunification team is to get the child to a safe location from where they can continue their court proceedings. Before youth are able to contact anyone, the family reunification specialist verifies the relationship that the child has to the person. This is done to protect the child from outside or unwarranted influence. Many victims of trafficking, for instance, have been conditioned to view their captor as someone to trust and turn to in time of need. Additionally, undocumented parents may encourage their children to lie so as not to endanger anyone in the family.

The family reunification team engages in a constant struggle to assure undocumented family members that they can still sponsor their children and not be turned in to Immigration for lacking immigration status. This struggle continues upon a child’s release from the center. There have been many cases in which children were discouraged to follow up with their court dates by family members trying to protect them. What these families fail to realize (despite attempts from the center to explain such information) is that a judge must submit an order of deportation the first time that a child fails to show up to court. This information, although translated in both
verbal and written forms into the child and caretaker’s native language, is often ignored.
Additionally, youth are unsure whether they should take the advice of the institution, which they associate with detention, or their family members. Language, literacy ability and effective communication play a large role in a child’s ability to navigate the complex legal system in the United States.

All minors at the center have been separated from their families at their time of arrest. Most of the youth at the WCH have experienced a separation of their families between the home and native country. Many children at the center, for instance, came to the United States for the sole reason of being reunited with a family member. Others, particularly involuntary immigrants, live with the sad realization that they may never see their family members again.

**Rationale for and Scope of the Study**

The institution of the WCH, a legal team and other government entities require youth to rely on literacy to move through the system. Although translation services are offered, detained youth are expected to participate in important meetings with lawyers, advocates and family reunification specialists. Their rights are read to them upon entry; yet it takes many children at the center weeks to adjust to their detainment. By this time, youth may be far into their legal process and family reunification cases. Youth must rely on their ability to express themselves and explain their story in order to ensure their ability to stay in the U.S. and work towards legal status. In many asylum cases, children are called upon to describe gruesome scenes from their past in order to be eligible seekers of asylum. Other cases require victims of trafficking to provide information about themselves that they may not even know (many victims of trafficking and child soldiers are kidnapped at a very young age and may not know their age or place of birth). If youth are unable to effectively communicate their experience, they may be deported.
back to a country where they may live in fear of gang recruitment, forced prostitution, fighting in war, and other forms of persecution. Given the stakes associated with such meetings, many staff members at the WCH fear that youth are unprepared for the legal meetings. One residential instructor stated,

> I don’t think they are necessarily prepared. Even just in the way that the meetings are set up, half of the time they don’t know that they are meeting with a lawyer and most of the time if you are meeting with a lawyer about something serious you are going to be very well-prepared for that meeting. And they’re pulled out of class without a second’s notice, so I don’t think they necessarily can be prepared for that (Brianne, WCH Residential Instructor, Interview, August 23, 2012).

In addition to the expectations for literacy associated with meetings, children enact literacy in a variety of other ways. The literacy practices and events of adolescents within the center employ an array of purposes. Whether attempting to communicate with roommates from another country, protecting themselves from harm, meeting with a lawyer, doing homework, or writing in their journals, youth are frequently interacting with literacy. Understanding the literacy practices of youth in the center is paramount to developing policies and procedures for effectively supporting them as they navigate a new land.

> Literacy practices in this research refer to cultural ways of using literacy, the mediating activities involving print that are part of the everyday lives of detained minors, and also to the purposes that shape how and why detained youth use literacy (Barton, 1991; Street, 1984).

> Literacy practices can be viewed as the link between the activities of reading and writing, and the social structures in which they are embedded, and which they help to shape (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). In the current research, close attention was given to the context of the WCH, since
literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and show power relationships in which some literacies are more dominant or influential than others. Literacy practices are purposeful, embedded within broader social goals and cultural practices and are often acquired through a processes of sense-making (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Literacy events, as defined in the current research, involve an activity wherein literacy plays a role. Usually, a text is central to the activity and talk revolves around the print. Literacy events both stem from and are shaped by literacy practices. These events often include literacy as a mediating tool to achieve some other goal (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Literacy is not reserved for a particular language in this study, especially since numerous languages are spoken within the WCH.

The purpose of the current study was twofold. It (1) examined the adolescent participants’ literacy practices and events and (2) described the literacy expectations placed upon adolescent youth by the WCH. The study focused on the current literacy practices of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant adolescents in one detention center. Furthermore, it sought to describe the roles that both English language and native language literacies play in the lives of these youth. Both questions were situated within a detailed description of the contexts of the WCH. The central research questions of the study were:

RQ1: What are the literacy practices and events of adolescents within the WCH?

RQ2: What are the literacy expectations placed upon unaccompanied adolescent immigrants by the WCH contexts?

I refer to the WCH as an institution which exhibits numerous contexts, rather than as a singular context in order to showcase the complex variety of environments present within the residential setting. Within this examination, I made an effort to understand the ways in which youth enact
and are subjected to high stakes literacies as they navigate an intricate new land. To do so, I conducted a descriptive study aimed at examining the purposes for literacy present within the context of the WCH and how participants enact literacy independently. Data were collected through a series of interviews with staff, a comprehensive document analyses, collection of artifacts and observations focused on minors within the WCH context.

Unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant children may participate in very high stakes uses for literacy as they negotiate their lives in detainment centers like the one that served as the site for this research. These unaccompanied children have meetings with advocates, lawyers, family reunification specialists, governmental workers, and clinicians. Children at the center rely on literacy to prove their cases (whether they seek asylum, refugee status, or temporary status) so that they can stay in the United States. While children as young as toddlers (who often take the journey with older siblings or hired smugglers) are detained in these types of centers, adolescents were the focus of the research at hand owing to the added vulnerability of their situation. Adolescents are protected by law and have the right to education up until high school, at which point those whose cases are unresolved, will become “illegal.” Adolescents who turn 18 while detained at the center are picked up on their birthday by immigration officials and taken to adult jails.

Owing to recent regulations enacted by the Office of Refugee Resettlement prohibiting detained immigrant youths to be interviewed for research purposes, interviews were conducted with WCH staff only. A discussion of the struggle I experienced in gaining permission to research this population is included in Chapter Three. Literacy artifacts present within the center, combined with a comprehensive document analyses supported efforts to develop a well-rounded
description of the phenomenon of immigrant detention in America and created a foundation for examining the literacy expectations placed upon youth within the WCH.

I designed this inquiry by drawing upon nearly a decade of prior experience working with immigrant youth, in combination with the completion of a pilot study conducted in the fall of 2011 at the WCH. I was inspired by the stories of my previous students and interested in learning more. Many minors I had worked with told me about using homemade maps to make it to the United States. Others found messages left from previous children on the journey along the railroad tracks describing places and people to avoid. My previous students have acquired fake accents upon their arrest in hopes to be deported to a region closer to the border for a second attempt at crossing. All of these anecdotes reveal youth enacting literacy in remarkable and rare ways. Recent ORR protocol forbidding the use of interviews with youth detained under their care makes an attempt to revisit these interviews impossible, yet such stories have played a significant role in the design and data collection techniques employed in the current study. Youth experiences were examined by observations as well as through the eyes of staff members at the WCH, working on behalf of the youth to help them find a safe place to live in America.

**Need for the Study: Embarking on a Journey**

Throughout the course of this research, I drew upon the metaphor of a journey. All unaccompanied immigrants have experienced tremendous journeys into America. They have come from all over the world, and many of them suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) upon entry into the WCH. Upon arrival into the country, however, the journey for unaccompanied immigrant youth does not end. Rather, they find themselves embarking on an equally challenging voyage. This passage involves crossing many contexts within detainment, and exploring new lands upon discharge. Additionally, caretakers, lawyers, and others fulfill the
role of *guides* helping minors navigate their way through uncharted territory. And while youth experience support as they travel, they are largely forced to rely on their own instincts and intuition to guide them safely through the trek. As a researcher, Residential Instructor and advocate for immigrant youth, I have also taken a journey in my efforts to understand the experiences of immigrant youth detained in America. My difficult course traversing academic, governmental, state and local protocol mirrors the route of minors embarking upon family reunification and immigration cases. Upon reaching my destination, however, I aim to bring the stories of my travel with me and share them with the literacy research field so that youth can no longer be overlooked within the dialogue of serving the youth of America.

Immigrant adolescents experience an important form of negotiation while detained, although understanding the ways in which they navigate the system has been overlooked. Immigrant minors’ limited English language proficiency and the literacy expectations placed upon them by institutions may serve as a detriment to their livelihoods. For this reason, examining the literacy expectations placed upon adolescents at the WCH was an integral part of the research.

The bulk of research that addresses the needs of unaccompanied, undocumented, immigrant youth discusses immigration status and detainment experiences. As the immigrant population continues to grow, it is vital that a paradigm shift occurs which puts the educational needs of immigrant youth at the forefront of the conversation. In researching the literacy practices and events of minors detained in America, I aimed to begin a dialogue that speaks to such educational needs.

Within the current research on immigrant youth, many gaps exist, and the role of education has not been given adequate attention. In fact, children were largely forgotten when
national immigration legislation was drafted (Bhaba & Schmidt, 2008). The U.S. Immigration court's first child-specific set of guidelines was not issued until 2004 (Bhaba & Schmidt, 2008). Prior to 2004, children were detained alongside adults in jail-like facilities. Additionally, the journey to the United States for these children is extremely dangerous. Many children journey on the tops of trains, hidden in compartments in vehicles, and are often at the will of gang leaders, “coyotes” and other adults, who have very little interest in their well-being. Upon reaching the border into the country, some immigrant minors are held for ransom and left indebted to the very ones they trusted to bring them to the United States. Regardless of the dangerous routes taken by youth into the country, the presence of the unaccompanied immigrant youth population in America continues to rise at a staggering rate.

In 2008, the Vera Institute of Justice issued a comprehensive literature review on unaccompanied immigrant children in the United States and found the following broad concerns: lack of systematic research on the migration of unaccompanied children, failure of U.S. Immigration law to adopt sufficient child-specific standards, lack of consensus on the need for child advocates, absence of the child's perspective from immigration policy proposals or decisions, a need for clear policies regulating confidentiality, repatriation, and reunification with family members, challenges faced by youth in applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, and finally, the lack of legal counsel (Byrne, 2008). Nowhere in this comprehensive review or in a search of the broader body of research on unaccompanied, undocumented immigrants can one find substantial educational or literacy research. And although the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) is an area that has gained priority and considerable activity in literacy research over the past decade, the topic of literacy and unaccompanied and/or undocumented immigrant youth has largely been unexplored. Immigrant minors have very specific needs which differ from
those of their language minority peers as they are largely forced to advocate for themselves in a new land as a situational consequence of being separated from their families. Above all else, the current study describes the experiences and events of an overlooked population of youth that is growing in America.
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature Review

The current review of literature focuses on the research in the areas important to understanding the literacy needs of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth. Research available in the fields of literacy, education and sociology were examined to explore: adolescent English language learners (ELLs) literacy, the changing literacy practices in informal and formal contexts, the way in which youth make use of their native language literacies to comprehend new literacies, practices and negotiate identity (including literacy and language brokering) and the role of contested space and brokering when navigating a new environment. The immigrant population in America is extremely diverse. In a current system that places all immigrant students under an ELL umbrella, however, the unique experiences of individuals are often overlooked. When discussing immigrant needs, the context is particularly important. The themes addressed in the current review speak to both formal and informal contexts, as both arenas play vital roles in the immigrant experience in America. Whereas undocumented immigrant youth are expected to attend school until they are 18, they are also largely reliant on the assistance provided by social service agencies and other governmental organizations as they navigate through a new land. Education plays a vital role in the futures of immigrant adolescents.

What I always emphasize to the kids is the importance of education. Most of the kids come here because of the work, but we really emphasize to the kids the importance of the law for school (Hyun, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 16, 2012).
The Literacy Divide and the Educational Debt

There is a growing awareness of the need to increase literacy levels of adolescents in America. Within this concern, however, a deep understanding of the needs of minority youth, particularly those of ELLs has been overlooked. Although a vast portion of the adolescent population identifies as an ELL, the research in adolescent literacy and ELL literacy, is largely viewed as separate areas of examination. When, in fact, the ELL population is addressed in literacy research, the group is typically described as a uniform whole, which does not speak to the diversity of ELLs in American schools. In order to address adolescent literacy in an equitable manner, one which includes the needs of ELLs, it is imperative to examine the connections between adolescent minority youth and achievement. In doing so, close attention must be paid to literacy practices, cultural variability, native language and immigrant experience. In view of the fact that ELL adolescent literacy needs are unique, and in an effort to understand these needs, we might begin by examining the issue of adolescent literacy as a whole, and understanding where ELLs fit into the dialogue, until we can eventually speak directly and in-depth to the various diverse experiences of students within ELL classrooms throughout the country. Thus, the aim for the current review of literature is revealed.

To find a place for adolescent ELLs in literacy research, the notion of equity is paramount. It is widely known within the field of education that there exist differences in access to educational opportunities; particularly for minorities (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Many youth in the U.S. do not receive the education necessary to become literate or join the job market, an area where 70% of jobs require specialized skill and training beyond high school. Moreover, schools which serve majority “minority” populations often have significantly fewer resources than schools serving mostly White students. Limited access to education is one of the factors
contributing to the achievement gap between cultural groups within American schools (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Rather than perpetuate the term ‘achievement gap’, however, as Ladson-Billings (2006) reveals, we might consider this inequality as an ‘educational debt’ owed to those denied access to equal education opportunities for hundreds of years. Equal access involves much more than just an opportunity to learn, but includes the ability for students to critique knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2006), draw from funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), utilize native language literacies and more.

Education inequality affects a wide array of youth, particularly those who are most in danger of falling behind. The group most affected by inequity and low levels of literacy is minority and/or ELL youth. Poorly educated children are dropping out of school in increasing numbers, and graduation rates have declined as high-stakes testing policies have been implemented, with the strongest decreases for Black and Latino students. Furthermore, Latino students scored near the 60th percentile on standardized tests and were less than half as likely as White and Asian students to be placed in college preparatory classes (Darling-Hammond, 2007). In 2005, the percentage of 16- to 24-year olds who were high school status dropouts was higher among Hispanics than among other Ethnic groups (Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minorities, 2007). Moreover, the six million secondary students who comprise the lowest 25 percent of achievement are twenty times more likely to drop out of high school than students in the top-performing quartile (High School Dropouts in America, 2009). One of the most commonly cited reasons for dropping out of school is that students do not have the literacy skills to keep up with the high school curriculum, which has become increasingly complex (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). For minority youth, the achievement rates are staggering, with 89% of Hispanic and 86% of African American middle and high school students reading below grade
level (NCES, 2011). ELLs make up a large portion within the unwarranted group of minority adolescents who have fallen behind in literacy. If ELLs reported speaking English with difficulty on the 2000 Census, their likelihood of completing high school dropped to 18% (NCES, 2011).

While increasing attention has been paid to the struggles present for youth within research on adolescent literacy, the examination of this phenomenon often either neglects the needs of ELLs completely, or reports on adolescent ELL literacy needs in specialized reports, which are kept separate from reports on mainstream adolescent learners. For instance, only one page in the form of a “snapshot” is allotted to ELLs in the Racial and Ethnic Minorities Report (NCES, 2007). The NCES 2011 data are slightly more inclusive of ELLs, but only briefly mentions non-native English speakers on a few pages of an otherwise lengthy report. In the National Council of Residential Instructors of English (NCTE) Call to Action prepared by the Commission on Reading, a paper specifically designed to inform Residential Instructors on advancing adolescent literacy, ELLs went unmentioned ("A Call to Action: What We Know About Adolescent Literacy and Ways to Support Residential Instructors in Meeting Students' Needs," 2004). Even in the widely-cited Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy, where 15 elements of effective literacy programs are recommended, ELLs are overlooked (Biancarosa and Snow, 2006). And while the NAEP report on adolescent literacy acknowledges that problems faced by struggling readers are exacerbated when they do not speak English as their first language, are recent immigrants, or have learning disabilities, it fails to offer literacy strategies that speak to the ELL population (NCES, 2011). Similarly, the comprehensive Carnegie Report by Snow and Biancarosa (2006) on the adolescent literacy achievement gap succeeds in acknowledging the ELL population by attempting to mention the vast variation of student experiences that exist within this group, yet explicitly states
that none of the literacy programs suggested for struggling readers speak to the ELL population
due to the reality that a large knowledge gap exists in the literacy needs for this group.

With the staggering growth of ELLs in middle and high schools across America, how
long will it be acceptable to exclude the needs of all adolescent learners in literacy research?
Presently, in order to learn about the literacy needs of adolescent ELLs, ELL-specific research
studies must be sought out, reports which are uncommon and inconsistent. The isolation of ELLs
in adolescent literacy research mirrors the experience of ELLs in modern-day schools. Although
the immigrant youth population is growing at a staggering rate, institutions and teachers within
the United States have ultimately failed to address their unique literacy needs. Such reactive
tendencies further segregate an already marginalized population of youth. Furthermore, larger
strides should be made to examine ways in which to close the gap between ELL learners and
their peers. And while closing this gap may be an ultimate goal for ELL literacy researchers, it is
beyond the scope of the current study to analyze the literacy attainment of immigrant youth.
Rather, the current research addressed the ELL population as a diverse group of learners with
varied experiences and focused on the unaccompanied, undocumented detained immigrant youth
population. Nonetheless, reviewing the literacy research on the underserved ELL population
provides an important foundation for the current research.

**Research on Adolescent ELL Literacy**

The intent of this review is one of awareness-raising, which calls to action the need to
extend adolescent literacy research to include the diverse population of ELLs within American
schools. In an effort to address this intention, a brief review of current trends in adolescent ELL
literacy research has been conducted. Within this investigation, definitions of literacy and
context are challenged and a deep examination of the diverse immigrant experiences within the ELL population is addressed.

The ELL population within American schools is growing at such a rate that at some point in the near future, researchers and educators will have to achieve an understanding of their needs. By 2005, there were over 35 million immigrants in the United States, accounting for roughly 12.4 percent of the U.S. population (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez, & Todorova, 2008). The number of school-age children (children ages 5–17) who spoke a language other than English at home rose from 4.7 to 11.2 million between 1980 and 2009, or from 10 to 21 percent of the population in this age range (NCES, 2011). To situate this group within the larger student population, the percentages of students who spoke a language other than English at home were higher among Hispanic and Asian elementary and secondary students than among elementary and secondary students of all other racial/ethnic groups shown (NCES, 2007).

And while the growth of ELL youth in American schools continues to rise, the achievement gap, or educational debt, of this population continues to drop or remain neutral. A mere 4% of eighth-grade ELLs and 20% of students classified as “formerly ELL” scored at the proficient or advanced levels of the reading portion of the 2005 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NCES, 2006). For ELLs who enter the educational system later, especially in high school, literacy development is a serious problem (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Adolescent ELLs with limited formal schooling and below-grade-level literacy, in fact, are the group most at risk of educational failure (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

One of the biggest challenges in addressing the needs of ELLs is that effective interventions for this population differ than those for English-speaking adolescents. Indicators
such as: position on the path to literacy, motivation, oral English proficiency, background knowledge, vocabulary terms with multiple meanings and context in which literacy is developed (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007) are some of the ways in which academic literacy development for struggling ELLs differ from their native English-speaking peers. Further examination of the indicator of the ‘position on the path to literacy’ shows that adolescent ELLs may have had little opportunity for literacy development prior to entry into the classroom, whereas English-speaking adolescents, regardless of the quality, have almost always had some form of access to literacy development (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Such differences have a great effect on literacy interventions that would be appropriate for ELLs. While equity may be an ultimate goal within adolescent literacy, in terms of access and learning, we must begin to develop a solution based upon the unfortunate reality that ELLs are often not at the same literacy level as their peers when they enter the classroom. Much of this can be credited to disrupted schooling. How then, can we level the playing field and apply notions of equity to that which is unequal?

The six major challenges to improving literacy in adolescent ELLs, as defined by Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) include: 1) lack of common criteria for identifying ELLs and tracking their academic progress, 2) lack of appropriate assessments, 3) inadequate teacher capacity for improving literacy in ELLs, 4) lack of appropriate and flexible program options, 5) inadequate use of research-based instructional practices, and 6) lack of a strong and coherent research agenda about adolescent ELL literacy. Although a detailed examination of each of these challenges, including potential solutions is available in Short and Fitzsimmons’ (2007) seminal report on the challenges to acquiring language and academic literacy for ELLs, the ELL population is once again addressed as a uniform whole, devoid of variation.
Comparisons among ELL adolescents and English-speaking adolescents. While ELL adolescents exhibit unique challenges in terms of literacy, some comparisons between ELLs and English-speaking adolescents are present and might be helpful in our efforts to make an equitable approach to adolescent literacy. In a longitudinal immigrant student adaption study, Suarez-Orozco (2008) found that immigrant students grades started out low and dropped the longer they were in the United States. Furthermore, immigrant boys were more than twice as likely as girls to be categorized as low achievers. The distinguishing features of low-achieving students in the study were more likely than their more highly achieving peers to live in a single-parent home and their mothers were less educated. Additionally, their English language proficiency was lower than that of other groups and they reported high levels of psychological symptoms upon arrival. These students also attended the worse schools, where resources were scarce and conflict was high (Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2008). Building upon the existing discussion of adolescent literacy achievement (Alvermann, 2001), the children in the Suarez-Orozco (2008) study reported more negative attitudes towards school, lower levels of motivation and more indifference than their higher-achieving peers. The constant trends within the research on ELL adolescents and English-speaking adolescents, in regards to literacy, include notions such as motivation, gender, family life, poverty, and access-trends that have been present within the research on adolescent literacy for years. Understanding these comparisons is a beginning step in understanding the literacy needs of ELLs.

(Re)examining literacy. When researching literacy within the ELL population, no known truth can go unchallenged. Even the term literacy, for instance, must be examined and defined in a way which speaks to the population it addresses. These challenges to research tenets are common when any new population is addressed. Literacy in ELL adolescent research,
therefore, must encompass a definition that puts culture and fluidity at the forefront of its efforts. A point of intersection between second language literacy and adolescent literacy, in fact, is the emphasis to reconsider the prominence of mainstream definitions of literacy (Ivey, 2007). The sociocultural perspective on literacy acknowledges the role of print and other symbol systems as being central to literate practice but also recognizes that the learning and use of symbols is mediated by and constituted in social systems and cultural practices (Heath, 1983; Moje, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). It emphasizes the context and culture of the institution as well as the individuals enacting their own literacy. This approach challenges previous literacy research that has been restricted to “formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language” (The New London Group, 1996, page 61). In contemporary research, rather than continue on the pathway that promotes such constricting views on literacy, multiliteracies (The New London Group, 1996), which speak to increasing local diversity, global connectedness, cultural and linguistic diversity of adolescents in America, must be examined. In doing so, we might begin to understand the complex literacy challenges associated with the ELL population.

(Re)Examining ELLs. Current research addressing the needs of ELLs is narrow in focus, and often fails to attribute to the considerable diversity of experiences within ELL classrooms. Recent available data showed that 57% of adolescent ELLs were born in the United States, and are second or third generation immigrants (Batalova, Fix & Murray, 2005). I suspect that number has changed within the last seven years, with increasing ELLs who are first-generation immigrants, yet accurate statistics in immigrant research are unreliable for a multitude of reasons (including, but not limited to, lack of research available, inability to access undocumented immigrant populations, and ELLs struggle to comprehend census protocol).
subgroup of ELLs and a focus in this review, for instance, include unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant youth, a population that has received little to no attention within the fields of literacy or education research even though they vastly populate ELL classrooms throughout the country. Rather than race to try to address the literacy needs of unaccompanied immigrant youth, an area of research that is extremely important, the dialogue must begin with a detailed description of the population at hand. Particularly because “some say, ‘I can’t go back to home country,’ and they know their reasons” (Saul, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 9, 2012).

**Voluntary Immigrants.** Perhaps the most common immigrant experience within contemporary ELL classrooms is that of the voluntary immigrant. Parents of voluntary immigrants often enter the United States for economic opportunity and leave their children behind with family members in the home country. Between working long hours and navigating a new land, often living in the shadows as an undocumented immigrant, it may take parents many years to become situated in the United States and have enough money to send for their children. This group of children is raised in the home country and may struggle with abandonment or challenges associated with being separated from a parent for a lengthy period of time. Voluntary immigrants often travel the dangerous journey on foot through the desert with smugglers or “coyotes,” men who have been hired by parents in the United States. Others take flights into the country or may travel hidden in compartments or vehicles. Voluntary immigrants primarily come to the United States for reasons associated with safety, reuniting with a family member, economic and educational opportunities.

Many minors are not apprehended upon entry into the country and live in the United States as undocumented immigrants. Apprehended minors, on the other hand, end up in a
detainment center at some point such as the WCH, which serves as the site for the current research. The detainment center functions to provide temporary housing and services to youth and begin the immigration court proceedings and family reunification. Youth reside in such centers under care of The Office of Refugee Resettlement while their cases are reviewed by officials, and family reunification specialists work to find a longer term living situation for youth. Once released from detainment centers, the vast majority of unaccompanied immigrant children are enrolled in school. It is uncertain how many unaccompanied immigrant children proceed with their immigration case and assumed that many immigrant youth choose to remain undocumented rather than continue immigration proceedings, for fear of deportation. It is also unknown how many unaccompanied immigrants enter American classrooms annually. These youth have varied educational experiences, which attribute to their levels of native language literacies, second language literacies and ability to transition into contemporary American schools. Many unaccompanied immigrant youth face the additional challenge of navigating a system without proper documentation. It is not possible to know the percentage of ELLs who are also unaccompanied immigrants, as research on this population has not yet been conducted.

Involuntary Immigrants. The second group of immigrants within contemporary ELL classrooms is involuntary immigrants, including: refugees, asylum-seekers and victims of trafficking. The Refugee Act of 1980 describes unaccompanied refugee minors (URMs) as: refugee children in the United States without a parent or close relative willing or able to care for them. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is tasked with taking care of these children both fleeing persecution and entering the United States without a parent or guardian (Haddal, 2008). Since 1980, approximately 12,000 unaccompanied refugee minors have been handled by

---

1 P.L.96-212
2 45 C.F.R.400.111
ORR (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). Refugees flee their homes because of fear of persecution for their beliefs, politics, or ethnicity. A particularly large group of involuntary immigrants who have entered the United States between 2011 and 2012 are from El Salvador, and are fleeing gang recruitment (which is now commonplace within most schools). A family reunification specialist at the WCH explained this occurrence in further detail by adding:

And the kids are coming from El Salvador in record numbers because the gangs are recruiting in schools there now. Schools aren’t safe for the children. Gangs also walk door to door to collect taxes. If you refuse, they may rape or kill you. It’s gotten so bad the government has made deals with the gangs to protect people. Some of their deals include having to give prisoners better conditions (Saul, Interview, August 9, 2012).

Since most refugees would prefer to stay in their countries rather than seek shelter in strange, foreign lands, they are referred to as involuntary immigrants. Children are displaced for reasons specific to their status as children: forced abductions in times of unrest, forced military recruitment, sexual abuse, and forced labor are examples of forms of refugee-producing phenomena which are either peculiarly meted out to children or which take on a dimension that can only be experienced by child refugees (Seugling, 2004). From FY 1999 through FY 2005, there were a cumulative total of 782 new unaccompanied refugee minors admitted to the United States (Haddal, 2008). The statistics associated with both involuntary and voluntary immigrants only refers to those who have been apprehended, and thus screened, by the federal government. It is very difficult to predict how many children within each group are, in fact, traveling into the United States annually and very little data on unaccompanied refugee children exist. In recent years, the United States has not filled the full allotment for refugees, which is an annual admission of 70,000. As a consequence of traumatic past experiences, unaccompanied refugee
children when resettled in other countries seem to be at particularly high risk for distress-related symptoms and are less likely to receive psychological care (Sourander, 1998). Successful integration of refugees into US society, including education, may be difficult in the face of functional health impairments (Geltman et al., 2005). Unaccompanied refugee minors often live in group homes or in foster care and are largely forced to advocate for themselves as they navigate their new countries.

_Asylum-seeking youth_ are another group within the involuntary immigrant population of ELLs in America. Thousands of asylum-seekers enter the United States every year. In 2000 alone, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) took nearly 5,000 children into its custody, some as young as eighteen months old (Morton & Young). Some children flee from child-specific threats such as forced gang membership and gang violence. Others flee based on religious or political persecution, abuse or maltreatment (Bhaba & Schmidt, 2008). In 2007, 7,787 children were arrested by the Department of Homeland Security. Advocates for children applying for asylum have commented on the many challenges of the process. The five grounds specified for persecution include race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. However, many children leave their home countries to escape dangers of infanticide, child marriage, being forced to live as a street child, gang violence, domestic violence and sexual exploitation (Byrne, 2008). This group of youth is dependent on their ability to describe their experiences (a high stakes use for literacy) in order to be granted asylum.

A smaller, yet present group of immigrants within ELL classrooms include _victims of trafficking_. Human trafficking is the fastest-growing source of profit for organized criminal enterprises worldwide. It is second largest criminal industry in the world, after drug dealing. Profits from the trafficking industry contribute to the expansion of organized crime in the U.S.
and worldwide ("The Campaign to Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking Fact Sheet: Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000," 2000). Victims are generally trafficked into the U.S. from Asia, Central and South America and Eastern Europe. Many victims of trafficking in the U.S. do not speak English and are therefore isolated and unable to communicate with those who might be able to help them ("The Campaign to Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking Fact Sheet: Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000," 2000). A law was not written to protect victims of trafficking or to persecute their traffickers in the United States until 2000. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA)\(^3\) defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as:

- **Sex trafficking**: the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person forced to perform such an act is under the age of 18 years; or
- **Labor trafficking**: the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery.

Although data on victims of trafficking is very unreliable, it is estimated that 18,000-20,000 victims of human trafficking are trafficked into the United States every year, many of whom are under 18 years of age ("The Campaign to Rescue & Restore Victims of Human Trafficking Fact Sheet: Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000," 2000). Many of these children are never able to seek out help and remain victims for years in the United States. Other children are apprehended by immigration officials or other service members and eventually placed in group homes or foster care facilities. Many of these children have been so coerced by their traffickers that they attempt to re-connect with them once discharged from a facility. Victims of trafficking are a particularly vulnerable subset of the unaccompanied immigrant

\(^3\) Public Law 106-386
population in America and have needs which stem from years of trauma, displacement and neglect.

(Re)Examining Context

Literacy is not a static entity; rather it changes as it flows throughout different contexts, shifting purpose along the way (S. Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984). As context and participants change, so too do the roles of literacy. The adolescent literacy experiences of ELLs manifest itself differently within different contexts. The current research on adolescent ELL literacy focuses primarily on experiences within schools. For the diverse ELL population, however, the enactment of literacy extends far beyond the classroom. Particularly for ELL youth fitting the categorization of involuntary or undocumented youth, the role of context has a profound effect on the performance of literacy. When addressing the literacy needs of adolescent ELLs, the definition of literacy we must posit should cross barriers between schools, families, workplaces (Sarroub, Pernicek, & Sweeney, 2007) and beyond. In building upon the notion of “hybrid literacy practices” and the need to create “third spaces” (Gutierrez, 2008; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; E. B. Moje et al., 2004) it is no surprise that failure to merge out-of-school discourses with school discourses results in the de-valuing of funds of knowledge and literacy practices, and thus widening the achievement gap in literacy for ELL youth.

They come to this country basically bringing those skills with them and then through this program they learn about a new environment with new challenges and they adjust, the overwhelming majority of them, adjust and respond to the new situation with what they’ve learned here (Saul, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 9, 2012).
The youth in the center are heavily influenced by their context. In turn, the context is shaped by the participants therein. Assimilation has come to be characterized as a two-way process of boundary negotiation (Alba & Nee, 2003) between immigrants and the contexts they transcend. Immigrant youth detained at the WCH make use of their surroundings to comprehend their situation. As described by Massey and Sanchez (2010):

As they encounter actors and institutions in the receiving society and learn about the categorical boundaries maintained by natives, they broker those boundaries and try to influence the meaning and content of the social categories defined by those boundaries (p. 16).

Thus, the transition of living in the United States of America for immigrant youth includes the process of boundary-brokering (Massey & Sanchez, 2010), an act that involves observation, accommodation and the ability to challenge existing notions. The youth at the WCH are additionally influenced by the political forces responsible for their detainment. Although the center is run by a human rights organization, youth are detained for illegal entry into the United States. Detained unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant youth begin their boundary brokering on the wrong side of the law, a reality that is made very clear to them upon apprehension. The space within the center itself is contested, heavy with boundaries and defined by all actors therein.

**Literacy Practices**

Literacy practices involve the socially-situated beliefs, values and purposes that shape how and why people use literacy (Barton, 1991; Street, 1984). They are the everyday uses of literacy in the real world. When examining literacy practices, the role of context is integral to
understanding. In an effort to address adolescent ELL literacy, therefore, we might begin with a deep examination of literacy practices. Many studies which focus on literacy practices (de la Piedra, 2010; Godina, 2004; Massey, Brown, Graeber, Johnson, & Learned, 2009; Moje, 2000; Perry, 2009; Sarroub, et al., 2007) found discrepancies between in-school and out-of-school literacies. Gutierrez argues that repertoires of practice capture vertical and horizontal forms of expertise (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), including what students learn in school as well as in a range of practices outside of school (Gutierrez, 2008). Here, the examination of context is at the forefront of literacy research.

In de la Piedra’s (2010) examination of adolescent literacy practices on the United States-Mexico border, for instance, many teachers defined literacy in a narrow, autonomous way and assumed that their ELL students did not read or write in the home because “99% of our kids [do not like to read].” De la Peidra, however, was able to identify literacy practices enacted in diverse ways within the home as parents and adolescents both drew from their funds of knowledge. These practices included: writing letters and making phone calls to maintain transnational relationships, religious literacy, magazine and book reading, computer/online literacy, text messaging, vernacular literacy practices, oral narratives, and sharing written texts. Additionally, adolescents were agents that contributed to their households’ funds of knowledge by bringing home literacy practices learned at school. Cross-cultural literacy practices among peers such as sending e-mails, navigating the Internet, and helping each other understand homework through translating, allowed the adolescents to accomplish social goals as they adapted to U.S. schools (de la Piedra, 2010).

The tension between literacies at home and in school, then, were identified in the conflicts between the goals of meaningful literacy instruction and the narrow definition of school
literacy practices that derived from standardized testing practices (de la Piedra, 2010). Children in this study were not disinterested or unengaged in literacy, but connected with literacy in ways that were not valued within the autonomous definition of literacy provided by the institution of school. While the school, in preparation for standardized tests, was approaching literacy as a set of skills to be acquired, the participants were engaging with literacy in their out of school contexts as a means of survival, personal entertainment, and cultural engagement. Often, their talk revolved around their experience with the trip to America.

They talk to each other [about their journeys] as something like an adventure, like something that they are proud of. I think also, they have a lot of energy. If an adult does this sort of trip they are more traumatized than the kids. I think that they see this more like an adventure, they think like they don’t even know the dangers, they can feel it, but I don’t know—maybe an adult is more conscious of what they are going through than the kids (Maria, Clinician, Interview, August 9, 2012).

In a similar examination of the literacy practices of marginalized gang-connected youth, adolescents who were often dismissed or silenced in school were found to be sophisticated practitioners of literacy who were utilizing literacy practices to write themselves into the world (Moje, 2000). And while students may have the ability to generate an alternative story through use of literacy practices, it is important that they also have the literacy and language tools and knowledge of how to use their tools differently in different contexts (Moje, 2000). Literacy practices continue to be divided between in-school and out-of-school contexts, with little overlap, and create tension of values, purpose and achievement for both teachers and students. Such tension speaks to Gutierrez’s (1995) original notion of the third space, as an area where the informal and formal scripts of teacher and student in both the unofficial and official learning
contexts intersect, offering a space for roles and knowledge to be reevaluated. While we strive for the third space as an area in which students funds of knowledge can be valued, when discussing the detained immigrant population, we must first be able to describe their transnational experiences within the first and second spaces. Since access to researching unaccompanied immigrant youth is limited, this might prove a tremendous challenge.

In Godina’s (2004) exploration of literacy practices of Mexican–background students in the rural Midwest, contradictory literacy practices surfaced again between in-school and out-of-school literacies. The role of literacy was very different for Mexican-background families than for monolingual White families. For students of Mexican-background, the role of home literacies included translation associated with aspects of maintaining a household, raising a family, and being gainfully employed. The parents of these students remained distant from the school setting. Additionally, Mexican-American parents were engaged in different literacy practices than their children because they were tied to their work obligations. Often, when parents deferred to teachers about the instructional needs of their children, the lack of communication between parents and teachers further marginalized the child. And while the teachers had negative perceptions about the Mexican-background students’ literacy abilities, teachers relied on the parents and children to translate their own documents between English and Spanish.

Contradictory values of funds of knowledge were also noticed in the local library, which had only four Spanish book titles (none of them for young readers) in a town of 1,000 with 480 bilingual residents. When a new librarian noticed this and added to the collection, she noticed that the Mexican-background students utilized the library in a very different way than their white counterparts. Rather than find their books in a hurry, students of Mexican-background tended to hang out at the library to read and work at a more relaxed pace (Godina, 2004). Additional
notions of accessibility to Spanish or bilingual text was also examined in the school setting, where Spanish-dominant students did not have sufficient scaffolding of mainstream English instruction, or the resources necessary to access the English language. The contradictory literacy practices of students from multilingual backgrounds showcases the vitality of accessibility and the central role that context plays in literacy.

Literacy Events

In the seminal text, *Ways with Words*, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) examined the ways in which children used language in home and school in two separate communities. She defined literacy events as:

A conceptual tool useful in examining within particular communities of modern society the actual forms and functions of oral and literacy traditions and co-existing relationships between spoken and written language. A literacy event is any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interaction and their interpretive processes. (p. 93)

The literacy events she described in Trackton, one of the sites of her research, were almost always public and social. Here, written information rarely stood alone, but were “reshaped and reworded into an oral mode by adults and children who incorporate chunks of written text in their talk” (p. 200). In this sense, literacy events were mediated by literacy, but literacy was not the end goal of enacting talk or the discussion of text. Literacy events, moreover, were activities in which literacy plays a role. Usually, a written text is central to the activity and there may be talk around the text. Literacy events, in fact, arise from, and are shaped by literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

By participating in an examination of the literacy events within the WCH, the notion of literacy as a social practice can be engaged. As noted by the Director of Youth and Residential Services, “the kids at all ages are expected to relay their story to their attorneys” (Sandra,
Midwest NPO, Interview, August 17, 2012). Bloome (1985), for example, describes reading as a social practice that involves relationships among people that include establishing social groups, ways of engaging with others and the role of status and social positions as well as acquiring culturally appropriate ways of thinking, problem solving, values and feeling (p. 134).

Furthermore, in *Discourse Analysis and the Study of Classroom Language and Literacy Events* (2005) Bloome discusses the role of literacy events in: cultural action, the social construction of identity and power relations. Rather than focus on events as a unit of analysis, however, his work functions to discuss events as a theoretical construct, placing emphasis on people’s interactions with others. According to Bloome, a literacy event is “any event in which written language plays a nontrivial role” (p. 4).

Many studies, often ethnographic in nature (Rose, 2004; Finders, 1997; Pollock, 2004; Taylor, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 1997) build upon the understanding of literacy events by observing the talk that surrounds text in social practices. Within the literature on the topic of literacy events, the role of context and power are two themes that come up often. These themes lend themselves well in building a discussion on the role of literacy events within the WCH and the way in which power is negotiated and evaluated between minors and the contexts in which they navigate. Here, as identified in the review of literature, the apex of talk and text is often associated with meaning-making.

**Language and Literacy Brokering**

Much like the act of brokering boundaries within a new context, so too do youth engage in the brokering of language and literacy. Language brokering refers to the meditational work that children do as they advocate for themselves, their families and negotiate between monolingual speakers (Faulstich Orellana, 2009). When brokering, children don’t passively
transmit words from one to another, but use language as a tool for negotiation. Other terms that are sometimes used interchangeably with language brokering include: family interpreting, natural translation, para-phrasing and transcultural and intergenerational work (Faulstich Orellana, 2009).

The youths’ experience with language and literacy brokering both within the context of the WCH and outside (in their home countries and especially when they are placed in the United States upon discharge from the center) involve particularly high-stakes uses for literacy which complicate the conversation. Minors who are discharged to sponsors within the United States serve as language and literacy brokers to sponsor, lawyers, school personnel and advocates as they transition to life in America. Their contexts of navigation will include schools, public institutions, courtrooms, lawyers’ offices, and other spaces where comprehension and ability to accurately describe an experience are vital in reaching the ultimate goal of being granted approval to stay in the country. And while detained minors serve as cultural, literacy and language brokers, many of them do not have the basic English language skills necessary to perform the tasks proficiently. They may be expected to carry knowledge from one context to another without the tools necessary to comprehend the knowledge at hand. In the review of literature on language and literacy brokering, the following themes emerged: brokering serving as a tool exceeding translation purposes and literacy/language brokering adjusting traditional view of adolescent “roles”.

**Literacy/language brokering as a tool exceeding translation purposes.** Perry (2009), in her work on examining the genres, contexts and literacy practices of Sudanese refugee families, defines literacy brokering as the process of seeking and/or providing informal assistance about some aspect of a given text or literacy practice. Brokers, in this sense work to
bridge linguistic, cultural, and textual divides for others. Brokering is not mere translation, but is a complex activity involving a commanding understanding of numerous aspects of a text and mediation of cultural context, or it may involve many of these aspects at once. Perry argues that there is a great need to examine literacy brokering in other cultural and linguistic contexts and communities, particularly for people in nonmainstream or marginalized communities. Immigrant families bring distinct cultural practices and traditions to their lives in America that may not be recognized by the larger society (Faulstich Orellana, 2009).

As the Sudanese refugees in Perry’s (2009) study settled in the United States, they encountered a new literacy environment, complete with a new language, new texts and new practices. Here, literacy brokers did not merely provide access to the meaning of a text, but also brokered the ways to utilize different texts. Additionally, parents educational backgrounds had little to do with the amount of brokering they sought. This finding suggests that regardless of previous access to literacy, when in a new land and speaking a new language, the playing field is even and many find themselves in need of assistance. Perry (2009) also suggests that the term ‘functional literacy’ needs to be re-conceptualized to include more than decoding. Instead, Perry posits that the term emphasizes the function in an understanding of the ways in which texts are used in the world to achieve social goals and purposes. The current research builds upon Perry’s discussion on brokering to analyze the influence of contested space in contexts on brokering and also by examining the text-mediated events present within the center.

Brokering also involves the use of navigating society and being powerful social actors. Youth involved in brokering practices, upon being made aware of their status as immigrants, serve to save face for their family members as they broker on their behalf. In certain contexts, when youth fear stereotyping or unjust treatment, they may adjust the language of their parents to
fit the contextual situation they are in. This type of literacy flexibility requires a great deal of competency with language and a general understanding of cultural norms in America. In one such example, a young immigrant teen spoke of “cleaning up” her father’s language in public interactions (Faulstich Orellana, 2009). Brokers also have the power to shape the flow of conversations and to make things happen in the social world that is often possible for young people to assume.

**Literacy/language brokering adjusting traditional view of adolescent “roles.”**

Brokering is invented by necessity in the immigrant context, not a practice in which children take the lead, nor something handed down by parents (Faulstich Orellana, 2009). Brokering provides immigrant youth with access to information and contexts which are normally reserved, in a dominant view of roles in America, for adults. Many immigrant youth find themselves responsible for brokering household duties such as paying the bills, communicating with landlords, and reading the mail. According to Faulstich-Orellana’s (2009) extensive ethnography on brokering in immigrant communities, the role of brokering is generally a role youth take pride in. Immigrants tend to work together for the collective good of the family, and when youth have a better handle on the English language than their guardians, it seems natural that they serve to broker responsibilities. Immigrant youth, in fact, did not recognize their brokering practices as anything unusual until their adolescence, wherein they began to realize many of their peers did not have the same responsibilities as they did.

There exists an assumption that translating gives youth more responsibility than they should have. This view assumes that such role reversal is detrimental to children’s proper development and to “normal,” healthy, family relationships (Faulstich Orellana, 2009). Others (e.g., Perry, 2009) argue that taking on household responsibilities does not necessarily involve
reversals of parent-child relations, and households that function according to norms that are
different from the dominant norms should not be assumed dysfunctional. Children who served as
brokers in Faultich-Orellana’s (2009) ethnography generally did not feel anxious, nervous or
worried when they interpreted for others, but they did worry about the effects their words could
have. The stakes for unaccompanied youth are much higher. I put forward that these youth may,
in fact, experience more negative emotions when serving as brokers as a result of their
experience with the English language, the context in which they are navigating and the high
stakes purposes for their literacy use. Within the context of the center, however, immigrant youth
often experience an opportunity to revisit their childhood, in the sense that (for the time being)
they don’t have to worry about getting their basic needs, such as food, lodging and care, met.

    They start to become children many of them. Some of them learn to be children with us.
    So that the roles that they have here are being learned here to some extent, but there’s no
easy line, like this is the adult role and this is the child role. They come with abilities and
they come with skills and they adjust to an environment when they are able to adjust
(Saul, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 9, 2012).

    Brokering allows children to become active participants in literacy practices. This allows
children to gain valuable experience with important real-world texts at a young age (Perry,
2009). Brokering may reinforce school-taught literacy concepts and skills and offer children an
opportunity to enhance their developing literacy abilities as they simultaneously help their
parents (Perry, 2009). Faulstich-Orellana, however, cautions those quick to make a judgment on
whether such social practices have uniquely positive or negative implications for learning and
development. To do so would assert a judgment about what counts as positive or negative. And
just as the current research urges the re-examination of what counts as literacy, so too are we
cautioned against placing judgment on the experiences and/or practices of the current participants.

**Literacy as a Transformative Tool in Identity Negotiation**

Another theme that emerged in the review of literature with such consistency that I chose to include it in my discussion, involved the use of literacy as a tool for transforming thought and experience (Vygotsky, 1978), and more specifically, for constructing identity (de la Piedra, 2010; E. Moje, 2000; Sarroub, Pernicek, & Sweeney, 2007). The identity development and negotiation differs among immigrant and American citizen adolescents. A major developmental task during adolescence is to reach a mature sense of identity (Tartakovsky, 2009). To understand whether individual identities exist alone, or in the process of socialization, Wortham’s work on the emergence of identity can be explored. In his research on the emergence of classroom identity, Wortham states that individuals exist only in social contexts. Wortham’s work showcased the development of individualized identities within the social context. His findings illuminated both the personal and sociohistorical processes. Bakhtin (1981) posits that identity depends on social categories and processes. Even when practicing privately, he suggests that the process of social identification involves the use of social resources to construct self-understanding. Both the social and individual processes play a role; they co-develop (Wortham, 2004).

During the process of brokering boundaries Massey & Sanchez (2010) suggest that youth look within and question their own language, values and goals for entering the country. Next, they position themselves as individuals within a larger group of immigrants, often characterized as a group on the ‘outside’. Another factor in identity negotiation and boundary brokering is the encounters youth have in their daily surroundings-or in the current research, the context of the WCH. Even so, immigrant adolescents exist between two worlds. In one world, often at home
(or in the native country for youth that have not yet been united with a sponsor in the United States), they have a rich sense of tradition and heritage. In another world, often at school, they are part of mainstream culture (Li, 2009). Uniquely, the youth at the WCH all share the immigrant experience. As identity is negotiated within the center, it will be re-evaluated upon entry into other American contexts upon discharge. Unfortunately, the process of uprooting and resettlement is a journey full of difficulties and uncertainties. Developing a deep self-identity, may therefore prove more challenging for immigrant adolescents than their peers. Additionally, recent research by Martinez (2009), suggests that for an immigrant, the youth experience of life stages of childhood and adolescence differ from mainstream characterizations and adopt older age-graded identities that do not coincide with full time schooling in the United States. In a sense, many immigrant adolescents may not feel like adolescents at all, but due to responsibilities at home, feel more like adults.

The experiences of immigrant youth are strongly dependent on the context of reception they have within the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, 2006). Moreover, in her work on the conceptual considerations of immigrant adolescent girls, Suarez-Orozco (1999) states:

Many immigrant and minority children receive ‘social mirroring’ that is predominantly hostile. When the assumptions about them include expectations of sloth, irresponsibility, low intelligence and even danger, the outcome can be toxic. When these reflections are received in a number of mirrors including the media, the classroom, and the street, the outcome is devastating. Our own recent research suggests that immigrant children are keenly aware of the prevailing ethos of hostility of the dominant culture. (p. 10)

Alvermann (2001) shares similar sentiment in her belief that many schools in the United States resonate with the “culture-as-a-disability” approach, in which it is assumed, “that all cultures, as
historically evolved ways of ‘doing’ life, teach people about what is worth working for, how to succeed and who will fall short” (p.677). Moje (2000) argues that social literacy practices are beginning to be examined within school and outside of school, but little research has been conducted on how adolescents use literacy in unsanctioned peer groups and how they weave their unsanctioned or alternative literacies together with academic literacies. This approach to examining literacy practices allows the third space (Gutierrez, 1995; Moje et al., 2004) to be examined and emphasizes the fluid nature of literacy. Literacy practices have important implications for knowledge and identity construction and representation (Moje, 2000). Like literacy, identity shifts as an individual moves amongst different contexts. Adolescents acquire multiple literacies and use them to construct their identities. Cross cultural literacy practices allow adolescents to construct transnational identities and a third space (de la Piedra, 2010). This discussion is particularly important when researching the literacy practices of unaccompanied, adolescent immigrants as their construction of third space involves an additional layer of complexity. For this population, funds of knowledge come from various contexts within both the home country and the United States, and involve the use of different language, cultures and nationality in the negotiation of meaning.

In her examination of the literacy practices of five gang-connected youth over the course of three years, Moje (2000) found that youth used their literacy practices as meaning-making, expressive and communicative tools. The unsanctioned literacies used by the students were not limited to gang literacies (tagging, writing graffiti, hand signs, dress and color codes) but included poetry, narrative, letter and journal writing as well as reading. Literacy practices in this study allowed participants to claim their space publicly, and negotiate their shifting identity in different contexts. Minors are also faced with the task of re-negotiating identity as they move
between contexts where different culture, values, roles and expectations are placed upon them. In Moje’s (2000) study, the literacy practices were acquired through the apprenticing of others and then the practicing of different forms in various spaces. Where teachers may not have the time to consider the linguistic sophistication of and the motivations for unsanctioned literacy practices, at some point the literacy practices of adolescents must be considered in order to extend learning opportunities to all students. For the detained children in the current research, understanding their enactments of literacy and practices thereof are vital components of understanding the role that literacy plays in their lives. Additionally, the detention experience in and of itself is a transformative experience which will allow youth to claim a space, negotiate identity and apprentice literacy practices in America. Within this space they will discover, both independently and with the help of their guides, the ways to trek the contexts within their immediate environment.

**Conclusion**

Current researchers examining the literacy needs of ELL adolescents are pioneers in the field of education and in their process of exploration will uncover both grand descriptions and make naïve misjudgments. In any pioneering journey such polarities are present. While increasing attention has been paid to the needs of adolescent learners, the fire is just beginning to burn for ELL literacy researchers. Furthermore, research on ELLs exists as a specialty area of work which is largely kept separate from other literacy research. Within this small arena, many ELL experiences, such as those of involuntary immigrants and unaccompanied youth have been overlooked entirely. Despite recent efforts to examine ELL literacy, an understanding of the areas including: functions of literacy, achievement, acquisition, comprehension practices and brokering events leave much to be desired. A review of the literature does offer some insight on
ways in which researchers might begin to understand adolescent ELL literacy including:
couching ELL adolescents within the work on English-speaking adolescents in an examination of
literacy rather than keeping the two areas of research separate, re-examining definitions of
literacy and context, investigating literacy practices, events and brokering, discussing
educational equity and examining the vast immigration experiences of youth within ELL
classrooms. ELLs are situated within a system that sets them up for struggling with literacy and
dropping out of school in much more significant numbers than their English-speaking peers.
Additionally, inequity in education is prevalent and has proven to under-serve minority youth.
With the ELL population growing at a staggering rate, immigration reform on the forefront of
many policies, and the presence of living in an increasingly global society, we must act now in
examining the educational and literacy needs of all adolescents in America, English-speaking
and English-learning alike.
III. METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework: Critical Sociocultural Theory

Critical sociocultural theory served as the theoretical lens for approaching the current inquiry. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the roles of social, cultural, and historical factors on human experience and can be described as a space where knowledge is constructed based on social interactions and experience (Woolfolk, 1998). When discussing sociocultural theory, the influence of environment on an individual is often at the forefront of the dialogue. Bronfenbrenner, for instance, laid early roots for sociocultural theory with his description of the concentric levels of influence that affect individuals’ development: the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model of human development illustrates the power of wide-ranging developmental influences on the human experience.

Since its inception, the ecological model has evolved to incorporate culture as a factor that is both stable and persists over a long period of time, and unstable and in constant evolution (Au, 1997; Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Leading scholar on the immigrant experience in America, Carola Suarez-Orozco, has used an updated ecological developmental perspective to describe the implications of unauthorized status (Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suarez-Orozco, 2011) for immigrants. This updated ecological model served as a foundational model of the sociocultural approach to understanding the experiences of unaccompanied, undocumented, immigrant youth in this research. I have built upon the updated model in an effort to represent the experience of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth within the setting for this study, the World’s Children House (WCH):

**Macrosystem**: country of origin, immigration law (federal and state), arrest and detainment process, and separation from family.
**Exosystem:** pro-bono legal team, immigration court, Office of Refugee Resettlement, advocates, translators, Midwest NPO, medical team and other intake/screening experiences.

**Microsystem:** how the youth navigates within and between the contexts of Family Reunification, Clinicians, Caseworkers, Residential Instructors, peers and other staff at the WCH.

**Mesosystem:** influence of collaborative microsystem entities on the youth’s experience.

**Individual:** documentation status, race/ethnicity/nationality, trauma exposure, worries about deportation and experiences with authorities, status of family reunification case, status of immigration case and process of discharge from the center.

I also drew from the discussion of the *funds of knowledge*—bodies of knowledge acquired by both historical and cultural means—that are central to home and communities (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Rather than view immigrant youth as “non-native” speakers of English or “limited” in their literacy capacity, for instance, we can build upon their background knowledge, experience and resilience in an attempt to describe their skills. The funds of knowledge of unaccompanied and/or undocumented immigrant youth are particularly unique and exist within formal and informal contexts in more than one country, with multiple factors such as culture, language, and transnational identities emerging as markers of knowledge funds. Many funds of knowledge for immigrant youth are the unseen influences on experience that took place in the child’s home country environment and continue to shape meaning making as they navigate through the WCH and eventually other contexts within the United States. While such funds of knowledge are immeasurable, and therefore, not units of analysis, they were included in the discussion of the youth experience and the ways in which literacy was enacted within the center.

In recent years, literacy researchers have adopted a version of sociocultural theory termed critical sociocultural theory that better addresses issues of power, identity and agency (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2009). This perspective was also employed in the study to expose larger systems of power that shape and are shaped by minors in the WCH. This approach to agency
speaks to the ways in which youth negotiate their identities within the WCH. Within this negotiation, issues such as activities, events, relationships and cultural tools are embedded within relations of power. In this vein, I explored how minors are exposed to new forms of knowledge and participation within the center and the effects this has on their meaning-making and enactment of literacy.

**Role of Context in the Theoretical Framework**

In response to the notion that the individual and community are often under-theorized in sociocultural theory (Lewis, et al., 2009), the role of context was placed at the forefront of the study. When referring to context, both the World’s Children House (WCH) and the numerous pathways, policies, and groups within the WCH were examined. Contexts within the WCH include, but are not limited to: academic, family reunification, legal, medical, counseling, and the milieu (a term used within the center to refer to main living areas). An exploration of each context within the WCH is an important task in describing the detained immigrant experience in as much detail as possible. The context of the classroom (academic), for instance, is extremely different from the context of the counseling office. Both spaces serve different functions, and youth learn how to adjust their roles and interact within the shifting environment as needed. The navigation across contexts or discourse communities, within the WCH has the potential for great change for both the minors and the WCH.

Discourse communities are groupings of people that share ways of knowing, thinking, believing acting and communicating (Lewis, et al., 2007). Variety exists within discourse communities, such as youth differ within the WCH, although all minors are members of the WCH community and inducted into this context upon detainment by the government. Although the malleable functions of the WCH, as they are shaped and re-shaped by youth itineraries, are
addressed in the approach to this descriptive study, the focus of the work is largely on the minors navigating through the system. Therefore, the way in which the environment is shaped by the immigrant journey is not the heart of the current inquiry, but an important consequence of the experience to be mentioned, nonetheless. Literacy practices, for instance, can only be inferred from observable evidence (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000) although they also involve unobservable evidence. Observable evidence can be characterized by an action that can be seen by others, a child reading a book, for instance. Unobservable evidence, on the other hand, involves additional resources such as feelings and values-incredible notions unseen by the human eye.

Transcultural repositioning is a concept developed by Guerra (2007, 2008) to explain immigrants’ negotiations of identities and literacy practices across the past, present and future (Medina, 2010). Such mapping of space “provides a lens with which to move away from assigning fixed meanings to people’s participation in cultural practices (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) and move toward a dynamic understanding of how people make sense and negotiate across places and communities” (Medina, 2010, p. 42). Furthermore, in addressing how social dynamics have been influenced by immigration and globalization, Blommaert & Van Der Donckt (2002) argued that “perceptions of space and spatial trajectories may offer a useful point of departure for analysis” (p. 147). Thus, the contexts within the WCH were viewed as spaces, (Certeau, 1988) situated and composed of culture, individuality and power. Addressing the contexts as spaces allowed for a discussion of power, where institutional demands could be explored. In short, I sought to explore how the stories about space exhibit the operations that allow it.
Definition of Key Terms

The current research examined literacy by focusing on literacy practices, events, and materials. Throughout this inquiry numerous literacy-related terms were utilized to examine the experiences of minors within the center. The definitions of these terms as applied in the study are as follows:

- **Literacy**: the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing (Street, 1984, p. 1). It includes an oral dimension and cultural practice (Freire & Macedo, 1987) in which literacy is enacted through language, and it is not a set of skills aimed at acquiring the dominant standard of language.

- **Language**: language is cultural, a mediating force of knowledge, knowledge itself (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and a tool used to mediate literacy practices and events. Minors often make use of numerous languages and dialects when making meaning within the center. Language allows minors to develop their own voice and participate in the “authorship of one’s own world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 151).

- **Literacy Practice**: The uses of cultural ways of using literacy, the mediating activities involving print that are part of the everyday lives of detained minors and to the purposes that shape how and why detained immigrant youth use literacy (Barton, 1991; Street, 1984). Literacy practices can be viewed as the link between the activities of reading and writing, and the social structures in which they are embedded, and which they help to shape (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000). In the current research, close attention is given to the context of the WCH, since literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and show power relationships; where some literacies are more dominant or influential than others. Literacy practices are purposeful, embedded within broader social goals and
cultural practices and are often acquired through a processes of sense-making (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000).

- **Literacy Event:** Shirley Brice Heath (1982) characterized a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and interpretative processes” (p. 93). Literacy events, as defined in the current research, involve an activity wherein a text is central to the activity and talk revolves around the print. Literacy events both stem from and are shaped by literacy practices (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000).

- **Emancipatory Literacy:** literacy is viewed as one of the major vehicles by which ‘oppressed’ people are able to participate in a sociohistorical transformation of their society (Freire & Macedo, 1987). “The notion of emancipatory literacy suggests two dimensions of literacy. On the one hand, students have to become literate about their histories, experiences and the culture of their immediate environments. One the other hand, they must also appropriate those codes and cultures of the dominant spheres so they can transcend their own environments” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 47).

- **Expectations:** The demands placed upon minors by the contexts of the WCH. These demands may be inadvertent and often refer to the documents youth are expected to read and understand in order to successfully navigate the contexts of the WCH.

**Methodology**

As previously stated, the central research questions of the study were:

RQ1: What are the literacy practices and events of adolescents within the WCH?

RQ2: What are the literacy expectations placed upon unaccompanied adolescent immigrants by the WCH contexts?
In order to examine the research questions, a descriptive case study was employed. Moreover, the research questions were embedded within a contextual analysis of the WCH. Throughout the study, I observed minors in the various contexts of the World’s Children House (WCH), conducted a series of interviews with staff, observed youth within the WCH, analyzed WCH documents, collected artifacts and embedded findings within a detailed description of the WCH. Descriptive research makes possible the depiction of “characteristics or properties of groups, events, or phenomena…with no experimental manipulation” (Kamil, Langer, & Shanahan, 1985) and was a well-suited approach for the current inquiry. By examining the context of the WCH and its participants, I described the literacy practices and events enacted by minors within the center as well as the expectations placed upon youth by the contexts of the WCH.

Case study methodology addresses both descriptive and explanatory questions (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). A strength of case studies, in fact, is “its ability to examine, in-depth a case within a real-life context” (Green, Camilli, Elmore; Yin, p. 111). The unit of analysis for the case study is the World’s Children House (WCH) and data were collected within this natural setting (Bromley, 1986). Such an approach is especially appropriate because of the dearth of educationally relevant information about immigrant youth in general and, in particular, information about the roles of literacy in their lives. In this intrinsic case study, I sought to understand the WCH context by describing it in rich detail, and not necessarily with the goal to contribute to theory-building (Duke & Mallette, 2004). Case studies “provide detailed narratives about particular individuals within a social setting with the power to generate hypotheses” (Duke & Mallette, 2004, p. 343) and the current research set out to do just that. The individuals in this
case refer to both the youth and the staff at the WCH and the setting relates to the various contexts within the center and the WCH as a whole.

When matching research questions to purpose, I concentrated on conducting an investigation that sought to examine a little-known phenomenon—to identify and discover important categories of meaning and eventually generate hypothesis for further research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The research examined the stories of both staff and youth within the WCH. In this examination, the roles of contexts were paramount. Additionally, the expectations placed upon youth by the WCH were considered. In describing the literacy events and practices of immigrant youth, stories were explored. Stories, as Certeau (1988) noted, “traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories” (p. 115). Every story collected within the current research is a travel story, or spatial practice, that pushes conception of maps and boundaries. Experiences are investigated and evidenced by the way in which they traverse boundaries of space and context within the WCH, and how youth develop their own unique itineraries in doing so.

The current design was informed by a previous pilot study I conducted at the WCH as part of a research project. The pilot study involved building a description of the center and incorporated extensive observations. I drew from my own experience as a past Residential Instructor at the WCH in the design of this research as well. Although there are numerous pathways I could have taken with the inquiry, both the pilot study and my anecdotal evidence spoke to the need for a deeper examination of literacy at the center. Case study methodology supports the efforts of this goal.
Setting

The World’s Children House (WCH) (pseudonym) is located in a large Midwestern city which has a very diverse population. The mayor recently stated that he wanted the city to be the most immigrant-friendly city in the world. The city, like most in America, has a rich immigrant history but also struggles with extreme segregation, gentrification and a complicated relationship with immigrant rights. The WCH provides housing, counseling, case management, and family reunification services to approximately 300 male and female children a year, birth to age 17, who have been apprehended by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The WCH’s 54-bed facility is licensed by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) as a Child Care Institution. The center is overseen by a large human rights non-profit organization called the Midwest NPO (pseudonym). WCH operates under a Cooperative Agreement with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to serve unaccompanied immigrant children, and has done so successfully since 1995. Services offered at the WCH include family reunification, counseling and case management, housing, education, medical care and recreation. Youth, ages newborn to 17, referred by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) are eligible for placement at the WCH. Services are available by referral only from Office of Refugee Resettlement/Division of Unaccompanied Children’s Services (ORR/DUCS).

WCH is one of the most language-diverse centers of this kind in the nation, with over 20 languages spoken. Participants at the WCH come from all over the world and speak a variety of languages. Other centers of this kind, often those near the border, typically have services offered in Spanish and English only and therefore, receive less diverse participants. Services at the WCH, however, are provided in the following languages: Arabic, Bosnian, Cantonese, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Kikongo, Latvian, Laotian, Lingala, Mandarin, Marathi, Nigerian,
Pandaya, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish, Swedish, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Tibetan, Urdu and American Sign Language. It is important to note that the WCH has been recognized as an extraordinary example of centers of this kind nation-wide. This is, in part, a reflection of the WCH being operated by the large, human rights organization, Midwest NPO (pseudonym). While children at the co-ed center range in age, the majority of youth are adolescent males.

The center has changed considerably over the last few years. Adjustments to both local and federal protocols have influenced these changes. Previously, the average length of stay for youth could easily exceed one year. At the beginning of the current research, however, the average length of stay of participants in the center was about four months. By the end of the research, due to a change in federal protocol and the tremendous influx of unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant youth detained in America, the typical length of stay had dropped to one month.

While detained at the WCH, minors are given access to a wide-range of social services to begin their family reunification and legal cases. Owing to the shortened length of stay, and thus smaller level of support, youths’ experiences in navigating the system have largely been affected. In order for the government to be able to process the heightened number of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth entering America, however, the length of stay had to drop. Additionally, Midwest NPO (pseudonym) was forced to open additional emergency shelters during the current inquiry in an effort to house hundreds of unaccompanied immigrant minors detained in America with nowhere to live. Although the WCH used to offer services to around 300 youth annually, this number has likely doubled in the past year (the data are not yet available for 2012).
A Researcher’s Journey

It required a great deal of patience, desire and creativity in order to be granted access to research the undocumented, unaccompanied immigrant population. Researching a population within a contested space such as the WCH was particularly challenging. Not only is this population considered vulnerable, but gaining consent to work with minors who are not citizens was especially challenging. The youth could not consent for themselves, since they are minors, and because they are separated from their families or do not have caretakers, parental guardians could not consent for them either. The temporary caretaker of immigrant youth detained in the U.S.A. is the federal government, or the Office of Refugee Resettlement, although they are not the ones taking care of the youth day in and day out (the staff at the WCH fulfill this role). My original intention, when designing a pilot study leading up to the current research, was to interview the youth at the center. In order to do so, I had to receive the required Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Midwest NPO agency and the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services. I was granted IRB approval from both the University and the Midwest NPO, which oversees the WCH. The federal government, however, proved extremely difficult to navigate in seeking approval.

I initially submitted my IRB to the federal government for review and approval in July, 2011. I received no response for a period of three months, despite numerous attempts to reach the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in the Department of Health and Human Services via email and phone. Eventually I was told (over the phone) that I could research the youth at the center so long as I did not audio or video record our interviews, in order to protect their privacy.
I agreed immediately and was told to await final approval before proceeding. In January of 2012, I received an email stating:

Your request to conduct research at the shelter has been discussed with the appropriate authorities involved in the federal care and management of the minors in ORR custody. However, ORR is not able to accommodate this request. Thank you very much for your time and understanding, please feel to contact me if you have additional questions.

I challenged this decision with the Director of the Division of Unaccompanied Children's Services at the Office of Refugee Resettlement. That challenge went unanswered, so I copied the Director’s superior. This got attention, and I received another message in less than one week. The reply was that my request was denied because the research would be too disruptive to the daily schedule of the youth, and the federal government did not want youth to be pulled out of classes. I understood this concern, yet my proposal had never mentioned pulling youth out of classes. In fact, participation was voluntary and youth would only be interviewed during their free time, so again, I wrote a response, requesting a favorable disposition. This time, however, I went directly to the person overseeing the IRB approval for the Office of Refugee Resettlement. I also reached out to the United States Senator, Richard Durbin [D-IL]. Upon hearing of my intention to research this important population, Senator Durbin’s office wrote a letter on my behalf to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, asking them to reconsider. One full year after my initial IRB submission with the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s Department of Health and Human Services, both Senator Durbin and I received letters stating that their decision would remain intact, and I would not be given access to research youth at the center. This necessitated an adjustment to my design in order to move forward. I amended the IRB and changed the participants of my research from the youth to the staff. As a result, I still had access to observe
youth within the center; I just could not interview them. Instead, my interviews would be with the WCH staff.

I cannot help but question the motives of the Office of Refugee Resettlement denying my request to research youth at the WCH, particularly since I had previous experience working at the center and the full support of the Midwest NPO. The ORR claimed their efforts to reduce disruptions to youths’ days at the center had to do with notions of protection. The tone of the conversations with the federal government in most of the correspondence, however, led me to believe that ORR was equally interested in protecting their own reputation. This may be due to the fact that human rights groups have paid increasing attention to the detained immigrant minor population and many centers within the United States have not been run equitably. Within the current research, however, I recognized the World’s Children House as a center that has gone above and beyond their federal duties to provide as comfortable of a home as possible to detained youth. In the end, the ORR’s decision was both political and silencing. I do not offer the discussion of my struggle to rationalize my research design. Rather, I include this description of my experience in order to emphasize the fact that my confusion and frustration with navigating a contested space says a great deal about the experience of detained youth. I am an adult English speaker with a relatively high ability to comprehend text, ample support and tremendous knowledge about the role of institutions in immigrant detainment, and I still struggled to navigate the space to achieve my goal. If anything, my journey as a researcher supported my sense of urgency to research the needs and experiences of the detained immigrant minor population.

Participants—Youth

The minors themselves are the focus of this research, yet they only participated by being observed in the WCH and by sharing artifacts from class with me. The composition of the
immigrant population at the WCH is constantly shifting, as new children come into the country or are discharged from the center on a daily basis. Most children, however, attempt to cross the border in the warmer months, and the WCH is typically filled to capacity in the spring and summer. Waves of immigrants arrive at the WCH in large numbers and shift with little warning. During the pilot study prior to this research, for instance, the WCH had seen an unusually large number of teenage boys immigrating to the United States from the Punjab region of India. Little was known about the influx of this population, although the trend of Indian adolescent males constituted for the largest group of immigrants within the WCH for nearly two years. When I began researching for the current study, however, there were only a few Indian males at the center. By the end of my study, there were none. During the investigation, I was made aware that the majority of the Punjabi youth had been entering the United States by way of Guatemala. When Guatemala started requiring visas for Indians traveling through the country, youth from India stopped making their way to the United States. Immigrant trends are common within the WCH. When the center first opened, for instance, Chinese adolescents primarily made up the population. The participant make up at the WCH typically reflects patterns of war, tragedy and conflict on an international level.

During the course of the study, there were a total of 70 children who resided in the house (55 boys and 15 girls). The age range of participants was 3-17 years old. Throughout the study, there were a handful of Mexican youth, but the vast majority of participants came from Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. The next largest groups of immigrants at the center were Chinese and African youth.

All minors were at the WCH because they have been arrested by Immigration officials for entering the United States without proper documentation. Because they are minors, they are
sent to the WCH. The voluntary immigrants at the WCH came to the country to be reunited with a family member or for other reasons such as educational or economic opportunity. Involuntary immigrants came to flee persecution or other hardship, or were brought here against their will. All youth were separated from their families when apprehended. Since a caretaker living in the United States did not come forward to claim them upon detention, the minors were sent to the WCH. While some caretakers don’t come forward in fear of punishment (if, say they are undocumented as well), other youth do not have any caretakers at all. Although children as young as toddlers are detained in centers such as the WCH, this research focused on adolescents.

**Participants—Staff**

Descriptions of the WCH staff who participated in this case study are as follows:

**Family reunification specialists:** Family reunification specialists play a vital role in the reunification of youth with family members or sponsor. A typical day for a family reunification specialist involves speaking on the phone with potential sponsor and lawyers, meeting with youth to determine family reunification cases and arranging discharge procedures for youth. Family reunification specialist staff members have a unique perspective on the cases of youth at the center as well as the literacy expectations present in the context. Many of the literacy expectations placed upon youth at the WCH occur in meetings with family reunification specialist. Upon discharge, for instance, youth take part in an extensive meeting with family reunification specialist where the contents of a large package of documents are reviewed. Data from the pilot study revealed this meeting to be a source of stress and confusion for participants, as well as a high-stakes purpose for literacy engagement present in the center. Additionally, the family reunification specialist staff serves an important role in protecting youth by constantly cross-checking their stories and working their hardest to find a safe placement upon discharge.
from the center. There are a total of four family reunification specialists at the WCH; two of them were interviewed for the current inquiry: Saul (pseudonym) and Hyun (pseudonym). Saul and Hyun were selected for interviews because they have been at the WCH the longest. Saul is the original family reunification specialist and has been refining the efforts of his office for nearly twenty years. Both Saul and Hyun are immigrants as well, and have an interesting insight into issues surrounding navigating a new land.

Clinicians: Clinicians at the WCH work with family reunification specialists as part of the youth’s care team. Throughout the course of a typical day, clinicians meet with youth to help them deal with the transition of being detained and away from family. Clinicians also are involved in intake procedures for new arrivals and building care plans for youth. WCH clinicians most often treat symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety for youth at the center. Many of the immigrants’ journeys to America were filled with trauma, while others are healing from the effects of leaving a country in turmoil. Additionally, many minors experience symptoms of depression when they find themselves detained. Clinicians maintain confidentiality in their work, yet they understand the many challenges of youth immigrating to a new land and have recognized patterns in experience for detained immigrant youth. By interviewing clinicians at the WCH, a better understanding of the personal struggles of youth existing in a liminal space was examined. Additionally, many minors participating in counseling services at the center are encouraged to write in journals and complete other written work as part of the healing process. Such literacy events were crucial in my examination of minors at the center. Maria (pseudonym) is the clinician interviewed in the current inquiry. She was chosen to participate in this study because she has been at the center longer than the other two clinicians and is very knowledgeable about the culture of the WCH.
**Director of the WCH:** The director of the WCH has many responsibilities. During the course of the study, the director switched positions and moved to the Midwest NPO office. The new director had previously run one of Midwest NPOs other centers for detained immigrant youth in the area. Both participants were interviewed for the current research. The directors have an interesting perspective on the needs of minors while under care of the WCH. They work closely with Midwest NPO as well as the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the lawyers. Data collected from interviewing the directors of the WCH shed a light on the literacy expectations of youth within the center as well as a deeper investigation of immigrant detainment in America. *Ignacio* (pseudonym) and *Liz* (pseudonym) were interviewed in this capacity.

**Associate Director of the WCH:** The associate director, Rafael (pseudonym), assists the director in any way needed and ensures the smooth functioning of the WCH. The responsibilities of the associate director involve anything from helping fix a broken faucet to organizing transportation and security of youth. Rafael has been at the WCH since its inception in 1995. He is an immigrant himself and many participants at the center refer to him as “tio” (uncle). He knows the inner-workings of the WCH and provides a sense of family and community in the center, while maintaining high expectations of participants. The associate director’s rich knowledge of the history of the WCH as well as close relationship with many participants and staff at the center, afforded an important perspective on the culture of the center in this descriptive study.

**Residential Instructor at the WCH and Manager of Educational Services for Midwest NPO:** There are four residential instructors at the WCH. The manager of educational services oversees the instructors at four different centers. The residential instructor and manager of educational services are responsible for the curriculum development, assessment and
implementation of all courses. Students attend school for six hours a day. Their main class is English Language Learning (ELL). The other courses include: Math, Reading, Science, Social Studies, Art, Music, and Physical Education. These educational personnel have specific insight on the academic experience of youth in the center. Observations of classes, examination of artifacts from classes and interviews conducted with the residential instructor and manager of educational services provided insight into the literacy practices and events of youth in the center. It also provided me with knowledge on the academic expectations of adolescents at the WCH.

_Brianne_ (pseudonym), a residential instructor, and _Danielle_ (pseudonym), the manager of educational services, were interviewed in this capacity. Brianne is one of four residential instructors at the WCH. She was chosen to participate in the research because she has the most education background of the instructors and expressed an interest in participating early on. Danielle is the sole Manager of Educational Services for Midwest NPO.

**Director of Youth and Residential Services:** The director of Youth and Residential Services, _Sandra_ (pseudonym), oversees the WCH as well as other residential care centers under Midwest NPO jurisdiction. The director is affiliated with Midwest NPO, the funding human rights agency that runs the WCH. Sandra has a wealth of knowledge on the government role in detainment of immigrant minors, the legal processes’ of youth at the WCH and access to statistics and patterns that have emerged on the inquiry of the unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth population. Data collected from her thus contributed to a well-rounded description of the overall process of detainment and experience for adolescents in the WCH.

**Caseworker:** Caseworkers spend a significant amount of time with youth and help them navigate the contexts of the center. Caseworkers’ responsibilities include general supervision of minors as they participate in activities at the center, evening classes and weekend outings.
Caseworkers are assigned to youth entering the center and participate in many of the entry protocols, such as intake and screening and teaching house rules. Caseworkers also observe minors during much of their free time in the center, providing them with a unique perspective of the ways in which youth enact literacy. Caseworkers work the second shift at the WCH and arrive as residential instructors are getting finished with the school day. There is usually a total of five caseworkers in the WCH at any one point in time after 4 p.m. *Sabina* (pseudonym), a caseworker with numerous years of experience at the WCH, was interviewed in this role. She was chosen among the caseworkers because she has been working at the WCH for five years and has a lot of knowledge about the screening and intakes procedures of detained immigrants.

All WCH staff who participated in interviews for the current research I view as ‘guides’ for minors. Depending on their unique roles within the center, each staff member serves to help youth understand and navigate their surrounding contexts. As ‘guides’ they also have unique and relevant stories of immigrant youth’s journeys, based on their years of experience. Five of the ten staff participants listed above are immigrants who came to the United States from: Korea, Peru, Ecuador, Cuba and India. The other five staff members are from the United States, and most of them speak a language in addition to English. All participants, however, are fluent in English. Participants range in age from 25-65 years old. They are all employed by the Midwest NPO. Some participants work at the Midwest NPO location, while the majority of participants work at the WCH center. The range of experience working at the center for WCH staff is nearly 20 years to two years.

**Data Collection**

A quality case study, Yin (1994) and Duke & Mallette (2004) argue, must utilize multiple sources of evidence. Multiple data sources allow for “a converging line of inquiry” (Yin, 1994,
The data sources included in the current research were collected over a series of six weeks and include the following:

- **Document analyses:** The WCH is a government-run detainment center and must comply with certain federal protocol. For this reason, extensive paperwork is utilized to maintain federal standards and move children through the system. Analysis of these documents was vital in building a description of the experiences of unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant youth detained in America. Additionally, the WCH has developed numerous regulations of their own, to ensure effective running of the center. Document analyses falls into the following categories:
  
  - **Decision-Making Documents:** Decision-Making documents included documents associated with legal and family reunification cases. *Legal literacy* is documents used to build a legal immigration case for minors at the center; and *family reunification literacy* is documents used to build a family reunification case for youth at the center.
  
  - **Orientation Documents:** Orientation documents include both federal and WCH literacies. *Federal literacy* refers to federally-created, Office of Refugee Resettlement documents used in the minor’s permanent file and during meetings with youth; and *WCH literacy* is internally-created documents that help youth understand the schedule, rules and protocol of living in the WCH.
  
  - **Academic Documents:** Include assessments, homework, and all other documents used to keep academic record of a youth at the center.
Documents were examined for their features, the ways in which they were used and by Coh-Metrix (Graesser, McNamara & Kulikowich, 2011) analysis, which served to characterize the difficulty level of the documents. All documents were examined for the following features: length, decorative images present, comprehension-supported images present, mandatory/not mandatory, and whether the documents were WCH, ILC or ORR-created. Moreover, the features of document use including: document read aloud by WCH or ILC staff, filled out by the minor, ILC or WCH staff, signed by the minor, ILC or WCH staff, and whether or not youth came in direct contact with the document. All documents were also given a score of (N) not very important, (S) somewhat important or (V) very important in regards to the documents ‘stakes to case.’ Analysis of documents supported the investigation of literary expectations the center places upon youth, and an understanding of the processes that adolescents experience while detained at the WCH. Data that emerged from the document analyses contributed to the description of system-imposed literacies discussed in research findings.

- *Observations:* Observations focused on interactions between staff and the adolescents at the center as well as observations of youth throughout the various phases of their days in the WCH. Such observations allowed a deep description of the culture of the center to be facilitated. Observations provided insight on: day-to-day experiences at the center, staff-participant relationships, relationships among participants in the center, minors’ experiences with and enactment of literacy, and more. Observations involved activities such as family reunification meetings and academic classes. Since audio-recordings were prohibited at the WCH, observations were conducted through extensive field notes. Field notes included sketches of the WCH environment, descriptive notes, reflective notes and
direct quotes from the observation. Much of the data that emerged from observations spoke directly to the youth-enacted literacies later discussed in the findings of the study.

- **Interviews:** the current inquiry employed semi-structured interviews with WCH staff in order to better understand the specific practices and expectations of minors as they navigate through the context. Each staff member participated in one or two, 45-60 minute interviews over the course of 3-4 weeks. All participants provided informed consent and interviews were audio recorded.

  I developed the interview protocol prior to the interviews, and although I asked all of my prepared questions, the interviews were flexible. Although each interview protocol was specifically intended for the participant in the interview, I asked some of the same questions to all participants in order to compare answers during my analysis. The conversational flow took precedence over the order of questions. Additionally, when a participant answered the question asked, but I wanted to know more, I often probed for additional information. The interview questions were all in direct alignment with the research questions and were focused on understanding the way in which youth navigate the contexts of the WCH and the larger American legal system. Many questions spoke directly to the role that literacy plays in the contexts of the WCH and the expectations placed upon youth by the center. Interview focal questions were presented in order to explore the roles of staff at the WCH. (See Appendix A for interview protocols).

  Building the interviewing relationship between the interviewer and the participant is a vital component of the design process that requires a mutual contract of understanding (Weiss, 1995). Having worked at the WCH previously and formed relationships with staff, I was able to achieve a mutual contract of understanding with the interviewees.
Specifically, interviews were conducted with the following staff: Family Reunification Specialists, Clinicians, the Director of the WCH, Associate Director of the WCH, Residential Instructor and Manager of Educational Services of the WCH, the Director of Youth and Residential Services, and Caseworkers at the WCH. Participants were chosen for their unique perspectives on the detained immigrant experience. Different roles at the center have various affordances for understanding the phenomena of the literacy use of minors at the WCH. All interview questions are included in the Appendix.

- Youth-created artifacts: Artifacts contributed to the understanding of the role that literacy plays in the center, and assisted in identifying youths’ willingness to participate in, or understand such literacy events. The WCH artifacts collected in this study were youth-created documents in the form of personal essays and environmental print, such as posters and room décor. Artifacts served to expose youth-enacted literacies in the center. The essays provided insight on the personal experiences of the youth in the class as well as an understanding of their literacy ability. The group of essays collected came from the students in the highest ELL class at the WCH who were considered the most English-proficient students at the center. Over the course of the study, residential instructors commented on the shifting demographics of minors in the center. When I began collecting data, for instance, the WCH had four ELL levels: Group A for beginners, Group B for intermediate learners, Group C for upper intermediate learners and Group D for advanced learners. By the end of the data collection, in contrast, the WCH had shifted its ELL format to three Group A classes and one Group B class. This shift was needed to address the fact that the majority of minors in the center at the time did not speak any
English at all. Of those that did, their literacy and language ability was seen to be categorized as intermediate at best.

At the end of each day during the study, I also recorded personal memos. These memos included reflections, questions to follow up on and served as a way for me to summarize my day. The personal memo recordings allowed me to think about the research as I was conducting it and helped strengthen my vision and purpose. I listened to my most recent daily memo at the start of each day of my study to remind me of my follow-up questions and put me in the proper mind frame for collecting additional data.

Data Analysis

The overarching analytic technique employed in this study was one of explanation building and description, where patterns of literacy events, practices and system expectations discovered throughout the data were examined for underlying themes (Barone, 2004). All data sources, including observations, artifacts, interviews and document analyses were analyzed in the order in which they were obtained. The progression of the study began with observations. Next, I drew from the observations in the development of the interview protocol and recruitment for interviews. Artifacts and documents were collected throughout the entire course of the study. Lastly, I conducted additional observations in order to further clarify questions that may have arisen from interviews with the WCH staff. The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1965) was utilized in the interpretation of data, where codes and categories were assigned and modified throughout analysis. Coding of transcripts, field notes and artifacts followed three phases. (See Appendix B for a list of codes with definitions).

**Phase one.** Transcripts: For the initial phase of open coding in the analysis of interviews, I conducted a thematic analysis. All interviews were transcribed, as part of a process of data
reduction and analysis (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). First, I separated all literacy practices and events that emerged from the transcript data. Then, I created a list of descriptive codes on the literacy uses of youth at WCH. The first analysis of the interview data yielded nearly 30 categories of youths’ purposes for literacy use in the center. These categories ranged from entertainment purposes to learning English.

Field Notes: Observations were analyzed in a similar manner. During the phase of open coding of field notes I initially coded the data in an effort to describe the environment of the WCH. Observation data provided further clarity on some of the literacy practices and events described in the interviews. Therefore, I utilized many of the same codes developed from the interview transcript analysis in the initial analysis of observation data. Additional codes emerged from the observations which were used to build a rich description of the context of the WCH.

Artifacts: The first pass at artifact data analysis proved more challenging. The artifacts collected for this study were personal essays that the minors had written for an English Language Learning (ELL) class at the WCH. Most of them were written in English, but a couple essays were written in Spanish, which I translated to English prior to analysis. During the initial phase of open coding of artifact data, I was unsure how to analyze the student artifacts. Although I had rich text examples directly from adolescent youth that spoke directly to their detention experience, I struggled with situating the voices of the immigrant youth alongside the voices of WCH staff. This challenge was resolved in phase two of the data analysis.

**Phase two.** Once the data were inspected for qualities and characteristics, relational categories emerged and codes were defined in greater clarity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The first pass of the data posited the need to separate staff literacies from youth literacies. Thus, in the axial coding phase, two overarching conceptual categories were created: *youth-enacted literacies*
and system-imposed literacies. This was done for all data sets. During the axial phase of analysis it became clear that the documents and interviews largely contributed to the system-imposed literacies, while the observations and artifacts spoke to youth-enacted literacies. In this pass of the data, I narrowed down the original codes in greater clarity. Themes that were consistent within and across data sets began to emerge. These themes included literacy use for the means of: Protection, Orientation, Academic participation, Decision-Making, and Entertainment.

**Phase three.** Lastly, selective coding presents how categories are related to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). At this point, I created a selective coding template that included: the code, label, definition of code, artifact, and data samples from different sources of data. In aligning the data sets with the previously developed codes, I was able to choose the strongest representatives of each grouping and disregard codes that were not supported across the analysis. During this phase of analysis, I sought to organize youth-enacted literacies and system-imposed literacies within the overall themes. At this point, I chose, confirmed and finalized all categories of codes. The overall categories of activity, which encapsulated all of the data, were revised to include: Decision-Making, Orientation, Academic and Downtime. See Table 3.1 for the final selective codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains of Activity</th>
<th>Youth-Enacted</th>
<th>System-Imposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Legal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Reunification</td>
<td>Family Reunification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Screening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Student role</td>
<td>Teacher expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtime</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, another pass through of all data were conducted to confirm these selective codes.

**Member checks.** I had working relationships with numerous participants prior to the interviews, which allowed our conversations to be comfortable and honest. When transcribing my interviews, if I had any follow-up questions, the participants helped me understand their point of view. In fact, in a few instances, the participants reached out to me after our interviews to let me know they had been thinking of our talk and came across something I might like to read, or wanted to provide more information about something they had mentioned in our conversation. When I had post-interview questions for WCH staff members, I scheduled time to clarify my questions. I conducted post-interviews with five out of the ten participants—Saul, Brianne, Hyun, Danielle, and Ignacio. In a few of these cases, clarifications were given via email. Two of the post interviews were face to face meetings that lasted from 10-30 minutes. My post-interview with the family reunification specialist, Saul, for instance, provided a great deal of clarity on the purposes of the documents used in family reunification meetings.

**Inter-rater agreement and triangulation.** Developing the selective coding template allowed for my comparison of data sources. This process of triangulation enhanced the interpretation of my findings. In order for trends or patterns to be considered findings, evidence of their existence had to emerge both within and across data sources. Moreover, all data were triangulated in order to find patterns consistent across data sources. Once a strong pattern was identified within the interviews, for instance, it also had to emerge from other data sources in order to be discussed in greater detail. Additionally, 176 sections of data samples were given to another Ph.D. candidate in the Literacy, Language and Culture program who used my definitions of codes to code the data. He/she scored 149 of the 176 codes identically for an inter-rater
agreement rating of .85. Many of the codes that we did not agree on still fell correctly within the larger themes of Decision-Making, Orientation, Academic and Downtime.

**Document Analyses**

Document analyses were conducted to examine the role that text played in the WCH. Throughout their stay in the center, minors are expected to sign, read and comprehend numerous documents for a variety of purposes. Some of these documents were extremely important and directly related to the youth’s legal or family reunification cases. Other documents, however, were used for less important reasons. At times, minors were asked to read something independently and sign it, regardless of their ability to read. Additionally, some documents (such as legal documents) were not intended for mediation due to liability issues. In these cases, the documents were largely read “as is” and youth were expected to understand the contents of the text in order to make important decisions, which may affect their cases. By conducting an analysis of the documents in the center, many instances of system-imposed literacies were unpacked. The comprehensive document analyses examined the documents that youth come across throughout their stay in the WCH. A complete annotated inventory of documents includes in the analyses is included in Appendix C.

Until this point in the research, numerous interviews had stated that the time youth spent with lawyers in interviews was typically filled with miscommunication. Due to the necessity to maintain confidentiality of youth, however, I was unable to observe legal interviews or speak to youth about their experiences in the legal interviews. During staff interviews, however, I was told that minors were responsible for filling out documents with their lawyers that would have a great effect on their legal cases. Documents associated with the minor’s legal case are handled by the Immigrant Law Center (ILC) (pseudonym), a group of pro-bono attorneys working with the
WCH to defend children in immigration proceedings while under the care of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). After months of continuous pleading with the ILC, who was extremely busy adjusting to the increase in youth at the centers they served, I was finally given access to the legal documents used within interviews. The access to legal literacies was a vital, previously missing piece in compiling an extensive database of documents needed for analyses.

I was given access to different offices and contexts within the WCH, where I was free to collect documents so long as none of them contained confidential information. For family reunification documents, for instance, I was given blank forms of packets that youth would fill out with their sponsor. Due to my extensive familiarity with the center, locating and organizing documents into literacy groupings was relatively straightforward. These documents provided a great deal of insight on the inner workings within the WCH and the federal government. The document analyses permitted examination of the expectations placed upon minors within the WCH context.

The process of analysis started with compiling a database of all documents. A comprehensive analyses of documents included an examination of features of the document including: length, decorative images present, comprehension-support images present, mandatory/not mandatory, and whether the documents were WCH-created, ILC-created and ORR-created. I also examined documents for the features of document use such as if they were: filled out by a WCH staff member, read aloud by staff to youth and their ‘stakes to case’. ‘Stakes to case’ was scored on a scale of: (N) not important, (S) somewhat important, and (V) very important. When a document scores a ‘V’ in the ‘stakes to case’ category, for instance, the document served as a mandatory and extremely important text in process of navigation.
Language was not included as a category in the analysis because during staff interviews it was made clear that all forms provided by the center (WCH) were available in the minor’s native language. Indeed, in my inspection of documents I came across forms in numerous languages. Legal forms were also provided in the native language, unless a dialect is spoken, in which case the main language of the geographic region is used. For example, Spanish is the language used instead of Mam, a Mayan dialect, for participants from Chiapas.

**Coh-Metrix.** In order to examine the internal features of the documents, I worked with a doctoral student colleague in Learning Sciences to conduct a Coh-Metrix analysis (McNamara, Louwerse, Cai & Graesser, 2005) of the texts. She previously worked the developers of the Coh-Metrix scoring tool and is well-versed in the process. Coh-Metrix is a process that analyzes texts on multiple levels of language, discourse and cognition and I felt such a comprehensive analysis supported my effort to understand the difficulty level and complexities of documents within the center. The focus of Coh-Metrix is on linguistic features closely associated with deeper levels of comprehension rather than those aligned with basic reading components (such as the alphabet, letter-sound correspondences, lexical decoding, morphological awareness, and a reading fluency—words per minute.) According to Graesser, McNamara and Kulikowich (2011) the five major factors that account for most of the variance in texts across grades levels and text categories are: narrativity, syntactic simplicity, word concreteness, referential cohesion and deep/causal cohesion. An explanation of the characteristics of each factor, as described by Graesser, McNamara and Kulikowich (2011) is:

_Narrativity:_ the characteristics of words, sentences and connections between sentences. It captures how the text conveys story, a procedure, or a sequence of episodes of actions and events with animate beings. It is affiliated with word familiarity, higher prior knowledge, and oral language, which tends to be on familiar topics with speech
participants’ co-present and involves sentence constructions that are easy for the audience to comprehend.

*Syntactic simplicity:* sentences have fewer words and simpler and have more familiar syntactic structures.

*Word concreteness:* a percentage of content words are concrete, meaningful and evoke mental images—as opposed to being abstract.

*Referential cohesion:* explicit content words and ideas in the text are connected with each other as the text unfolds. The noun phrases are important for providing co-reference and bridging the explicit clauses and sentences in the textbase. A referential cohesion gap occurs when a sentence has few if any words that overlap with previous sentences.

*Deep/causal cohesion:* clauses and sentences in the text are linked with causal and intentional (goal-oriented) connectives.

Flesch-Kincaid metrics was also included in the analysis, and involve:

*Flesch-Kincaid Grade level:* Flesch-Kincaid metrics (grade level and reading ease) are based on the length of words and length of sentences. Flesch-Kincaid grade level is a predictor of the amount of time it takes to read a passage.

The internal features were analyzed within each type of literacy present in the center. For the Coh-Metrix analysis of the internal features of the documents, the higher the score of each characteristic the “easier” the text. This rule refers to all text characteristics, except reading ease and grade level, where the lower score is desired in terms of text ease. While numerous documents were collected and included in the initial document analyses database, certain documents were not able to be included in the Coh-Metrix analysis owing to their format. The texts excluded from the Coh-Metrix analysis were limited, but included documents in the form of a checklist or assessment. Coh-Metrix does not have the ability to analyze text in these formats. (Documents excluded from the Coh-Metrix analysis are indicated with a * in the inventory of documents in Appendix C.) I kept excluded documents in the Appendix C in order to provide a rich description of the different types of documents used to mediate activities within the center.

The internal features of the texts, discussed as the five major Coh-Metrix factors, enabled
measurement and comparison of concepts such as readability and comprehension across documents examined within the center.
IV. FINDINGS

The current study was an effort to describe the literacy practices and events enacted by undocumented immigrant youth in the WCH. It also examined the literacy expectations placed upon youth by the contexts of their detention. The inquiry provides an opportunity for researchers and teachers to better understand the ways in which recent immigrant youth experience literacy. It does so by describing the ways that youth used literacy to mediate the activities within the contexts of the WCH.

The analyses examined documents and information provided by WCH staff. The findings presented in this chapter also include the voices of the minors themselves, and do so either in the form of observation, artifact analysis or through the filter of a staff member (since permission could not be obtained from the federal government to have direct access to the minors through interviews). By collecting extensive data sources including interviews, observations, artifacts and documents, important aspects of the role of literacy in the immigrant experience have been revealed.

This chapter begins by elaborating on the environment of the World’s Children House, the first 48 hours of detention and a day in the life of an adolescent at the center. The description of these contexts of the WCH lays the groundwork for this examination, and all subsequent findings are rooted therein. Within the contexts of the WCH, different activities were observed, many of which were identified as literacy practices or events. I approach the discussion of findings by: 1) identifying the activity, 2) discussing the degree to which literacy played a role in mediating the activity and 3) examining the ways in which literacy played a role in activity mediation. The major activities mediated by literacy identified in this research were: Decision-Making, Orientation, Academic and Downtime.
Once an understanding of the center activities is explained, I describe how literacy entered each domain. These activities are discussed in the order of the degree to which the activities were mediated by literacy, from most prevalent to least. The WCH heavily relied on the use of documents to help youth navigate some contexts of the center. Other contexts of the WCH, however, involved very little use of literacy to mediate activities. For the four major activities—Decision-Making, Orientation, Academic, Downtime each included sub-groupings that emerged from the data. Each group is in direct alignment with the research questions guiding this study. Within each finding subgroup, I discuss both youth-enacted literacies and system-imposed literacies.

Youth-enacted literacies are defined as events and practices that adolescents participate in independently within the contexts of the WCH. System-imposed literacies are characterized as literacy events and practices that take place as a result of the WCH rules, protocol and overall role of context in the detained immigrant experience. Many of the sub-groups within youth-enacted and system-imposed literacies overlap with one another. Given the pervasiveness of certain themes, I organized the findings in the manner presented here in order to place emphasis on the major domains of activities themselves. Thus, additional themes and sub-groups fit within the larger examination of major findings. Language played a vital role in both the youth-enacted and system-imposed literacies at the WCH. For this reason, I discuss the task of language within each finding. Code-switching, for example, is one language activity that was observed across all data sets. Rather than discuss language in and of itself, however, language was better conceptualized as an enabling aspect of the various literacy activities found in the center.

Lastly, within the discussion of findings is a focus on document analyses. Documents mediated many of the activities of youth in the WCH, and their analysis focused on: document
purpose, internal and external features of the text, document stakes to a youth’s case, and the
documents’ reading difficulty levels. The document analyses centered on both the analysis of
themes and general text characteristics, as well as a comprehensive Coh-Metrix (McNamara,
Louwerse, Cai & Graesser, 2005) analysis. The document analyses showcase specific ways that
literacy was used to mediate activities, while at the same time, revealing WCH expectations
related to literacy placed upon youth within the center.

The WCH Environment

This description of the WCH environment serves to orient the reader to the overall
experience that immigrant youth have in the center. As such, it attempts to capture the layout and
physical environment of the center, the “feel” of the center, and the typical activities of the youth
as they live at the center (with special attention to the literacy materials and activities that are
part of the WCH environment).

The WCH residential center serves the functions of school, dormitories, legal counsel,
clinical counsel, family reunification, medical care, entertainment, and more. From the outside, it
is hard to discern the center’s purpose. It is a fairly large building that looks a bit like an
apartment building. The landscaping is minimal; and a large, security-enforced gate surrounds
the property. The location of the WCH is extremely guarded in order to protect the
confidentiality of the youth therein.

The first floor of the center has a game room, numerous offices and classrooms. The
basement is used for dining. The second floor consists of living quarters. There is a main area on
the second floor with large couches, a big-screen television and a large fish tank. An attic is used
for storage and can be modified into an additional room in times of medical quarantine.
Quarantine happens fairly often at the WCH, particularly with respect to chicken pox, as numerous minors have received no vaccinations prior to their arrival at the center.

The WCH is decorated primarily with arts and crafts made by the youth. Also, since the Midwest NPO is a human rights agency, numerous human rights posters have been scattered throughout the building. Signs on the walls often appear in two or more languages. A boldly painted “welcome” poster hangs in the waiting room on the entry floor and has been translated into numerous languages. In order to enter the building, one must ring a bell, be identified on the video camera, and then a staff member uses an electronic key to open the door. The same protocol is followed when leaving the building. If a door is opened without the auto-key, an alarm is sounded.

The federal government recently mandated that all unaccompanied youth detained under their care must attend six hours of school daily. The protocol change also administered a rule that detained immigrant youth must have recreational activity or the option to play outside daily. Minors at the WCH have ELL class for two and a half hours a day. The other mandatory classes are: Science, Math, Social Studies and Physical Education, which rotate every other day. Art and Music are two additional classes that WCH added to their schedule, although they were not ordered to do so by the government. Students are in class for a typical school day Monday-Friday, with breaks for lunch. All classes are conducted at the WCH, where the first floor has been converted into classrooms. Physical Education takes place either at a nearby park, YMCA, or in the basement of the WCH, where mats are laid out on the floor for in-home exercise.

Youth at the WCH live in dormitory-style bedrooms on the second floor of the center. The east hall is all boys, and each room can fit up to four-six children if needed. The west hall is separated into a north and south end. One side is for “big brothers” and the other is for females.
and “big sisters.” Big brothers and big sisters are roles that the youth can qualify for based on their behavior, academic standing and by portraying the characteristics of a role model in the house. In order to apply for this role, the minors must be teenagers, doing well in their classes, and follow the house rules. They also must submit a written application, pass a house rules quiz and be interviewed by WCH staff. Big brothers/sisters set examples for the other youth, are given more responsibilities and chores, and also awarded more freedom and participate in occasional outings. Additionally, they can keep a TV and CD player in their rooms at all times, rather than rotate on the schedule that the rest of the house follows.

The bedrooms themselves are simple. They each have a small bathroom, carpeted floor, desk, dresser and bunk beds. All bedrooms have windows that open partially. Closets contain shelving and room for clothes and school supplies. All clothes are provided by the center. When minors arrive at the WCH, their personal items, including clothing are stored in a separate, locked area of the center. Each child is given numerous solid-colored sweat pants, jeans, a polo shirt, sweatshirt, t-shirt, long sleeved shirt, shorts, undergarments, socks and shoes similar to crocs. They are each given an ID number, which is written on the tags of their clothing. Gym shoes and jackets are kept in a locked room outside of the bedroom, to discourage the risk of flight. While no minors have attempted fleeing the WCH in many years, there have been instances of escapes in the past. The children are not allowed to keep their personal items in their rooms, save for small items such as books, prayer cloths and CDs. Photographs at the center are dealt with extreme caution, since the need to protect the identity of youth is vital because many youth are financially indebted to coyotes and other smugglers who brought them into the country.
Youth at the WCH spend a lot of time decorating their bedrooms. They cover the walls of their rooms with drawings, poems, song lyrics, religious figures and other arts and crafts. Many of the immigrants from China, for instance, spend hours creating intricate origami mobiles to hang from their ceilings. The youth from Mexico often paint detailed images of the Virgen de Guadalupe, rich in color, and hang them above their beds. Other popular wall décor are pictures of famous soccer players, Tweety Bird, coloring book pages or Bollywood actors.

Minors at the WCH are expected to follow house rules at all times, including completing daily chores. Every day, the youth are expected to make their bed and clean up their clothes. Bedrooms and bathrooms are cleaned on a weekly schedule, with shifts rotating for roommates. Laundry is also on a strict schedule, and many youth help organize and fold the clothes, once they have been cleaned. Other chores in the house include kitchen duty, where youth help cook and clean up after meals. In order to be approved for cooking duty, the youth cannot have parasites (which is common for many of the youth at the WCH), must be a teenager, healthy and trustworthy enough to help. Cooking and cleaning cannot interrupt the school schedule, however, which is a priority within the center.

Although the WCH is technically a detainment center, the culture feels much more like that of a social services residential setting. There are no armed guards, no bars on the windows and no locks on bedroom doors. Youth may not leave the premises under any circumstances, however, unless they are supervised for a WCH activity. There are numerous alarms on the doors and codes and keys that only staff have access to in order to protect the youth within the center. Since the WCH is run by Midwest NPO, a large human rights organization, it has gone to great lengths to provide comfort and support to the youth at the center. This is evidenced by the WCH’s commitment to go above and beyond what is required of them by the Office of Refugee
Resettlement. Additional activities and opportunities provided by the WCH such as student council, art and music classes, field trips, big brothers/sisters, talent shows, and picnics, are some examples of this effort.

**The first 48 hours.** Within the first 48 hours of arrival at the WCH, youth have to complete numerous intake procedures that relate to domains of decision-making, orientation and the classroom. The itinerary of incoming immigrant youth from apprehension to discharge is complicated. During this time, youth are introduced to numerous different actors within their contexts and are expected to take in a significant amount of new information pertinent to their immigration and family reunification cases. A comprehensive timeline in the form of a flow chart has been included in Figure 4.1 to describe the itineraries of youth beginning from their arrest by Immigration, entrance into the WCH and eventual discharge (or deportation) from the center.
Figure 4.1
Youth Itinerary from Apprehension to Discharge

One-time Events

Arrrest / Apprehension by ICE

ICE Detention  ICE Screening

Arrival at WCH

Initial Orientation  Initial Decision-Making

Initial WCH Intake  Medical Intake  WCH Orientation  Know Your Rights Meeting  Family Reunification Intake  Clinical Screening

Academic

ELL Assessment Placement  Math Assessment Placement

*Family Sponsor Meeting  *Advocate Meeting

Recurring Events

School (Monday - Friday)
Downtime (Monday - Sunday)
Mealtime (Monday - Sunday)
House Issues (Once per week)
FR Meetings (Once per week)
Clinical Meetings (Once per week)

*Advocate Meetings ( Twice per month)

Note: *Only some youth participate in the activity, depending upon their case
As seen in Figure 4.1, immigrant youth follow a series of initial screenings when first apprehended. After going through the processes within an Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility, they are transferred to the WCH. The center has its own federally-mandated series of screenings and orientation activities as well, which largely serve to categorize, describe and record the experiences of immigrant youth. Initial WCH intake is conducted by a WCH staff member, in the minor’s native language when possible. If no staff members are present who speak the youth’s language, a translator is brought in. First, staff members introduce themselves and provide a meal to the youth. During this time, the staff explains that the WCH is a human rights organization that is not run by Immigration. Many minors do not know exactly what to believe. Immigrant youth arrive to the center in handcuffs, accompanied by an Immigrant and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer. Typically, these youth have been apprehended upon entry into the country, held elsewhere for a day or two while screened, and then flown or driven to the WCH. More rarely, minors have been raised in the United States and were turned in to authorities for a variety of reasons.

Initial intake involves the act of a minor stripping down and having their physical body checked for signs of abuse, trauma or medical need. Two staff members must be present for the entirety of the intake procedures. Next, youth are checked for lice and given a treatment of lice shampoo as a precautionary measure. Minors are then given hygiene materials and privacy to take a shower. Often, when arriving at the WCH, youth are scarred from cactus needles, have large blisters on their feet, or suffer from sunburn, parasites, wounds or skin rashes. In more extreme cases, young men and women have been victims of physical or sexual assault on their journey into the country. All minors are vaccinated upon entry into the WCH, unless they are pregnant or have record of previous vaccinations. A nurse at the WCH administers all medical
intakes in the primary language or with the help of a translator. When needed, prescription drugs are ordered for youth. If a minor is pregnant, for instance, they are prescribed prenatal vitamins.

Initial WCH intake also entails collecting all personal items from the youth and providing them with an entry package that contains clothes, school supplies, and toiletries. All personal items are kept in a locked area on the first floor. Valuables are placed in a safe. Youth do not meet other peers in the center until the intake has been complete, at which point they are walked up to the second floor of the WCH, introduced to their roommates, and begin the process of getting acquainted with their new surroundings.

Legal Representatives from the Immigrant Law Center (ILC) come to the WCH to meet the youth upon their arrival to the center. The purpose of the meeting is largely to explain the legal process to the minors and let them know that the ILC will provide temporary legal counsel to them while they are at the WCH. The legal intake meeting is the first time an attorney from ILC meets with the youth, and they explain all the various actors that the youth has met and what decisions they can/can't make in their cases. The agencies that are discussed include the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Immigrant Law Center (ILC), country consulate, home country government and the Worlds Children House (WCH). Lawyers explain that the ILC is a legal service organization that could help explain legal rights and assist minors that qualify for a form of immigration relief. The first meeting is called the "Know your Rights" meeting, and a booklet with the same title is read out loud, discussed, and given to the minor. In addition to “Know your Rights,” numerous additional documents are shared with the youth in the same manner. These documents are discussed in greater detail in the ‘Decision-Making’ section later on in this chapter. Many of the forms read during this meeting
are read aloud verbatim from the document, since lawyers need to stick to script for reasons associated with liability.

Youth are able to ask questions during the meeting. If any questions come up after the ILC representative has left the center, minors can call the ILC hotline and speak to someone. The ILC hotline is open for a few hours every Wednesday. ILC acts as the temporary legal counsel for minors while they are detained at the WCH. Youth are able to deny this offer at any time.

Upon discharge from the center, youth are responsible for finding lawyers on their own.

Family reunification also has an intake meeting within the first 48 hours of a youth’s arrival. The family reunification office is a medium-sized room with four desks. Each desk has a computer and telephone and is arranged so two pairs are facing each other, on either side of the room. File cabinets with secure locks line the walls. Above this, the walls are covered with posters and cards made by participants for the family reunification staff. Some of these have drawings of Winnie the Pooh, Tweety Bird, animals, princesses and other characters on them. The messages on these cards are in a mixture of languages, usually other than English and contain messages such as the following:

- I am very happy to go to my family.
- I love you, thanks for helping me with my case.
- I’m very grateful for all of your help.
- I don’t even know how to thank you.
- Thank you [WCH] family for helping me
- I’m very grateful for all of the help you have given me, may God bless you and those nearest to you forever.

In the initial family reunification meeting, a minor is assigned a family reunification specialist.

At this time, family trees are discussed and youth are assessed for family reunification options in the United States. Minors provide information about their journey to the country and discuss possible family reunification options. This includes identifying potential sponsors or family
members in the United States or elsewhere. Family reunification specialists take great pain to authorize and double and triple check every fact that is discussed in the initial meeting in order to protect youth who may be untruthful or are attempting to be reunited with a trafficker or other adult who does not have their best interests at heart. Additionally, in this meeting the process of family reunification is described in great detail. This process includes hearing from the lawyers whether or not the minor will attempt to stay in the country and fight for an immigration case within the United States, analyzing the youth’s background and personal information, verifying family relationships, contacting potential sponsors and beginning the paperwork necessary for reunification with families/sponsor, whether it be in the United States or the home country. Numerous important documents are used within family reunification meetings and are discussed within the ‘Decision-Making’ section later on in this chapter.

Clinicians also hold an initial meeting shortly after the youth’s arrival. The counseling office is across from the family reunification office. The desks are arranged in a similar manner and space for a couch sits in the corner. The walls in this room have human rights posters on them. Cards from previous WCH participants litter the desks within the office, and origami mobiles made by youth hang along the windows. The initial counseling session is a time for the minor’s clinician at the WCH to assess the child’s psychological welfare and lay out a treatment plan if needed. Clinicians identify their main objective as helping the youth set goals for themselves. The most common challenges minors at the WCH have to overcome include depression, anxiety and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). More than anything, the counseling session is a place for youth to be able to share their thoughts and fears as they grapple with their current situation. Often, clinicians learn of information vital to the minor’s legal or family reunification case, and encourage youth to share their story with the appropriate person.
Orientation is another initial intake meeting that typically occurs within the first 48 hours of detainment. In this meeting, a WCH staff discusses the house rules, the daily schedule and explains the role the center will play in the larger experience for the detained minors. Since numerous minors, upon initial entry into the WCH, do not believe that the center is a separate entity from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the staff members in this meeting try to explain the different roles of the government, lawyers and center. Personal hygiene is also discussed in this meeting. WCH staff members never assume that a participant at the center knows how to work a toilet, for instance, and take time explaining all general personal hygiene practices. Additionally, many youth have parasites when they enter the country, and all youth must conduct a stool sample as soon as possible. In this meeting, supplies for the stool sample are distributed and directions are given on how to complete the process. Once samples are tested, medication is prescribed to youth living with parasites in order to restore their health. The documents used to mediate this meeting are discussed in greater detail in the upcoming ‘Orientation’ discussion in this chapter.

Youth begin classes right away. In order for this to take place, they are assessed in English and Math. First, residential instructors talk with them and learn about their school background in the home country. Next, the youth take an oral and written English exam. The exam has four different sections, which correlate to the ELL levels at the WCH. Minors who complete the exam in its entirety, which is rare, enter Group D: Advanced ELL. The math exam is given independently. Directions for the math exam are written in four languages: English, Spanish, Mandarin and Punjabi. Translation is provided when necessary. Scores from both the Math and English assessment determine the classes that the new youth will join.
The goals of the ILC and the WCH are both to serve the best interest of the youth detained under federal care. The ILC focuses on the legal case and the family reunification specialists focus on the family reunification case. They are separate agencies and very little collaboration is seen in their duties. This lack of communication emerged as a source of tension from the data. Within the WCH, however, the support system for the youth includes the clinician, family reunification specialist and caseworker. This trio is considered the care team and can be considered useful guides to youth navigating the WCH contexts. They work together closely in order to come up with pathways of opportunity for the immigrant youth. Family reunification specialist and clinicians take part in weekly meetings, for instance, where youth’s individual cases are discussed. They aim to meet with the minors as often as necessary in order to provide full care. With the increasing numbers of youth entering the center however, and the average length of stay dropping, one-on-one time between youth and the care team is not always as frequent or lengthy as desired.

A day in the life. A typical day in the life of an immigrant minor detained in America is exceptionally full and may include participation in:

- Decision-Making Activities: legal meetings, family reunification meetings, court dates, consulate meetings, advocate meetings, and more.
- Orientation Activities: Intake screenings at both the ICE facility and upon entry into the WCH, numerous forms of intake and center orientation activities.
- Academic and Downtime Activities: Academic placement assessments, classes, downtime, meal time, house issues and more.

Immigrant youth traverse among these contexts both independently and with the support of caretakers. While moving from one activity to another, youth are all the while gathering
information from their surroundings in order to broker an understanding of their case. Not all activities have the same high stakes associated with them. In fact, some of the most important meetings occur over a very short period of time. Likewise, activities that account for the majority of a detained immigrant’s time may have little effect on the outcome of their family reunification and/or legal case. All of the contexts youth must broker, the lengths of the activity time as well as the importance of each activity in regards to their immigration and legal cases, are described in Figure 4.2.
Figure 4.2
Domains of Activity: Time and Importance

Note. *Only some youth participate in the activity, depending upon their case
As described in Figure 4.2, the meetings most important to an individual’s immigration and legal case are often the shortest. Moreover, youth must participate in numerous activities throughout their one month detainment at the WCH. Keeping track of it all may prove challenging. Youth at the center wake up Monday-Friday at 7 am, begin their morning chores and take showers. They are downstairs eating breakfast as a house by 8 am. After breakfast, there is a short window of time to brush teeth and gather school belongings before heading to ELL class. The ELL courses are conducted in English, with occasional assistance in Spanish or another language. ELL class lasts until lunch, and the youth are given one break during class. Detained minors at the center are never unsupervised. Even when they need to use the restroom during class, a staff member must wait for them outside of the door. Same goes for walking to class, using a razor, completing chores and all other activities at the WCH - the staff are considered the caretakers and serve to supervise the minors in all that they do.

The classrooms are fairly basic in design. They are often extremely full of students, particularly when the house is at capacity, with little extra space for moving around. Rooms include the bare necessities: tables, chairs, a blackboard and some shelves. The walls are covered with student projects and maps. On a particular day, the walls of Group A, for instance, are covered with word walls and rotating vocabulary lists that correspond to the unit. Along the perimeter of the classroom, cut out paper dolls hold hands in a banner, decorated as youth from different countries around the world. Other classrooms have posters with inspirational quotes from Maya Angelou, world maps and human rights posters lining the walls. In Group D, the walls are covered with “All about Me” essays, in which the adolescent students have written about their favorite hobbies, foods and activities. Many classrooms also have school rules hung on the walls, which remind students to do things such as “raise your hand” and “be respectful.”
All classrooms have windows, yet most of them are nailed shut, in order to prevent escape attempts. Classrooms are kept tidy by the students and residential instructors, who are tasked with maintaining the space throughout the week. Every Friday, following the weekly quiz, students take turns sweeping, cleaning the tables and taking out the garbage. In class, residential instructors focus heavily on vocabulary and learning English as well as preparing the detained youth for “life on the outside.”

The school experience in the WCH is tasked with teaching basic English language and life skills. Residential Instructors at the center are more concerned, for instance, that their students can properly understand how to get on a city bus than how to describe historical events or write a compelling narrative. The school values at the WCH serve as an entry into the youth’s school experience. Once discharged from the center, the minor’s school experience will represent a stark comparison to the type of schooling in the WCH. Owing to the constant turnover of youth at the center, residential instructors are tasked with having to get students caught up on a daily basis. The units of study are typically short to accommodate for the turnover, and often include grammar, writing, reading and vocabulary. Every Friday, students are given a quiz. Students also receive progress reports to keep them aware of their scores. When residential instructors feel they are ready to be advanced to the next class, they are given an additional assessment.

After lunch, youth follow their rotating schedule, which includes Math, Science or Social Studies, followed by Physical Education. Physical Education includes walking to a nearby park and playing games, traveling to the local YMCA for swimming and basketball, or classes taught in the basement of the WCH. Physical education is a highly supervised class, usually involving the help of two to four staff members, depending on the class location.
Afterwards, students gather for Reading Class, a context that deserves detailed description. The reading class was recently developed in an effort to support the literacy of detained youth, which was deemed low by residential instructors at the center. Additionally, the Midwest NPO, which oversees the WCH, noticed that many youth with good English oral skills could barely read in English and encouraged the WCH to make time for a class devoted to reading. It is vital to note that the average native literacy ability of youth at the center is relatively low. Depending on the country from which the youth are coming, previous schooling varies. During the study, since the majority of youth were Central Americans-many youth had limited schooling and had instead been working for some time. Immigrants from countries such as India and China, on the other hand, typically had higher native language literacy ability and more overall school experience. Even so, the minors’ reading skills were considered extremely low and in order to enhance literacy, a Reading Class was recently added to the school day.

For the reading class, numerous novels, nonfiction texts and a variety of other genres of literature have been purchased in multiple languages, including: Spanish, Punjabi, Mandarin, Swahili, Arabic, Romanian, French, and more. Reading class also places emphasis on English, and it focuses on the act of reading and building comprehension. All students carry a reading log with them in reading class, and they have to participate in silent reading, record their progress and write responses of their texts. Staff members sign off on their reading logs during reading class or study hall. The most requested novels in the reading class during the time of gathering data for this study were Spanish language novels about gang and street life. Popular titles included: *Mexican WhiteBoy* (de la Peña, 2010), *Always Running: La Vida Loca* (Rodriguez, 2005), and *My Bloody Life: The Making of a Latin King* (Sanchez, 2000). Staff members stated that having native language books that cover topics the youth are familiar with is the best way to
get them reading. In a center with primarily adolescent males from Central America, the gang life is, unfortunately, a topic many of the youth are all too familiar with.

School ends in the late afternoon, and at this point children have “free time.” During free time, youth are able to hang out in their bedrooms or in the main common area on the second floor of the WCH. The most common activities during free time include listening to music, playing card games, reading and writing, doing homework, making arts and crafts and watching television. Many minors use this time to write in their journals. Speaking to this, Sabina (pseudonym), a caseworker mentioned, “I don’t know exactly what they are writing about, but some of the kids tell me that they’re writing about their experiences” (Interview, September 6, 2012). In addition, many youth write numerous letters home to the families they left behind in the home country. All correspondence is closely monitored so as not to allow youth to give out information on the location of the WCH or circumstances specific to their cases. When asked what the most common things she observes during quiet time, Sabina mentioned numerous requests for Bibles and journals from the youth. When not watching T.V. or playing cards, she noted, adolescents actively and often seek out reading and writing materials during free time. Such literacy events are referred to as ‘downtime’ and will be discussed further on in this chapter.

After free time, youth have a brief “quiet time period” where they have to stay in their bedrooms and turn the music off. Quiet time can be called at any point throughout the course of the day. When it is called, youth must return to their bedrooms and turn off music and the T.V. During this time, youth prepare for the evening class, or sixth period. Evening class is considered more of an elective. Although the course is mandatory, adolescents can choose different classes for the evening. They typically involve vocational skills and life skills. For instance, one week,
the evening class may focus on learning how to use the computer, whereas the following week teaches sexual education. The evening class was developed in an effort to better prepare the minors for life outside of the WCH.

Evening class is followed by dinner. All meals are eaten in the basement of the WCH, where youth are assigned seats at tables. The dining room is basic. Tables and chairs are tight packed into the room, but the area is kept as clean as possible. The walls throughout the dining room are decorated with posters the youth have made. For example, one poster, created by a group of youth says “Multi-Language Poster” on top in bold colorful letters and below is a table with common sayings translated from English into Spanish, French, Mandarin, Punjabi, Gujarati, Dari and Arabic. On another wall, an Anti-Bullying poster has been created, which says “no bullying” on the top in six languages. The center of the poster is a stop sign with the word ‘bully’ spelled out to say:

- Be a leader-not a bystander
- Understand differences as learning experiences
- Look for help
- Let the person being bullied know you care
- You can stop bullying

Kitchen team rotates with each meal; the team includes a handful of youth helping serve meals, collecting dishes, and assisting in other meal responsibilities. After dinner, minors have another brief period of free time before they get ready for bed. The youth have quiet time around 9pm and are in bed by 9:30pm. On weekends, the entire schedule is pushed back a bit. The daily schedule is adjusted slightly for tender-age kids (youth under the age of 13) and pregnant participants. Both of these groups, for instance, receive snacks during the day in between meals. Tender-age kids are also given extra time outside for playing and have an earlier bedtime.
Throughout the course of a typical day, a detained immigrant youth can be called out for any of the following reasons: family reunification meeting, phone call (often related to case), legal meeting, doctor’s appointment, clinical meeting, advocate meeting or court. These activities represent different contexts within the WCH. Each context contains its own rules and protocol. Moreover, there are different actors and guides mediating each context. While most of these events occur within the WCH with Midwest NPO and/or WCH-employed staff, legal meetings are conducted with ILC—an outside agency. Advocates are also facilitated through an outside agency, and are only assigned to minors in particular need of advocacy. Youth who have been assigned advocates often face serious challenges in their lives, which set them apart from their peers. They may suffer from PTSD, have previous gang involvement, or have fled from some sort of trauma or abuse. Advocates may remain “on call” for minors even upon their discharge from the WCH. In these cases, advocates sometimes help provide support to minors looking for social services in their new location.

**Overview of the Findings from Interview, Field Notes, and Document Analyses**

The findings about the literacy practices of and literacy events related to youth in the WCH discussed in the remainder of this chapter emerged from examination of the interviews, field notes, and documents described in Chapter 3. All of these data sources were coded to enable description of these events and practices. It is important to note that the codes and descriptions that resulted were not mutually exclusive. Codes were assigned to events, interview comments or documents if they accorded to the given definition of each category (See Appendix B). When a unit of analysis could reasonably be applied to more than one category, I chose the category more strongly linked to the unit. For example, although adolescents were observed doing homework during their ‘downtime,’ this enactment of literacy was influenced by the
context of the classroom and coded as an ‘academic’ activity. As noted previously, the four main categories of activities that were mediated by minor’s literacy activity emerged from the data: Decision-Making, Orientation, Academic and Downtime.

The first research question focused on identifying the literacy events and practices of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth in the center. The key purposes for adolescents’ enacting of literacy practices and events were Decision-Making (legal and family reunification), Orientation (reflection), Academic (student role), and Downtime (entertainment, religion). The most prevalent system-imposed literacies included: Decision-Making (legal and family reunification), Orientation (screening and entry) and Academic (residential instructor expectations). Table 4.1 defines each of the four categories of domains of activity and describes the instances of youth-enacted and system-imposed literacies that emerged across data sets. Since minor’s were not interviewed for this study, youth-enacted literacies present within interview data refers to WCH staff members commenting on the ways in which adolescents enact literacy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains of Activity</th>
<th>Youth-Enacted Definitions</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Field Note</th>
<th>Student Artifacts</th>
<th>System-imposed Definitions</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Field Note</th>
<th>Document Analyses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td><strong>Legal:</strong> Youth meetings with ILC or discussions with others in regards to legal case, court dates and Consulate visits.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Legal:</strong> (Staff) explains procedures, support legal case and clarify processes for youth.</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Family Reunification:</strong> When minors identify possibilities, weigh options and make important decisions about the FR case.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Family Reunification:</strong> (Staff) explains procedures, support FR case and clarifies processes for youth.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td><strong>Reflection:</strong> Youth reflecting upon their experience and seeking clarification on processes.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td><strong>Screening:</strong> Staff monitored initial arrival screening protocol.</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Entry:</strong> Staff explanation of entry into life in the center and the country- includes values, etiquette, WCH rules and protocol and life skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Entry:</strong> Staff explanation of entry into life in the center and the country- includes values, etiquette, WCH rules and protocol and life skills.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td><strong>Student Role:</strong> Refers to the literacies enacted by youth within the realm of the classroom or to achieve an academic purpose of some kind.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Residential Instructor Expectations:</strong> Curriculum goals, lessons and other general academic expectations placed upon youth.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtime</td>
<td><strong>Entertainment:</strong> Involves participant’s literacy practices for entertainment purposes, including: watching movies with subtitles, reading books and novels, drawing and writing song lyrics and other sayings to decorate their room.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Religion:</strong> Seeking out the Bible, Quran and other religious texts.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The main findings were developed by first identifying the *purpose* for literacy use across data sets. Drawing from the definition of literacy as social practices and conceptions of reading and writing, including oral language, the first step to analysis was pulling all literacy practices and events from the data. Next, purposes for literacy use were coded, clarified and re-coded and then separated into more specific sub-groups. Once sub-groups were established, the *degree* of literacy mediation was defined. Lastly, documents used within system-imposed literacies to mediate the text were analyzed. A document analyses of the mediating texts used in literacy practices and events, when present, is embedded within the findings. The document analyses serves the purpose of answering the final research question, which examined the expectations placed upon adolescents by the context of the WCH.

In the discussion of findings, all documents used to mediate activities are listed within the findings they correspond with. After the documents are identified, their purpose is explained, as well as the features of the text. Next, the ‘stakes to case’ description is included; a category that describes the influence the documents can have on the direction of an immigrant adolescent’s immediate future. Finally, a Coh-Metrix (McNamara, Louwerse, Cai & Graesser, 2005) analysis identified surface characteristics of the documents used to mediate activities. The Coh-Metrix (McNamara, Louwerse, Cai & Graesser, 2005) analysis is used here primarily to indicate the Flesch-Kincaid grade level of the documents. The Flesch-Kincaid grade level was determined by converting the Reading Ease score into a U.S. grade level. It should be noted that the Coh-Metrix (McNamara, Louwerse, Cai & Graesser, 2005) tool analyzed each document for 20 different measures, one of which (Flesch-Kincaid grade level) is included in the findings discussed in this chapter. The Flesch-Kincaid grade level was rounded to the nearest whole number and determined by Coh-Metrix focusing on five of the twenty features of the text: narrativity,
syntactic simplicity, word concreteness, referential cohesion, and causal cohesion. Additionally, certain documents were excluded from this discussion because Coh-Metrix was unable to analyze its features due to the text format. (The excluded documents are marked with an * in Appendix C). The document formats of excluded texts were primarily checklists. As mentioned previously, the documents collected at the WCH were separated into the same categories as the Domains of Activity: Decision-Making, Orientation, Academic and Downtime. The documents fit within the larger discussion of the literacy practices and events observed during the study, as depicted in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2**
*Document Analyses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains of Activity</th>
<th>System-imposed Literacy</th>
<th>Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>Legal and Family Reunification</td>
<td><em>Legal and Family Reunification</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Screening and Entry</td>
<td><em>WCH and Federal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Residential Instructor Expectations</td>
<td><em>Academic</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtime</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Youth-requested materials</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Not included in Coh-Metrix analysis*

There were no recorded system-imposed documents associated with Downtime; yet youth did request numerous documents during their free time. Thus, the documents analyzed within the Downtime activity refer to what I observed the adolescents utilizing during their independent free time. Independent and Coh-Metrix (McNamara, Louwerse, Cai & Graesser, 2005) analysis were used to examine the documents used to mediate all other domains of activity. All documents are discussed in the order of importance and frequency. Decision-Making, for instance, was by and large the activity most dependent on documents to mediate activities. Consequently, the documents analyzed within Decision-Making findings were also the most difficult to read.
To put this analysis into perspective, and to reiterate the stark comparison between the youth’s literacy levels and WCH literacy expectations, it is important to mention that WCH residential instructors believe that the minors at the center have an average reading grade level of ‘elementary’ in their native language. According to the residential instructor at the WCH, grade level “depends on which language you're talking about. In English, on average, I'd probably say they are pre-reading, so they are not really literate in English” (Brianne, Post Interview). Variation exists within this view. Some minors, for instance, read at native language grade levels up to ninth or tenth grade or even higher, whereas others are not able to read in their native language at all. Some youth at the center can barely write their own name. Speaking to this challenge, all of the documents included in the analysis were available in the youth’s native language. If they were not readily available, a translator mediates the text orally, or translates it in its written form.

**Decision-Making Domains of Activity**

The degree to which literacy was used to mediate Decision-Making activities was higher than all other findings in this study. Decision-Making includes both the youth-enacted and system-imposed sub-groups of Family Reunification and Legal Activities. In general, examples of literacy enacted by youth were coded as related to Decision-Making when they involved a participants’ use of speaking, reading and writing while making important decisions about their family reunification case and legal case. The Family Reunification code was given to literacy events and practices enacted by minors that involved the use of talk, reading and writing with family reunification specialists, peers and family members as they identified possibilities, weighed options and made important decisions about their family reunification case. In addition, youth-enacted literacies were categorized as Legal Case decisions when youth reviewed their
legal options with their lawyers, had further discussion with others about their legal case, or had appearances in court and at the consulate.

**Youth-enacted legal decisions.** After the initial meeting with a legal representative, often a paralegal from the Immigrant Law Center (ILC), minors have a second meeting. In this meeting, the ILC conducts an individual intake with the child. Paralegals ask the youth specific questions about their case to try and figure out what, if any, form of immigration relief they are eligible for. A follow up meeting is scheduled, and if a child hasn’t been discharged to a sponsor within this period of time, the ILC has the meeting to explain their legal opinion based on the information provided. The legal meeting is perhaps the most confusing of all contexts for minors detained at the WCH. Numerous WCH staff, for instance, spoke to the reality that often youth do not even know they had met with a lawyer at all. Some of this is because ILC staff members introduce themselves as “paralegals,” a term that the youth are unfamiliar with. Other times, youth think the lawyers are advocates or clinicians-they do not realize that what is being said in the short meeting can have a profound effect on the outcome of their legal case. One of many WCH staff members whom expressed frustration with the legal meetings stated, “I don’t think sometimes they understand any of the concepts that the lawyers are explaining to them. I think they are not ready. I don’t think they understand nothing” (Maria, Interview, August 9, 2012).

Numerous staff also spoke about minors crying after meeting with ILC staff. Sometimes, they were sad because they realized they may not have an immigration case. Other times, they were sad because they were confused and did not understand what was happening. Hyun, a family reunification specialist shared,

I had many experiences after they meet the lawyer, they got upset or they got completely confused. So we need to follow up with the kids. Because if they completely
misunderstood or they don’t understand at all, that is not okay” (Hyun, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 16, 2012).

When questioned about the legal process, representatives from the ILC stated that they always provide information in the native language and offer time for youth to ask questions. Yet, according to WCH staff, the majority of youth at the center experience extreme confusion with the legal meetings. Regardless of whether or not they understand the process of the legal immigration case, youth are required to make important decisions while at the WCH. They must decide what type of relief they are eligible for and how they will pursue their case. They must decide whether or not to disclose personal information to strangers. They also must decide if they should go against the wishes of their family, in some instances, and do what is best for themselves.

When the detained adolescents turn 18, they are not tried as minors, but as adults, and their cases get a lot more difficult. When a minor is close to his/her 18th birthday, the ILC is no longer able to help. In this case, the youth must act quickly and try to move the case forward before the 18th birthday so as not to be taken to jail. A past WCH director and current employee of Midwest NPO noted, “I’ve seen kids who are approaching 18 having to file their own asylum applications when the [ILC] isn’t able to help them” (Liz, WCH Director, Interview, August 17, 2012). The documents used in an immigrant legal case are extremely demanding texts and are discussed in greater detail in the upcoming discussion of the analyses of documents associated with Decision-Making.

**Youth-enacted family reunification decisions.** Aside from the legal case, the other major decision that youth have to make while detained at the WCH is in regards to their family
reunification case. Choosing which pathway to pursue for family reunification can be daunting. The decision is on the shoulders of the minors, regardless of what their families want them to do.

When they’re deciding if they want to go with their sponsor or they’re deciding if they want to go back to their home country. That’s something. They are making a life-long decision that a lot of kids don’t ever really need to make (Danielle, Manager of Educational Services, Interview, August 10, 2012).

Some decisions that youth make refer to whether or not they want to live with a sponsor or be deported back to the home country. In cases where youth have no legal case, they are automatically deported; often from the WCH. In some more unfortunate instances, minors will reveal previous abuse from their caretaker and thus, not be allowed to be reunited with them.

During the study, one adolescent female from El Salvador was very far along in her family reunification process. This young woman’s mother and father were separated and lived in different states. She had not seen either of them for years. Her clinician stated,

She came here to live with her father because her father paid for the trip. And when she came she said, “ok I’m going to live with my father.” But then, the case is almost done, like the father has sent in everything, but now she’s saying “I’m afraid of my father” (Maria, Clinician, Interview, August 9, 2012).

Additionally, although caretakers often want to sponsor their child at the WCH, some home environments may be unstable. Furthermore, since the youth are unaccompanied, they are expected to make decisions associated with their family reunification case independently.

If [the youth] are sitting down with someone who could possibly negatively impact their lives, we prepare the kids to make adult decisions. The decisions are theirs. They might have a mom and dad, siblings who are giving them advice, but at the end of the day when
we sit down with them, we are telling them these decisions are yours that you will have for the rest of your lives (Ignacio, WCH Director, Interview, August 17, 2012).

Youth at the center are encouraged to make decisions independently because some of the advice given from family members may not be rooted in an understanding of processes within the United States. Sabina, a WCH caseworker recalls,

There was this kid who had to take a decision about whether he’s going to age out or go for foster care. And it was a very hard decision for him and he had to be an adult to take the decision for himself, because his mom was back in India and she was saying no but she didn’t know what it was to be here, what it was like to go to foster care-she didn’t have an idea of it. So he had to take that decision (Interview, September 6, 2012).

Another family reunification specialist remembers speaking to the mother of a previous Indian adolescent detained at the WCH. In this conversation, when asked where the family had intended for the child to go once arriving in the United States, the mother was not able to offer up an answer. The family reunification specialist was terribly upset that a child had been sent across the ocean and numerous continents with no ‘where’ in mind. Other adolescents get frustrated with the detainment experience and enact literacy to make quick decisions that may not have been well thought-out.

Some kids you can tell are acting impulsively, like they’ll say ‘oh this is gonna take too long, I don’t care just send me back’ and they’ll be more impulsive and more kind of reacting without thinking. And you can tell some kids really are mature, you know, they may have children of their own and they do take into consideration the consequences when they make a decision (Sandra, Director of Youth and Residential Services, Midwest NPO, Interview, August 17, 2012).
**System-imposed legal and family reunification decisions.** Similar to the discussion of findings for youth-enacted literacies, Decision-Making involves participants’ use of speaking, reading and writing while making important decisions about their family reunification case and legal case. Out of all of the system-imposed literacies, the documents associated with Family Reunification and Legal activities are the most vital. These documents mediate the youths’ futures and are used to decide where the youth will live, if they’ll be able to stay in the United States or not, and much more. Although documents categorized within the Decision-Making domain of activity are intended to be mediated with minors while in the WCH, some are also read by sponsor, lawyers and other people affiliated with social services, working to serve the best interest of the youth in detainment. See Table 4.3 for a complete list, description and analysis of documents associated with Decision-Making. The table includes a category entitled ‘stakes to case,’ wherein documents were grouped into the following levels of impact: (V) very important, (S) somewhat important, and (N) not important. Documents which were considered very important in their ‘stakes to case’ scoring included vital pieces of information. These documents were often ‘gate-keeping’ in the sense that, when fully-comprehended and utilized, their contents would have tremendous impact on the youth’s family reunification and/or legal immigration case. The documents that minors come in direct contact with are identified in bold.
Table 4.3
Documents Related to Decision-Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigration and You: Know Your Rights</td>
<td>ILC</td>
<td>-Explained at first legal meeting. -Information on: important words, explanation of detainment, legal process, rights, attorney expectations, important things to remember, general FAQs.</td>
<td>-Length: 27 pp. -Decorative images present -Mandatory</td>
<td>-Read aloud by staff to youth</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement of Receipt of Rights</td>
<td>ILC</td>
<td>-Acknowledges that the ILC explained the “Know Your Rights” session</td>
<td>-Length 1 p. -Mandatory</td>
<td>-Read aloud by staff to youth -Signed by ILC representative and minor</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement: Detained Minor</td>
<td>ILC</td>
<td>-Acknowledges that ILC: is not the attorney, only gives legal advice; can share youth’s information with other organizations; can cancel agreement at any time; will represent the minor in court if still in the WCH</td>
<td>-Length 1 p. -Mandatory</td>
<td>-Read aloud by staff to youth -Signed by ILC representative and minor</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorization for Release of Information</td>
<td>ILC</td>
<td>-ILC representative has permission to share information about eligibility for immigration legal relief to Midwest NPO, WCH and other local entities</td>
<td>-Length 1 p. -Mandatory</td>
<td>-Read aloud by staff to youth -Signed by ILC representative and minor</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Representation Agreement</td>
<td>ILC</td>
<td>-Minor agrees that ILC will represent them in a ‘limited’ manner, must sign off on nine statements</td>
<td>-Length 1 p. -Mandatory</td>
<td>-Read aloud by staff to youth -Signed by ILC representative and minor</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retainer Agreement for Detained Minors</td>
<td>ILC</td>
<td>-Verifies that ILC will refer to minor as client, reviews services to be performed, the rules of representation and the termination of representation</td>
<td>-Length 2 pp. -Mandatory</td>
<td>-Read aloud by staff to youth -Signed by minor and ILC representative</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice to Appear</td>
<td>ORR</td>
<td>-Sent to youth explaining that they must appear in court because they have been apprehended in the country without documentation, includes gives court date and location</td>
<td>-Length 2 pp. -Mandatory</td>
<td>-Signed by Immigration Officer and minor</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax Cover Sheet</td>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>-Sent to Sponsor with family reunification materials; used ‘stars’ as signs of where to sign and ‘small hands’ to show that the document should be brought with them to appointment</td>
<td>-Length 1 p.</td>
<td>-Signed by Sponsor</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Mandatory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Comprehension-supported images</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant Call Log</td>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>-Used to keep track of all supervised phone calls that have been made while at the WCH</td>
<td>-Length 1 p.</td>
<td>-Filled out by WCH Staff</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Mandatory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release of Information</td>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>- Allows the WCH to release information to the Office of Refugee Resettlement</td>
<td>-Length 1 p.</td>
<td>-Filled out by WCH staff</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Mandatory</td>
<td>-Read aloud by staff to youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Signed by WCH staff and minor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Can Protect Myself from Sexual Abuse</td>
<td>ORR</td>
<td>- Includes 12 statements that the minors must sign off on; e.g. “I know it is okay to break promises I might make about sexual abuse. I do not have to keep any promises that make me feel bad inside.”</td>
<td>-Length 1 p.</td>
<td>-Read aloud by staff to youth</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Mandatory</td>
<td>-Signed by minor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Mandatory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discharge Packet Manual</td>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>-Explains all the contents in the discharge packet and is used internally to make sure youth are discharged with all of their complete paperwork</td>
<td>-Length 4 pp.</td>
<td>-Filled out by WCH staff</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Comprehension-supported images</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Mandatory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Items in bold refer to documents in which minors come in direct contact.

*Stakes to case: V=very important, S=somewhat important, N=not important.
Decision-Making Documents

Both Family Reunification documents and Legal documents were included in the analyses of Decision-Making documents. This section of the chapter clarifies the roles of documents and examines the system-imposed literacies present within the center.

Legal documents. Legal documents are created externally, by both the ILC and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. As evidenced in Table 4.4, the grade level readabilities of Decision-Making documents were extremely high. The average grade level of Decision-Making documents was 13th grade. In interviews, whenever staff members spoke about legal documents, they discussed how confusing the texts were for youth. Legal documents are handled by ILC, an outside agency that legally represents minors detained under federal care. WCH staff members are not allowed to give legal advice to youth. They do, however, help explain the process when a participant has questions. Although the ILC representative orally reads all of the documents to the youth in their native language, WCH staff state that they suspect that youth do not understand the content of the documents.

The Know Your Rights meeting is the first legal meeting that the detained minors participate in. During this meeting, a large manual under the same title is given to the youth and used to guide the discussion. The manual includes numerous images, yet they were decorative in nature, providing no support for comprehending the text. This meeting is important because it provides youth with information of their rights in detainment, and explains the entire legal and detention process. Despite the ILC’s efforts, however, this meeting is a source of confusion for detained youth. Danielle, the manager of educational services at the WCH said:
[ILC] goes through the *Know Your Rights* manual. They try to make it as child-friendly as possible, but I’m not sure that they understand a lot of maybe what is written in there. But I think they understand as a big picture (Interview, August 10, 2012).

After the initial meeting with the ILC, youth are expected to share their story and begin to fight their immigration case. Due to the shortened length of stay of youth at the center, however, which was the result of the new federal protocol to address the escalating unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant population; few minors are given the opportunity to meet with a legal representative more than once while detained.

Most of them get the *Know Your Rights* from their attorneys. Some of them will ask follow up questions of us. Some don’t. They are all intaked by the attorneys, but only some of them only get so far as to know if they are eligible at this point; and there’s rarely time for a follow up meeting (Liz, WCH Director, Interview, August 17, 2012).

Since all of the legal documents will be needed after discharge in their cases, youth must be able to understand the role that each document plays. It is unknown how many immigrant youth receive legal help after leaving the center. It is also unknown how many minors continue to fight their immigration cases. The WCH fears that many immigrants fail to show up to their court dates after discharge. Youth might do this for fear that the judge orders their deportation. Instead of showing up to court, youth may choose to just take the risk of living in the United States undocumented. They all receive the *Notice to Appear* document which is a statement from the federal government ordering them to appear in court for an immigration hearing. The judge must file an immediate order of deportation for any youth who does not attend their court date. WCH staff members, in an effort to encourage youth to follow through with their cases, often help explain the legal documents to youth at the center.
The legal documents such as the discharge packet for example, which the client carries with them when they are discharged—there are a lot of papers and there is a lot of legal information which the child does not understand, so you have to break it down and you have to explain to them in a way that they can understand in a different language (Sabina, Caseworker, Interview, September 6, 2012).

The ‘language’ that Sabina referred to is not Spanish or other world languages, but a reference to the readability of the documents. Brianne, a residential instructor at the WCH, agreed with Sabina’s statement:

To understand these documents you need to be well read in documents like that. I have trouble reading legal documents sometimes, so I don’t know that they are necessarily sat with and explained what each section means and the importance of it (Interview, August 23, 2012).

**Family reunification documents.** Family reunification documents have an average Grade level score of 11 (See Table 4.3). Family reunification documents are created both within the WCH and externally by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Many family reunification documents need to be read and filled out by the sponsor as well as by the minor. Similar to the discussion of family reunification youth-enacted literacies; one of the biggest issues surrounding the notion of family reunification is trust. Family reunification specialists at the center need a minor to share his or her story in order for the family reunification case to begin. When initially meeting family reunification specialists, youth are fearful and hesitant to share their stories. Moreover, all family reunification meetings are mediated with documents.

Some [youth] are like, ‘I get it, don’t worry about it, let’s start the paperwork.’ And then some are like, ‘No but surely you are the same as Immigration and Customs
Enforcement’ and the answer is ‘No we are not the same” (Saul, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 9, 2012).

Regardless of how much the WCH staff assists in the family reunification process, ultimately, the minors decide where they want to go. A WCH clinician, Maria, explains, “They make this decision. We don’t make it. At least we hear what they want. Based on that, we explore the possibilities” (Interview, August 9, 2012). The possibilities referenced by Maria are dependent on the literacy events involving the legal documents. Much of the information that youth need in order to make decisions about their family reunification cases is made available through the legal documents.

**Orientation Domains of Activity**

Numerous literacy practices and events associated with Orientation emerged from the data during analysis. The degree of documents used to mediate literacy in the orientation activities was increasingly prevalent. Orientation involved the participant’s initial exposure to the values, expectations, rules and ideals within the WCH context, the immigration legal system and the United States. Within this theme, the youth enacted literacy primarily for the purpose of reflection. Reflection involved youth’s action of reflecting upon their experience and seeking clarification on processes.

**Youth-enacted reflection.** When immigrant youth arrive in the United States, they may not always understand the mainstream customs and values within the country. In some cases, their lack of knowledge (in regards to what is deemed acceptable or appropriate in the United States) may have a negative impact on the outcome of their case. One child, for instance, was working hard in the WCH kitchen one day. When a family reunification specialist commented on his work ethic, he said, “Oh, this is nothing. I used to work 17 hours a day at the chicken
The chicken factory was in the United States, and the minor was unfamiliar with labor laws.

He didn’t know how much he was exploited. And he didn’t tell us he was working like that. Are you kidding me? I asked him if he told his lawyer this and he just said, “No. Why?” (Hyun, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 16, 2012).

In this case, the adolescent never revealed his work experience; and by the time he shared this experience with a family reunification specialist, his discharge had already been scheduled.

When reflecting on their experience, youth at the WCH also engaged in literacy practices and events to describe their home life, expectations of America, and what they thought of the country now that they were here. Following are sections of essays that ELL: Group D (Advanced Course) wrote with the help of their residential instructor during two classroom observations.

The grammar lesson leading up to these essays was on past tense and present tense. A range of experiences can be seen in their writing.

**Student A:** My life in my country was good because I study every day. I liked to be with my brother and friends. I thought America would be a country very develop for its money and work. America is different because I understand now very it’s work and much work little money. My life in [WCH] is good because I’m studying English, I have clothe and I can eat.

**Student B:** My life in my country was very difficult because my family did not have money. I thought America had much work and money because is very big. America is difficult and difference because I miss my family and culture. My life in [WCH] is good because I am study and have food.

**Student C.** My life in my country sometimes was happy, but I always worked every day. Sometimes I was sad because sometimes I didn’t have friends. I always worked so that my family was good. I thought America is rich because come of different countries. In my country the people is poor there have no money. That is why I come here. That is my thought. When I lived in my country my father thought it too. I think America is beautiful. I look _____ is good bat I’m here in this program that is no I can watch the cities in America. I think the economic is just a little bit. I think only this bat I don’t know. I’m sorry. I like _____ for the lake. My life in [WCH] sometimes is good because sometimes I
go to the park. Sometimes I am sad because I miss my family. Now I am to worry because next I going to my country. I no want to go in my country, but I go.

Student D. My life in my country was worrying because I don’t have more protection. I thought America would be give me more protect. America is like family to save protect me. My life in [WCH] is safe. Because in here I have protect.

Student E. Mi vida en El Salvador era un poco bueno pero muy complicada. Estudiaba todo el día durante la tarde la pasaba en la calle con mi hermano, mi ex novio y mis amigos. Casi nunca me separaba de ellos, me gustaba estar con ellos aunque no compartíramos muchas cosas. Mi familia solo ellos dos, mi abuela era buena pero hay muchas personas que no valoran hasta que ya está todo perdido. Cuando todas las personas incluyéndome creíamos que Estados Unidos en uno y el primer país más desarrollado del mundo, lo que las personas ganar aquí en un día lo ganan en mi país en unos 15 días. Al estas acá y viendo bien la situación así como se gana se gasta todo. Hoy pienso que no en la gran cosa EEUU. Solo puedo prepararme bien para llevar un buen futuro. Hoy que aquí piense que EEUU es un país muy bonito grande con mucho dinero pero que donde hay mucho trabajo hay poco dinero. Mi vida en [WCH] es bien porque lo tengo casi todo porque como todas los días. Tengo ropa y lo más importante estoy estudiando y las personas son buenas, me gusta su trato con los de más.

(My life in El Salvador was a little good but very complicated. I studied all day, then in the afternoon I hung out in the streets with my brother, ex-boyfriend and my friends. I was almost never separated from them, I would like to be with them although we wouldn’t share many things. My family was just us two, my grandma was good but there are a lot of people that we don’t value until they are gone. When all the people, including me, thought that the United States is the first and most developed country in the world, what people earn here in a day, it would take 15 days in my country to earn. Being here and seeing the situation, how people spend what they make today I think the big thing is not the U.S. I can only prepare well to make a good future. Now that I am here I think the U.S. is a big, pretty country with lots of money but where there is much work there is little money. My life in [WCH] is good because I have almost everything because all day I have clothes and most importantly, I am studying and the people are good, I like how people are treated.

A common theme throughout the essays was how the minors’ expectations of America differed from their actual experience in the country. Many of the youth at the WCH spoke about how they thought America was an easy country, where everyone had a job and there were good schools.

While this perception of the United States is somewhat accurate, compared to many of the countries from which the youth came, numerous youth were disheartened to learn that America
is also a country full of laws and rules. These laws prohibit adolescents from working and mandate that while pursuing legal counsel, all undocumented minors must attend school. It is unclear how many minors follow this law once discharged from the WCH.

An extremely vital aspect of the minors practicing reflection is in how they seek the advice of WCH staff and others as they move forward with their case. The most common questions that are asked of clinicians and family reunification specialists are: 1) When am I leaving? 2) What do you think I should do with my case? Again, the WCH staff cannot give legal advice to detained minors; only the ILC representatives can. This does not prevent youth for seeking clarification in the process, however. Rather than give legal advice, WCH staff choose to explain what their options are. In this process, some minors get confused. Some WCH staff members have had minors accuse them of lying. One staff member told me of an adolescent approaching him after meeting with the lawyer. “My lawyer told me you lied,” he said. The staff was shocked by this, and walked through the process with the youth to understand the miscommunication until it was resolved. Additional instances of minors reaching out and asking questions were discussed in another interview:

    That’s what all of their questions are about. When they meet in therapy there questions aren’t just like “when am I going home?” but it’s “what’s going on with my case?” or “I met with my lawyer and they said this and I don’t understand” (Liz, WCH Director, Interview, August 17, 2012).

When approached with questions, staff generally walked the youth through what they are able to or found someone else that could. The amount of data that spoke to minors being confused with the legal process was overwhelming. Nearly every person interviewed spoke to the confusion that exists for detained immigrant youth around the legal process. Observations and document
analyses largely support these claims, and are further examined in the analyses of documents associated with Orientation upcoming in this section.

Numerous staff also mentioned that there is a time that many participants in the center become aware that the staff members are there to help them and that they care about their well-being. When this happens, minors seem more willing to engage in real conversations with WCH staff and seek out advice.

But when they find out that there’s someone there to talk to-just for them-somebody that’s there to talk to, I think they begin to see the value in that and they also begin to realize it’s us trying to prepare them to begin to process all of the information that’s happening in their lives (Ignacio, WCH Director, Interview, August 17, 2012).

Values within the WCH are, in fact, that youth understand their cases and that staff care about their well-being. When detained immigrants ask staff questions, one interviewee revealed, “every explanation for each kid, for us, personally, it’s to let each kid know that they are very important to us” (Rafael, WCH Associate Director, Interview, August 9, 2012). Youth are encouraged to ask questions and, according to WCH staff members, many of the minors make a concerted effort to understand the expectations placed upon them.

I don’t know how much of an idea they have of the fact that they have a case in the immigration court or if they have to decide if they are going to apply for relief or asylum or what case they can fight. They do a great job. They make an effort to learn, to know, to ask questions, to find out and I think they do an awesome job on that (Sabina, Caseworker, September 6, 2012).

Thus, although the system imposes expectations upon youth, the WCH played a significant role in attempting to clarify processes for youth. The director of the program summed up the
collaboration between honesty and caring perfectly in a discussion of his orientation with youth at the WCH:

My first thing, when I do my own orientation with the kids. And I sit down with them when they first arrive and I, as much as I can and I just talk to them, I try to get to know them, and they’re very untrusting because of the kind of lives they’ve had. And sometimes I’ll tell them there are only a couple of rules that I have. The only rule that I really have is for you to be respectful to other people and if you’re going to be, we’ll do the same. The second one is you can ask me anything and I’ll tell you the truth, but that comes with a rule. And they’re like, “What’s that?” And I’ll say, “You need to be prepared for the answer” (Ignacio, WCH Director, Interview, August 17, 2012).

Although youth are encouraged to seek clarification on what they may not understand, many do not. There were numerous instances during my observations during which I anticipated youth would ask questions and they did not. In one observation during a family reunification discharge meeting, an adolescent female was being walked through the discharge process and a considerable amount of information was being discussed. The entire conversation was in the adolescent’s native language, Spanish, but much of it dealt with legal paperwork (e.g., which document serves as an I.D., which document should be used for a visit to the doctor and to go to school, how to call the Immigration hotline to learn about the court date). After the family reunification specialist talked for nearly ten minutes straight, she looked up and asked “If you understand everything so far, I need you to sign this paperwork. It’s part of your discharge paperwork, okay?” The adolescent signed the paperwork and the family reunification specialist asked, “Do you understand well?” The adolescent said, “Si (yes).” The family reunification specialist asked her if she was sure, and again, she said, “Si.” So they kept moving forward with
the meeting. The only question the adolescent female asked during the entire meeting, which lasted around 40 minutes, was if she could still study in the United States even though she was pregnant. When the family reunification specialist told her yes, she asked again, just to verify that she had heard her correctly. Other areas where I had expected to see more questions asked were during the classroom observations. In many instances residential instructors asked their students if they had questions, often asking them up to four times in a row, with little to no response from their students.

Although follow-up care is not one of the duties of the WCH staff, many interviews revealed that numerous past participants call with questions after they are discharged from the center. The most common phone calls are for the family reunification specialists. In one month during the study, for instance, one family reunification specialist had recorded that he received at least ten phone calls from past participants. Four of these phone calls were education-related, which involved students asking for information on transcripts or other documents that schools may need. The WCH is not an accredited school, unfortunately, so youth do not get credit for studying there. The other six phone calls were related to legal questions about court dates and sponsorship. Again, answering these calls is beyond the scope of responsibilities for the WCH, but the staff often assists previous participants. Typically, once discharged from the center, immigrant youth must learn how to answer these questions on their own. Only immigrants with approved legal cases will receive follow-up services.

**System-imposed orientation.** Orientation activities including screening and entry were the second largest domain that emerged from the data, behind Decision-Making. Numerous documents mediate the literacy events within the selective code of Orientation. Documents associated with the WCH and Federal government were included in Table 4.4, which provides an
analysis of all Orientation documents. Again, the documents with which youth come in direct contact with are noted in bold font.
### Table 4.4
**Documents Related to Orientation**

|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Orientation Manual        | WCH                | -Distributed to minors to explain: program orientation, services provided, safety of resident, pro-bono attorneys, access to legal services, expectations of participants, residential rules, disciplinary procedures, rights of participants and grievance procedure. | -Length: 23 pp.  
-Decorative images present  
-Comprehension-supported images present  
-Mandatory | -Read aloud by staff to minor | V  | 10 |
| Big Brother/Sister Application | WCH | -Form used to apply to be a Big Brother/Sister at the WCH. Includes short answer, WCH checklist and quiz on house rules | -Length: 3 pp.  
-Filled out by minor | | N  | 4 |
| Intake Checklist          | WCH                | -Includes list of documents that must be completed for intake and descriptions of each document process | -Length: 2 pp.  
-Mandatory | -Filled out by WCH member | N  | 4 |
| Health Screening          | ORR                | -Includes questions that are asked of minors; has examples of questions: (Have you received your immunizations? Are you allergic any foods?)  
-Includes drawing of a body, which staff fill out with visible scars and wounds | -Length: 1 p.  
-Comprehension-supportive images present  
-Mandatory | -Filled out by WCH member  
-Read aloud by staff to minor | V  | 7 |
| Communicable Disease Screening | ORR | -Includes specific questions asked of youth about their health. e.g. “Do you have a cough, runny nose or cold sore?” | -Length: 1 p.  
-Mandatory | -Filled out by WCH member  
-Read aloud by staff to minor | V  | 5 |
| Initial Intake Form       | WCH                | -Interview between staff and youth conducted within first 24 hours. Includes an overview of personal history, mental health, family information | -Length: 2 pp.  
-Mandatory | -Filled out by WCH member  
-Read aloud by staff to minor  
-Signed by family reunification specialist, minor and translator | V  | 12 |
| Client Orientation Checklist | WCH | -Contains phrases that review documents with youth; youth must initial and sign each phrase to agree that they have received an explanation of all materials | -Length: 1 p.  
-Mandatory  
-Bilingual form (Spanish and English) | -Filled out by minor  
-Read aloud by staff to minor  
-Signed by minor | V  | 12 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form/Document</th>
<th>Required Agency</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Filled Out By</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affidavit of Support</td>
<td>ORR</td>
<td>Agreement between Sponsor and the Office of Refugee Resettlement ensuring that Sponsor is fit to care for youth</td>
<td>2 pp</td>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>Sponsor of minor</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORR DUCS Sponsor’s Agreement to Conditions of Release</td>
<td>ORR</td>
<td>Sponsor must read and sign off on this document, releasing the minor into their care</td>
<td>1 p.</td>
<td>Monolingual</td>
<td>Sponsor</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Authorization for Medical and Dental Health | ORR | Agreement between WCH and ORR giving the center the ability to make medical decisions on the behalf of the minor. | 2 pp | Bilingual | WCH member and ORR representative | Somewhat Important | *

Note. Items in bold refer to documents in which minors come in direct contact.

*Stakes to case: V=very important, S=somewhat important, N=not important.
Orientation Documents

Documents in the analyses of text used to mediate Orientation activities included those associated with Screening and Entry. The average grade level of all Orientation documents was tenth grade. The sources of Orientation Documents were the WCH and the ORR (Federal). Since records must be kept that record the progress of detained youth through the system, many Screening and Entry activities are mediated with text. Copies of documents are almost always kept in the minor’s permanent file, which can be accessed by both the WCH and the ORR.

WCH-created screening and entry documents. The average grade level of documents used to mediate the screening process was eighth grade. Many of the WCH forms have been revised numerous times over the years to meet the needs of the minors within the center. The screening process can often be a time of stress for youth new to the center. Thus, during the process of screening, WCH staff members try to make the youth as comfortable as possible. One staff member explained,

My first role in the meeting is, it depends on when I met them, if it is just intake what I try to do is just make them comfortable as much as I can, that’s my role and also make them sure we are not the police” (Hyun, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 9, 2012).

WCH staff must find a balance between comfort and protection in the screening process. One on hand, WCH staff members are there to reassure the youth and help them feel at ease, on the other hand, they are questioning everything the youth says in order to verify the accuracy of their story. One family reunification specialist clarifies:

So from the get go, from the very beginning when the child arrives, we are already setting the tone by making sure, for example, that the child is communicating with his mother,
and that we verify who the mother is, so that we are not giving the child the telephone, so that they can talk to a stranger-who might be the one that she owes money to or that he owes money to and is expecting them to pay back or there’s another debt that needs to be paid-so you know it’s a process (Saul, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 9, 2012).

Although WCH staff make a concerted effort to explain everything to the youth at the center, multiple data revealed that youth often will sign documents regardless of if they understand or not.

Well, we do orientation with the kids. When kids are coming into the program, I know they have an Orientation Manual—they have all of this documentation, they have everything. But I could easily hand a child all the pieces of paper with a bunch of words on it and get them to sign. That’s not a problem” (Ignacio, WCH Director, Interview, August 17, 2012).

In addition, the role of comprehension does not solely depend on the language the documents are in. A residential instructor at the WCH commented that, “These documents are hard to understand…I imagine a lot of the time they are given these documents in their primary language but they are very young” (Brianne, Interview, August 23, 2012). Many of the documents associated with screening are mediated orally. This is done to help the youth understand the nature of the documents. Oral mediation also provides minors with an opportunity to ask clarifying questions before signing anything. In an effort to increase comprehension of screening documents, the WCH Director notes:

Even though it’s in their language, sometimes their literacy isn’t where it needs to be, so sometimes we’ll tell them, “Do you understand?” If not, we’ll read it for them. Really the
most of the house rules and orientation that we do with them individually, it involves more intimate conversations about “Ok, do you understand what we’re doing? In the house these are our rules. Do you understand them?” And then after going through each one of them, they sign off on this orientation checklist just so we’re reminding ourselves that we are hitting everything that we wanted to hit while they are in the program. So we try. We try to make sure that all of the kids understand what they are doing—at least to that point of orientation and rules. (Ignacio, Interview, August 17, 2012).

Another aspect of entry is to follow a set schedule every day. The schedule at the WCH was developed, in part, to provide youth with an example of American norms and values. The schedule serves as a model for youth to follow upon discharge from the center.

When they come here they’ve already-this place actually provides the model for what they should be doing when they leave here, because here they go to court, here they should be meeting with their attorney, here they should be going to class, learning the language, learning how to read and write, becoming literate. Learning about social studies and other subject matters, and they leave here, they should follow that model (Saul, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 9, 2012).

Furthermore, during meetings with family reunification specialists and clinicians, youth discuss their future. Many of these discussions involve a conversation around what is deemed ‘acceptable’ within the United States. Many minors, for instance, are surprised they will not be allowed to work while undergoing immigration proceedings. They are even more surprised to hear that many adolescents in the United States don’t work, but focus on their studies instead. A large number of the youth at the center have been working for years, often to help support their families, before arriving in the United States.
**Federal screening and entry documents.** The average reading grade level of federal documents was 16. All federal documents had high scores in ‘stakes to case’ and all documents were mandatory. Federal documents are created externally by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, an entity of the federal government. Many federal documents need to be read and filled out by the sponsor as well as signed by the minor. One of these documents is the *Sponsor Agreement*. Personal information from both the minor and sponsor are included in this document, so family reunification specialists take great precaution in disclosing the document in its entirety. A sponsor, for instance, may not want the youth to know their annual salary or other personal information. Likewise, an immigrant minor may not want to disclose that they were abused by a primary caregiver and thus are not able to be reunited with their family. Family reunification specialist, Saul, explains:

[The Sponsor’s Agreement] is the responsibility of the sponsor, and we go over the responsibilities of the sponsor with the child and we tell the sponsor that we are going to go over his responsibilities with the child. And then when the child is leaving, we would advise the child on what to do if you know these responsibilities were not being met and the sponsor too—so that they actually get the essence of the sponsor/child relationship without revealing every document and every letter and every single number and every single figure and all of that. So it’s a balancing act. (Saul, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 9, 2012).

The federal documents are added to the minor’s file upon discharge from the center. The youth take their files with them, but the WCH and ORR also keep copies of all documents. In an effort to protect the privacy of detained immigrant youth, paperwork such as a summary of legal documents often is shared with the sponsor and the minor. Since the file is taken with them,
however, upon leaving the WCH, the youth may read as much as they’d like and thus, learn potentially private information about their sponsor or vice-versa. Saul, a family reunification specialist explained:

[The review] paperwork relating to their cases, was largely educating the sponsor, educating the programs or the institutions that we are working with on how it works. And the children, they simply got what I would call an extremely brief and not very detailed representation of the paperwork…. Sometimes the child will be [looking] in the file that the child will take with him or her. So conceivably, the child would be able to read this document (Interview, August 9, 2012).

All documents are reviewed before a minor is discharged from the center. Often, the documents are reviewed again when the unaccompanied immigrant minor is united with a sponsor. “At the physical release we will take out all of those papers before handing over the kid and go through it all again” (Liz, WCH Director, Interview, August 17, 2012). This clarification of documents is done as a last attempt to assist youth in comprehending the documents needed to navigate the numerous systems they will be confronted with within the United States.

**Academic Domains of Activity**

As we move into the discussion on academic activities that emerged from the data, the role of documents remains prevalent. Documents associated with academic activities, however, have much lower stakes in regards to the legal and family reunification case. Many youth-enacted and system-imposed literacy practices and events were found that relate to the notion of an academic context. Within this finding, both the roles of the student and the teacher expectations have been considered. Language played a vital role in the academic findings. The majority of the academic pursuits at the WCH are centered on English language learning. A large
number of students at the WCH, for instance, were determined to learn the English language.

This topic served as both a goal and fear for youth within the center. Group D ELL student essays showcase the student’s thought process surrounding the notion of learning English and transitioning into American schools. Sample student artifacts in the form of personal essays are included in Table 4.6, which emphasize the thoughts of detained immigrant youth about their roles as students in a new country.

Table 4.5
Student Artifacts, Essay 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Legal Status</th>
<th>After the WCH</th>
<th>School or other plans</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Staying in the United States with a sponsor to fight for an immigration case</td>
<td>My life will be difficult because it something new for me</td>
<td>I will live in New York, they will speak English. I will go to school. I will go to a very big school. I will study to become a dentist.</td>
<td>I feel nervous to go to school because it’s a new school with new people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Will be deported to home country</td>
<td>I think my life is going to be difficult because when I am going to arrive maybe I have no job.</td>
<td>They will not speak English, only Spanish. I will not go to school. I would like to work. I would like to see shoes to make money.</td>
<td>I feel good because I will have my best friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Staying in the United States with a sponsor to fight for an immigration case</td>
<td>My life will be happy because I am going to be united with my family and my sister.</td>
<td>I will live in South Carolina. They speak English. I will go to school. I will go to high school. I will study to become a doctor.</td>
<td>I feel happy to go to school because I need to learn English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Staying in the United States with a sponsor to fight for an immigration case</td>
<td>My life will be difficult or easy because I don’t know my future.</td>
<td>I will live in Los Angeles with my father. He speaks English and Spanish. I will go to school, I don’t know where the school is. I don’t know what kind of school. I would like to study how to be a cook.</td>
<td>I feel nervous about going to school or working because the first day will be difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Staying in the United States with a sponsor to fight for an immigration case</td>
<td>My life will be difficult because everything is different. I will have to learn to live.</td>
<td>I will live in New York. They will speak English. I will go to school. I will go to a high school far from my house. I would like to study to be a forensic doctor.</td>
<td>I feel happy and nervous for the first day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Staying in the United States with a sponsor to fight for an immigration case</td>
<td>My life will be full of</td>
<td>I will live in Ohio</td>
<td>I feel very happy but my</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
United States with a sponsor to fight for an immigration case because I like to make myself better. I need to constantly raise myself up. because my family is there. They speak English. I will go to school in Ohio. I will go to finance school. I would like to study cook. English very bad. I need to effort study it.

Youth-enacted student roles. All of the immigrants staying in the country discussed the role of English and school in their lives upon leaving the WCH. Numerous students thought their life will be difficult upon leaving the WCH. One student went so far to say she will have to “learn to live.” Regardless of the obstacles facing them, however, the students who wrote these essays had great dreams to attend school, learn English and be successful. The biggest concern they expressed about the transition was learning the language. The effort to learn English was noticeable in the center, not only during ‘downtime’ and classes but also in the milieu. The WCH supports this effort by having English-only Wednesdays, in which staff and youth must speak as much English to one another as possible within the center. Native languages are reserved for the contexts of the family reunification and clinical offices on these days.

Much of the data around language emerged from classroom observations and interviews with the residential instructors at the WCH. Youth enacted code switching in their language practices, and most of the residential instructors at the center actively code switched in class as well. In ELL Group A, for example, the (native Arabic speaking) residential instructor was trying to explain to his students to draw a picture and put it on the bulletin board. They seemed confused so he clarified, “We do dibuja and put it aqui.” (We do the drawing and put it here). Some heads nodded in agreement then and students got to work. Later on in the class, after one of the boys used the bathroom he told the residential instructor that they need to spray the aerosol can. The child pointed to the bathroom, laughed and said, “Spray por favor; it’s mucho stinky.” Furthermore, in ELL Group D, the residential instructor was often observed clarifying her
English instructions with the statement, “Todos entienden? Preguntas?” (Do you all understand? Questions?). Additionally, one of the student’s utilized code-switching in his essay when he wrote:

*My life in my country was difficult because my family did not have money, and in my country there is not much work and also there is not opportunity to study. My country also has delinquency and crime. Yo pensaba que Estados Unidos lleno de trabajo y también con mucho dinero. Pensaba que me iba acostumbrar fácilmente es un país bien grande. América es difícil y diferente a como yo pensé, hay muchas dificultades. América tiene mucho trabajo pero para obtener trabajo tenemos que ser mayor edad y estudiar mucho. Extraño mucho a mi familia y mi cultura. Vivir en [WCH] a sido muy bueno estudio mis clases favoritas como la matemáticas, Ingles, tenemos tres tiempos de comida tenemos llamadas para hablar con nuestros seres queridos. También sabemos que al final salimos ganando.*

*(I thought the United States was full of work and had a lot of money. I thought I would easily get used to it-it’s a very big country. America is difficult and different than I thought, there are many difficulties. America has a lot of work but to work you have to be older and study hard. I really miss my family and my culture. Living in [WCH] has been very good. I study my favorite classes such as math, English, we have three daily meals and we can call to talk to our loved ones. We also know that in the end we leave winning.)*

**System-imposed academic expectations.** Numerous academic documents were collected during the course of the study. Academic documents were typically created within the WCH and used to mediate literacy activities in the center. The forms were used to record, monitor and explain the academic processes to students and their sponsor. All documents are included in the youth’s permanent file. Many documents are also made available to receiving institutions, such as schools, upon discharge from the center. A description, analyses and examination of documents associated with the domain of Academic systems in the WCH is explained in Table 4.6. Again, documents with which youth come in direct contact are indentified in bold.
Table 4.6
*Documents Related to Academic Systems in the WCH*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Descriptions</td>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>Describes each class at the WCH; given to minors during entry and often requested by receiving institutions.</td>
<td>-Length: 4 pp.</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework Summary</td>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>Describes each class at the WCH; given to minors during entry and often requested by receiving institutions.</td>
<td>-Length: 1 p.</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL Assessment</td>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>All youth assessed upon entry and results place youth in ELL class level</td>
<td>-Length: 1 p.</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized Education Plan</td>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>Developed for students in need of extra support (behavior and academic) with the care team and minor.</td>
<td>-Length varies</td>
<td>Filled out by WCH member</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Assessment</td>
<td>WCH</td>
<td>Given upon exit from WCH; a personalized document for every student describing their academic experience at the WCH.</td>
<td>-Length: 2 pp.</td>
<td>Filled out by minor</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Items in bold refer to documents in which youth come in direct contact. Stakes to case:
*V=very important, S=somewhat important, N=not important.*
Academic documents at the WCH included in the document analyses have an average grade level of eighth grade. Compared to documents in the other domains, they were relatively easy to read. Much of the data that spoke to the system-imposed literacies surrounding the academic topic involved the role of education within the center. Since the majority of a detained immigrant youth’s day is spent in class, they must abide by numerous rules and protocol within the context of the classroom. The WCH states that these rules are a way for them to stay organized and ensure the best opportunity for learning.

The role of education at the WCH serves as a form of entry for immigrant youth into the American academic experience. What makes the WCH academic experience unique, however, is the amount of attention placed upon life skills and behavior within the classroom. A WCH residential instructor claimed:

   Educationally, academically, I want them to learn how to speak in appropriate sentence structures, I really want them to be able to read more texts than just simple sentences, ideally I would like them to be able to read and we work a lot on that in our studies-current events and news articles. I would like them to be critical readers instead of just be able to read for basic understanding. And then I do a lot with just behavior, and attitude and etiquette, manners (Brianne, Interview, August 23, 2012).

Other academic expectations include:

   That they are learning, that they are studying, that they are using the skills that we’ve taught them to be able to use when they leave. Not just that we are teaching them so they can pass the test, but that they can learn, community vocabulary. So that when they get on a bus when they are gone in two weeks with their families, so they can understand, ok,
this is your-the next stop, or we’re turning left on this street, and that kind of stuff (Danielle, Manager of Educational Services, Interview, August 8, 2012).

Document analyses showed the ELL assessments were generally easy to read and written for lower grade levels. Even so, a WCH residential instructor expressed:

I do not like the exit exam that we give—because we cannot stray from English. And I find it very frustrating that a lot of our kids that have progressed a fair bit, I mean we have a lot of kids who come here speaking no English and then they have some basic survival English and on that test you cannot speak in their language, you cannot find out if they understand (Brianne, Interview, August 23, 2012).

Downtime

Downtime was another activity observed where youth enacted literacy practices and events. Downtime refers to how the detained youth spent their free time during evenings and weekends. It is the only finding that is solely youth-enacted. The WCH, for instance, does not enforce downtime activities on youth. Rather, youth come up with the activities independently.

Oral language played an important role in downtime. Throughout the course of a day in the WCH, code-switching was heard often. With so many youth coming from different countries all living in the same house, there are certain terms in other languages that all detained youth learn quickly to communicate with one another. Spanish-speaking staff members were observed speaking to minors in Spanish only to get responses in English or vice-versa. Moreover, many Spanish speakers greeted their peers (regardless of the country they are from) with the Chinese term “nǐ hǎo.” Often, non-Spanish speakers will pick up on Spanish and use a mixture of English, Spanish and their native language to communicate with their peers. The youth at the WCH love teaching their peers words in their language. Throughout the day, and particularly in
the dining room, youth constantly point to items or food and say the word for it in their native language and ask how to say it in a new language.

**Youth-enacted entertainment and religious practices.** In their downtime, 24 minors were observed requesting books and other text materials. Requested items included novels, ELL workbooks, Bibles, journals and coloring books. Texts were requested in both English and the native language. The 24 observed minors used the majority of their free time drawing, writing down song lyrics, practicing English and reading the Bible, Quran or another religious text. During free time, youth were observed laying in the hallways pouring over ELL workbooks and asking staff members and peers for clarification. Some students came up with their own vocabulary and phrase lists. Here, youth would write down numerous phrases in their native language and find out how to say each in English. The downtime ELL activities were not associated with homework. They served the function of an independent desire to improve in English—a desire that was mirrored in the forthcoming discussion on academic practices.

Numerous WCH staff discussed how youth write in journals during their free time. Maria, a WCH Clinician mentioned that she suggests journaling to numerous center participants:

If there is a kid who is struggling, and they are in their rooms and they have nothing to do and they are thinking about their family and they miss their family, I suggest if they like to write then they can journal. Journaling is a great idea because they can express their feelings. And basically one of the things that we help them is try to give them the skills to cope with the sadness, with their frustration (Maria, Interview, August 9, 2012).

When asked what it is the youth seem to be writing about in their journals, Sabina, a Caseworker said, “I don’t know exactly what they are all writing about, but some of the kids tell me that they’re writing about their experiences,” (Interview, September 2, 2012). The majority of
requests, however, came from youth who simply wanted to write during their free time. “Lately I’ve seen more and more kids asking for the notebooks, which we have been giving up since they use that for writing their own experiences or writing the lyrics” (Sabina, Interview, September 6, 2012). The notebooks were considered personal. Youth usually kept them with them or in their desk drawer. WCH staff members respected their privacy with writing within the WCH. However, all letters coming and going to the WCH must be screened, in an effort to protect the security of detained minors.

A very large number of bedroom walls at the WCH are covered in song lyrics in numerous languages. Youth often spend their free time listening to music and many sit with their dictionary while listening and translate as many words as they can. Sometimes, they were observed singing the songs back while reading the lyrics or asking peers and staff to help them translate meaning. Additionally, observations as well as interviews spoke to the frequent activity of religious practice during free time. A large percentage of the minors living at the WCH during the study were religious. Thus, numerous youth were observed reading and reflecting on the Bible, Quran or other holy texts during their alone time.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the overall findings reveal that the minors’ activities most consistently mediated by literacy were Decision-Making, Orientation, Academic and Downtime. Within each domain, both youth-enacted and system-imposed literacies were found. Youth-enacted literacies refer to the events and practices that minors participate in independently within the WCH. System-imposed literacies were literacy events and practices that take place as a result of the WCH rules, protocol and overall function of the WCH. Within these findings, youth most often enacted literacy and participated in literacy practices for the goal of achieving decisions
associated with family reunification and the legal case, reflection, student roles and
entertainment and religious practice. The main literacies imposed by the system and placed upon
youth, in contrast, were: informing decision-making on the family reunification and legal case,
screening and entry, and teacher expectations.

Decision-Making and Orientation were the categories most associated with literacy
activity. The system-imposed literacies across findings were evidenced during a literacy event
that was mediated by text. The documents which youth were expected to use in order to mediate
and make sense of their surroundings were, in general, written at a level well above their literacy
capacity. These findings have implications that reach across the boundaries of literacy,
immigration, social services and human rights. The discussion and implications of these findings
is contained in Chapter 5.
V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

By conducting this study, I aimed to enhance understanding of the experience of undocumented immigrant teenage children in the United States, especially to draw attention to the demands and experiences related to literacy that have life-defining circumstances for these youth. The results have also led me to realize that the definition of English language learners (ELLs) warrants expansion to account for the diverse immigrant experiences within the group. They have also indicated that these youth are in need of additional advocacy to help the public, educators, and policy makers understand better how to help them achieve their greatest potential. Moreover, political forces influence the context of centers in which these youth are detained and the experiences they have while there.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the youth-enacted literacies that were identified in the course of the research. This beginning point sheds light on the ways in which adolescents were observed utilizing literacy as they navigated the contexts of the WCH. In this section of the discussion, I refer to the youth as ‘travelers’ to emphasize their position as recent immigrant arrivals new to their surroundings. Next, I discuss the WCH environment as the ‘destination’ in which youth traverse contexts and specifically examine the contexts’ literacy demands and activities. Then, system-imposed literacies and the role of WCH staff members, or ‘guides’, are discussed in order to exhibit the ways in which youth are influenced by the center. As part of these discussions, I also describe the findings of the document analyses to more specifically understand the expectations placed upon youth by the WCH contexts. In this aspect of the discussion, the documents analyzed are referred to as the ‘currency’ with which immigrant youth must become familiar in order to successfully navigate their detention. The final section of the
chapter addresses the implications of the study that cross the borders of education, immigration policy and social services.

I make ample use of the metaphor of literacy journeys to portray the multitude of contexts and the significance of those contexts that detained immigrant youth must traverse in their lives in the center and subsequently. Unaccompanied and undocumented immigrants are currently entering the United States at staggering rates. Many of the youth at the WCH have risked their lives on very dangerous passages into the country only to be apprehended by immigration officials and detained. Upon apprehension, they must participate in numerous forms of screening and are placed in a detainment center where they begin their family reunification and immigration cases. Many of the children use their time in detainment to reposition themselves in the world, fight for their legal cases, and begin to prepare plans for the future. Although the youth ultimately must accomplish such tasks themselves, the WCH ‘guides’ help with the navigation. Unfortunately, as revealed in this study, some of the expectations placed upon them are unrealistic and may prove detrimental to their futures.

The Travelers: Youth-Enacted Literacies

Immigrants at the WCH find themselves in transition, which enforces an active repositioning of self in world. I liken them to travelers because they have come great distances to reach the country, often do not speak the language of the new land, and frequently have entered the United States carrying all of their possessions on them. After months of journeying, they enter into a new itinerary upon detainment. This itinerary is informed by federal, state and local standards and protocol. Youth do not dictate their travel itinerary but are guided through each destination while at the WCH. During this repositioning, youth travelers were observed
participating in numerous and varied literacy activities and events. The literacy activities and events enacted by them served the functions of: Decision-Making (about family reunification and immigration cases), Orientation (reflection), Academic (student roles) and Downtime (Entertainment and Religious Practices). Their literacy practices were purposeful, embedded within broader social goals and cultural practices and were often acquired through a processes of sense-making (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000). Thus, many of the youth-enacted literacies served the function of making sense of the WCH contexts. Moreover, many of the observed activities became aligned with the notion of emancipatory literacy, which is viewed as one of the major vehicles by which ‘oppressed’ people are able to participate in a sociohistorical transformation of their society (Freire & Macedo, 1987). While in the center, minors relied on literacy as one of the components to their emancipation. Quite literally, those who were able to utilize the documents present within the context were given their freedom and discharged to a sponsor. This form of emancipatory literacy, although it transforms the lives of immigrants, may at this point in time not be making as big of an impact on society as one might hope. Again, the needs and experiences of minors in America have been extremely overlooked.

Literacy looks different among global peers. As such, the current research posits that the definition of literacy is directly influenced by context, language, and culture. Within the context of the WCH, literacy was utilized in numerous languages, surfaced in numerous different types of informal and formal text and was central to activities with very high-stakes consequences. Some literacy practices were jointly constructed with youth in informal spaces within the center. Others were largely pre-constructed through institutionalized plans, procedures and texts. Regardless of the characteristics or source of literacy, however, a constant theme surfacing from the research was that detained immigrant youth found themselves highly reliant on literacy to
move through detainment. Furthermore, the literacy present within the center served the function of prescribing identity to the youth. Numerous forms, for instance, were utilized to record, label, define and make permanent (by including in the federal file) the lives of unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant youth. The main problem with the permanence implied by these literacies is that they retain the power and voice within the federal system. Immigrant youth are not the keepers of their stories—they come to be defined by others. Although youth used the context of the center to reposition themselves in the world, their voices were far less powerful than the voices within the detaining institution. Additionally, many immigrant stories remained uncovered because of the youths’ fear of sharing, confusion, and more. The great injustice is that many of the stories kept private by youth trying to protect themselves, could have been their ticket to citizenship in the United States. The life of an immigrant youth is translated into a story by multiple others, but that life may be only a set of unordinary experiences from the youth’s point of view.

By engaging in literacy practices and events, immigrant youth became literate about their histories, experiences and the culture of the WCH. For instance, observations and interviews indicated that youth were encouraged to advocate for themselves and speak up when they needed support. By reflecting on their experiences, a common activity that emerged in the findings, immigrant youth were able to draw from their histories in order to make sense of the WCH. In doing so, they drew from their funds of knowledge (Moll, et al., 1992) while enacting literacies. A sense of agency was also observed in the youths’ participation in literacy activities, which speaks to the ways in which the minors negotiated their identities within the WCH. For example, many of the detained youth had quite different expectations of their travels than the reality of their situation in the U.S. and the WCH. In numerous cases, immigrant adolescents entered the
country with the sole intention of working, only to find it illegal for them to work in the United States under the age of 18 and to come to the realization that they will only be able to find legal employment upon successful progress with their immigration case. Moreover, student artifacts revealed that youth were largely nervous about their discharge from the center and were preparing themselves for life to be difficult ‘on the outside.’ Hence, many minors at the center participated in a restructuring of personal identity that included notions of learning English and attending school.

The ways in which identity was negotiated by youth within the center, however, were far more expansive than what has been captured within the current study. Identity formation includes both emergent and reactive ethnicity (Massey & Sanchez, 2010). Emergent ethnicity develops out of the “structural conditions characterizing American cities and the position of groups in American social structure,” wherein the conditions under which culture emerge are examined while “social forces promote the crystallization and development of ethnic solidarity and identification” (Yancey, Ericksen, & Juliani, 1976, p. 391). The structural conditions of detained youth are the contexts within the center and will change only upon discharge. While detained, youth are made very aware of their status as “illegal trespassers” in a foreign land. Furthermore, they are identified for the very existence of being unidentifiable within the constraints of the United States-as undocumented immigrants. In contrast, reactive ethnicity views identity as “the product of confrontation with an adverse native mainstream and the rise of defensive identities and solidarities to counter it” in which “the discourses and self-images that it creates develop as a situational response to present realities” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 284). In the current study, youth are largely reactive in their identity formation as their identity was largely observed and recorded by others.
The Destination: The WCH Contexts

The original destination for youth was some other location in the United States. Upon apprehension, however, they were placed within the destination of the WCH. Here, minors stay for approximately one month and experience a series of meetings, intakes and screenings before being discharged. As discussed in the First 48 Hours and A Day in the Life sections of Chapter 4, the youth have extremely busy days at the center. Once youth build a basic understanding of their surroundings, they must perform the codes and cultures of the WCH, ILC and federal government in order to transcend their environment. Within this negotiation, issues such as activities, events, relationships and cultural tools are embedded within relations of power (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2009). In this study, it was clear that the WCH, ILC and federal government function as powerful institutions in the lives of detained immigrant youth. Here, while traversing the institutions, the youth are expected to understand and follow the rules, protocol and the culture of their surroundings in order to succeed with their cases. Furthermore, the space they traverse is contested and exists as an arena in which their very life can be called into question.

The contexts within the WCH were viewed as spaces, (Certeau, 1988) situated and composed of culture, individuality and power. Addressing the contexts as spaces allows for a discussion of power, which became so central to understanding the findings in light of the institutional demands that were observed. Close attention to the context of the WCH showed that literacy practices there were patterned by social institutions and showed power relationships where some literacies were more dominant or influential than others. In this case, contexts associated with Decision-Making trumped all other contexts within the WCH in terms of power and influence. Although the Decision-Making activities were mediated by WCH staff members, they were organized at a federal level by policy makers, politicians and lawyers. The people
most influential in deciding the fate of detained immigrants very rarely came into contact with
the youth. The experiences, futures and lives of these youth look can be explained very
differently depending on with whom one is speaking. For instance, the main contexts of the
WCH were: academic, family reunification, clinical, legal, and the milieu (a term used by WCH
staff to refer to main living areas). As evidenced by the findings, although they are governed at a
federal level, both the Midwest NPO and WCH have gone to great lengths to shape their own
culture at the WCH. They refer to the WCH as a residential setting, not as a detention center.
Rather than call youth ‘clients’ or ‘prisoners,’ they refer to them as ‘participants.’ Additionally,
the WCH has added numerous activities to its schedule in order to provide the detained youth
with more choices and opportunities for enjoyment. Each context at the WCH serves its own
specific function. The contexts with the greatest influence on the immediate future of the youth
were Family Reunification and Legal.

Furthermore, both legal representatives from the ILC and family reunification specialists
within the WCH have made concerted efforts to streamline the detained immigrant experience
within their contexts of expertise. These efforts, however, have not always been effective. The
findings revealed a great deal of tension between the context of the ILC and the family
reunification process, for instance, where representatives from each entity rarely communicated
collaboratively for the benefit of the youth. Additionally, youth were given very little or no
warning before important meetings within these contexts. When youth are unprepared or
unaware of the stakes of certain meetings, it may greatly affect the outcome of their case and
thus, their future. Many minors, for instance, did not bring up experiences they had in their past
to a relative stranger (ILC representative and/or family reunification specialist) because the
stories were personal. Youth may not understand that revealing trauma and/or abuse may provide
relief in their immigration cases. In fact, in the United States there have been reported instances of immigrant youth being deported to dangerous communities and circumstances in the home country from which they had fled in the first place, as a result of failure to build an immigration case in the United States. When brokering boundaries, immigrant youth were not always able to read their environment correctly—a high-stakes task that may have profound implications on their future.

**The Guides: System-imposed Literacies**

WCH staff members and representatives from the ILC are considered guides on the travelers’ journey through the WCH. In this capacity, WCH staff members explain procedures to the youth, walk them through activities and guide youth from one context to another. First and foremost, all guides at the WCH shared the goal of helping the detained youth with their journey. I explored how immigrant youth were exposed to new forms of knowledge and participation within the WCH and the effects this had on their meaning making and enactment of literacy. Instances of this were evident in the findings on the observed youths’ dedication to learning English and some youths’ eventual willingness to open up to family reunification specialists as they moved forward with their cases. In both instances, youth-enacted literacies resulted directly from their learned culture of the WCH environment. Learning English and opening up to family reunification specialists were ways for detained youth to find success in their new environment. In these cases, youth were able to properly read their environment, and broker boundaries within the contexts of the WCH to successfully navigate the system.

Additional high-stakes system-imposed literacies included the purposes of: Decision-Making (made on behalf of youth in family reunification and immigration cases), protocol
related to Screening and Entry, and Teacher Expectations. In many instances, the youth were unaware of the influence that the ‘guides’ had on their future. Many, for example, did not know the great lengths that family reunification specialists went to in order to protect their confidentiality and investigate their potential sponsors. Additionally, they often did not realize the tremendous focus on life skills in their ELL classes—which were built into the curriculum in order to prepare them for their discharge from the center.

System-imposed literacies associated with Screening and Entry illustrated the vast cultural differences between the native country and the United States. Screening and Entry activities were tasked with intake procedures and other meetings with the purpose of identifying and moving youth through the institution. Such literacies also, however, showcased the cultural values and norms of the United States. When immigrants enter the contexts of the WCH and the United States, they bring the culture of their home country with them. Some of the experiences that they consider acceptable are deemed inappropriate or even illegal in the United States. Moreover, minors were constantly supervised while in the center, and this was often difficult for the youth who were more accustomed to freedom. Many of the center participants lived independently prior to their detainment, so the shift in daily activity and being treated “like a child” was challenging. Many staff members commented on this during the interviews. One family reunification specialist mentioned the youth at the WCH were “learning how to be children again because they didn’t have that luxury at home,” (Saul, family reunification specialist, Interview, August 9, 2012). Notions such as cultural values and norms were not explicitly discussed or taught; rather youth gradually had to become aware of values as they learned their environment.
The most influential system-imposed literacies involved Decision-Making surrounding the family reunification and immigration cases. Throughout the data collected in the current study were many instances of staff discussing the challenge of the initial entry into the center. It appeared the detained youth were pushed in many different directions and received considerable new and important information in a short period of time. Because of this, staff worried how much of the information youth retained and the effect their confusion might have on the decision-making process. And although WCH staff guides acknowledged that considerable information was given to the youth in a short period of time, it is their institution that is responsible for guiding youth through this itinerary. It is no surprise that immigrant youth are extremely resilient. Building upon this resiliency, however, was their ability to enact unique literacies that both shape and are shaped by the context of the WCH.

**The Currency: Document Analyses**

The document analyses revealed extremely high stakes associated with documents that were largely ‘unreadable’ for youth in the center. The analysis categorized documents into the following groups: Decision-Making, Orientation, Academic and Downtime. As mentioned previously, Downtime documents were not analyzed for grade level. Figure 5.1 shows the comparison of average Grade Levels across data sets present in the document analyses.
Given the findings, the documents associated with Decision-Making activities in the WCH had the highest average grade level of 14. Orientation documents had an average of level of grade 10 and Academic activities within the WCH had a grade level average of grade 9. On the basis of grade level alone, youth were largely not suited to understand the nature of these documents. Moreover, the stakes-to-case associated with Decision-Making and Orientation activities were consistently high. Minors at the center were reliant on the currency of these documents in order to successfully traverse the contexts of the WCH and build an immigration case, yet they are unable to independently read the majority of the documents guiding them through the process.

**Limitations**

The primary limitation to the current study was my inability to speak directly with the youth in the context of the WCH. When researching populations in contested spaces, access is often a challenge. While the Office of Refugee Resettlement has ensured certain protocol in order to protect youth under their care, inability to research the unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth population also secures their place in the shadows. Many Americans, in fact, may not even realize that unaccompanied immigrant youth exist in the numbers that they do in
cities all throughout the country. Moreover, few ELL teachers know their students’ immigration experience. Additional limitations include the inability to video record observations. Again, this was a rule enforced upon the WCH by the federal government in order to protect the confidentiality of minors at the center. Lack of videotape data forced me to rely heavily on my field notes during observations for analysis. And while my field notes were extensive, I am sure there were numerous activities that I failed to notice and record. Lastly, although I observed all adolescent youth in the center, as well as interviewed ten participants, the sample size was fairly small. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. Lastly, my familiarity with the context of the WCH, having been a previous educator at the center, permitted me to draw from a vast amount of background knowledge in this study-although it may have also influenced my thinking.

**Implications for practice**

The unaccompanied immigrant population is unique for a variety of reasons, one of which is that they do not easily fit into an area of existing research. I have extensively searched for research on detained unaccompanied and undocumented youth within the fields of immigration policy, sociology, education and literacy with little success. Even the research on ELLs, as revealed in the literature review, fails to discuss this segment of the vast diversity of students within the ELL population. Thus, the implications of the current research extend far beyond the scope of education and literacy to reach the fields of immigration policy and social services. Research surrounding the needs of undocumented and/or unaccompanied immigrant youth in all of these areas is so insignificant, that the implications of this research support the need for further research with this population to be conducted. It may be too soon to understand pedagogical implications for educators, for instance. Rather, research surrounding the immigrant
youth population, at this particular point in history, is largely tasked with beginning a conversation and encouraging additional inquiry.

**Immigration policy.** The current research is extremely political. Moreover, the political voices and values that shape the immigrant experience can change at any given moment. Political presence influenced nearly every aspect of the current study, from gaining access to researching the population, and examining federally-created documents in the center, to understanding the detained immigrant experience. Immigration reform is a contested topic and one of the most pressing issues in current politics in the United States. Although numerous laws have been passed at the state level that directly affect immigrants, the federal government has failed to created comprehensive reform laws. I believe that within the next few years, our country will make great strides in the area of immigration reform. In an increasingly global society, lawmakers will soon come to a point where they don’t have the option to ignore the issue any longer. Moreover, anti-immigrant politicians are beginning to be explicitly challenged by more progressive politicians who see value in the immigrant community. The findings from the current study speak directly to policy makers in immigration. It is beyond the scope of the current study to influence immigration reform, yet actors within federal immigration detainment centers can be informed with respect to adjusting some of their practices and protocol to ensure heightened accessibility of information for youth. Most notably, the documents used with youth to mediate vital and life-changing meetings are written at a level way too difficult for them to access. This is unacceptable and sets youth up for failure, confusion and possibly even dangerous outcomes. The documents need to be revised.

Additionally, although certain screening measures were created in an attempt to protect youth and identify victims of trafficking, immigrant minors are moved between too many
contexts too quickly. Within the first 48 hours of detention, they have met with numerous important actors in their cases. Youth have also revealed information to these actors that may be detrimental for their cases. In numerous instances, as revealed in this study, youth do not even know whom they are talking to when shuffled from one intake to the next. Also, it takes time for youth to open up to strangers, particularly when the strangers are also detaining them against their will. There needs to be a federal protocol in place to ensure that youth understand who they are meeting with, why they are meeting with them and the effect the meeting will have on their future. Moreover, youth should have ample time to prepare for such meetings. Perhaps they can be given at least 24 hours of notice and an easy-to-read document with frequently asked questions to prepare them for the context of the meeting. This would require minimal effort from the government, yet provide additional support for immigrant minors in high stakes meetings.

The federal government has shortened the length of stay for detained youth in order to reunify them with their sponsor more quickly. This is a move that, in many respects, makes sense, but it also has implications for the youth. Most detained immigrant youth are unable to pay for attorneys, for instance, upon discharge. Without an understanding of how the process works, and very little working knowledge on how to navigate the complex legal and academic systems present within the United States, many minors are set up for failure upon discharge from the center. The likelihood of a youth being discharged from the center, united with a sponsor, and able to do well in school while also appearing for court dates is a difficult task.

Currently, the federal government seems to be dealing with detained minors in an inconsistent manner. They protect minors from rape once in the United States but not on their way into the country. They provide care to minors while they are detained but do not offer mandatory follow-up services for all participants (follow-up services are only provided for youth
when cases are approved, which rarely happens within the shortened time frame of detainment). There are not even repatriation laws in place that ensure safe deportation practices of youth from the United States. In many ways, minors receive more support within the contexts of detainment than they will upon discharge. Failure to offer comprehensive follow-up services does two things: 1) it does not ensure that youth are receiving the support and protection they need and 2) it offers no way to collect data on a population that is growing in America. By law in most states, undocumented youth are protected while in school until their 18th birthday. This is a law that they know very little about. When youth are unaware of their rights, they can be taken advantage of and mistreated. Additionally, although the federal governments spend massive amounts of money on the detainment of unaccompanied immigrant youth, they have no way to follow up with them after discharge from the center. True, minors are given an ‘alien number’ and their information is in the system, but the government has no knowledge of what happens to youth after they are discharged from the center. Some show up to their court dates and win their immigration cases, an activity recorded at a federal level. Far more, however, never appear at their court date, choosing instead to risk their undocumented status in order to pursue work or education in the United States. What happens to these youth is unknown. Without support systems in place for youth upon discharge, many may not be successful in their transition to life outside of centers like the WCH. Pre-determined follow up services would provide the youth and their sponsor with the additional support necessary to help accomplish their task. It would also ensure that undocumented youth are attending court dates and school regularly, rather than being exploited in the workplace.

**Social Services.** Hundreds, and more recently perhaps thousands, of youth are detained annually within the state that the current research has been conducted. In the past year, the
shortened length of stay for detained youth has caused local social service agencies to have to scramble to open numerous emergency centers. The World’s Children House, Immigration Law Center and Midwest NPO are only three of the numerous institutions that have been affected by the protocol change to account for the fast-increasing population. All of these organizations are also rooted in notions of human rights and have been consistently praised as examples of successful agencies of this kind within the nation. The reality of the situation is that many minors are detained in centers that run much less efficiently than the WCH. In recent years, many centers throughout the country have been closed due to reports of sexual and physical abuse, neglect and failure to follow federal protocol. The implications in this arena speak to policy makers, human rights workers and lawyers at both a national and local level.

Within this state, numerous laws have been passed within the last few years that aim to support undocumented immigrants. And although the DREAM Act (DREAM Act Portal, 2011) has been passed in the state where the research was conducted, which allows undocumented youth to attempt a pathway to citizenship so long as they maintain good grades or join the armed forces, thousands of immigrant youth will never be eligible for the bill. This is because too many minors leaving the WCH fall between the cracks and fail to show up to court dates for fear of being deported. As noted earlier, as soon as a court date is skipped, the federal government issues an order of deportation for the youth—which states that if they are ever apprehended or identified, they will be detained and deported to the home country. Minors who fail to show up to court are largely influenced by their sponsor, who are their caretakers, to do so. Often, caretakers are also undocumented and may impose their own beliefs on the youth under their care. Also, many caretakers may not realize that minors are eligible for certain forms of relief and assistance that adults are not. Undocumented immigrant youth often do not have the
opportunity to apply for financial aid, a driver’s license, state ID, or numerous other forms of ‘currency’ that would help them navigate the United States. At a state level, both sponsor and the youth need to be explained their rights in an accessible way. The WCH attempts to do this, but has no authority to follow up with youth upon their discharge. Social services at a state level need to step in and monitor this transition in order to support the immigrant youth. Furthermore, as evidenced by the document analyses, the documents used with minors need to be written at a level they can understand.

At a local level, there are additional implications within the contexts of the WCH. Although the WCH has done many things well, there is also room for improvement. First of all, there needs to be more communication between the ILC and the WCH. These two entities share the goal of helping the minors navigate the complex legal system of the United States, but due to time restraints and other reasons, they fail to work collaboratively and communicate. Numerous WCH staff members mentioned during the interviews how they didn’t know exactly what was going on in the legal meetings, but they knew that it was a source of anxiety and confusion for the youth. One staff member revealed, “well because they are more legal documents and usually for the kids that come in with those they are already signed, so we are assuming that they’ve been explained to them by somebody else” (Interview, August 17, 2012). From the ILC perspective, they probably choose not to disclose much information to the WCH owing to liability and because WCH staff members are not able to provide legal advice. There is a difference between providing legal advice and helping to make sure youth understand certain issues, however, and it has been overlooked by both the ILC and the WCH.

Furthermore, although WCH-created documents were found to be easier to read than ILC- and ORR-created documents, the forms used within the WCH are still written at levels too
high for the vast majority of their audience. The WCH needs to make a concerted effort to revise their documents in order to make them more accessible to youth. In doing so, they should pay attention to lexile scores/grade levels and work to add images that will aid in the comprehension of the text, rather than solely decorate the document. Moreover, WCH staff members are not trained on how to help mediate texts to help youth understand the documents. Although numerous WCH staff members have come up with their own ways to mediate texts, including using body language and drawing graphs and timelines, protocol should be put in place at the Midwest NPO level that is enforced upon the WCH and other centers of its kind. It is not enough to assume that staff members will come up with text mediation techniques on their own.

The last, most notable implication for the WCH would be to re-organize the first 48 hours for minors in their center. The Entry and Screening procedures are implemented at a federal level, so the WCH will still have to conduct all the initial procedures with youth, but they can be streamlined in a way that makes them more accessible to youth. Again, I suggest some form of written itinerary or timeline written at a very low literacy level that includes images. This itinerary could include a brief description of each activity along with an explanation of when and why each activity is taking place. All actors involved in the initial entry itinerary can wear identifying name tags and refer to the timeline while the minors are traversing from one meeting to the next. The ILC representatives, for instance, can wear a large name tag that says “lawyer”, explicitly identify themselves and point out precisely on the timeline where the minor is, why they are there, and what will happen next. These practices may not solve the problems within the navigation, or lower the stakes of literacies within the center, but they will increase the support of comprehension for youth.
Education. Findings from the current study reveal that many youth at the WCH intend to attend high school in the United States. It is hard to say if detained immigrant youth are motivated to attend high school in the United States, however, and within the larger area of research—no data have been collected on this issue. Many of the youth at the WCH, for instance, seem to have entered the United States in order to work and make enough money to help support family back home. When they find out this is not a viable option, they have no choice but to go to school—as they are required by law to do so. Additionally, undocumented immigrants are ineligible for financial aid in most states, so unless they are able to pay for college out of pocket, it is not an option for them. From my years as an educator at the WCH and my experience researching there, however, I would say that many adolescents at the center do intend not only on attending high school, but eventually attending college, although such an opinion was not analyzed within the current study. Nonetheless, many immigrants at the WCH talk about their desire to make their family back home proud by learning English and getting a good job. They leave the WCH optimistic and largely unaware of the numerous obstacles that may await them.

The primary implication for education relates to the notion of an unaccompanied immigrant youth’s entry into an American school. At receiving institutions, youth will be tested, and placed in an ELL course. It would be extremely rare if a recent immigrant was placed near their grade level—more realistically, these adolescents will start high school at a freshman level. They will most likely start with a heavy course load in an ELL class and eventually transition into more mainstream classes as their language improves. Placement may also be a result of inadequate or non-transferable transcripts provided by the home country. Too make matters more complicated, many unaccompanied immigrant minors have not been to school for numerous years. Danielle, manager of educational services at the WCH, revealed that she receives weekly
phone calls from schools inquiring about the nature of the WCH and trying to figure out how to place the youth into an appropriate grade level. Unfortunately, the WCH is not an accredited school, so youth do not receive credit for any of their studies at the center. The first issue with school entry is one of age, as most high schools have an age limit. For immigrant youth who are largely playing catch up, they may not have the time to complete four years of high school before they age out of the school. These youth may instead obtain GEDs or some other high school equivalency certificate. Doing so, however, suggests that minors have been made aware of the services available to them. When undocumented, many services (legally or not) become unavailable. In this case, although required by law to attend school, undocumented immigrant youth may not have access to educational institutions.

In order to support immigrant youth at during their transition into American schools, attention must be paid to intake procedures and setting youth up with a guidance and/or academic counselor who can help them plan a pathway for success. We cannot assume that the immigrant population understands all of the options that are available for them. In some cases, American high schools may not be the best option for unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant adolescents. Youth who do not intend on attending college, for instance, may be better suited in GED courses and receiving vocational training. Moreover, it would be helpful for some actors within the educational arena to know more about the unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant experience. Although sponsors are considered the minors caretakers, as immigrants themselves (the majority of whom did not attend schooling in America), they may not be very well-versed in the culture and expectations of American schools. If educational professionals are knowledgeable about the unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant experience, they may be able to work with the sponsor to seek additional support for their students.
The second notable implication for education is the difference between the WCH school context and the context of a traditional American school. The WCH aims to provide a well-rounded education to detained youth, but the academic expectations are extremely different from those of traditional schools. Rather than focus on content and standards, WCH educators spend considerable time teaching English and building life skills. These skills are more important for recent immigrants. Additionally, minors are only at the WCH for about a month. For many of them, this has been their most comprehensive educational experience—particularly those youth who were forced to drop out of school at a young age to help work in order to support their families. Youth leave the WCH, for the most part, with positive things to say about their educational experience there. At the WCH, they receive a lot of one on one support. Moreover, all youth at the WCH are in the same situation. They are all learning English, they are all separated from their families, and many of them are entering the context of the classroom for the first time in years—but they are doing it together. Although data on the topic are unavailable, it is suspected that unaccompanied, undocumented youth make up a lot smaller percentage of immigrants within ELL classrooms in America. Many traditional ELLs have come to the country as a family unit or may be second-generation immigrants trying to get a better grasp on the English language. The life experiences of unaccompanied and/or undocumented youth differ greatly than their mainstream ELL counterparts. Such diversity may be discouraging or alienating for adolescents entering traditional ELL classrooms. Additionally, ELL teachers are rarely made aware of the particular immigrant experience of their students. Again, if made aware of the unaccompanied immigrant experience, educators may be able to help youth seek additional assistance.
The native country of the minor plays a large role in the likelihood of their successful transition into American schools. The vast majority of the Chinese and Indian youth at the WCH, for instance, attended school up until their journey to America. Moreover, many Chinese students and Indian students have been exposed to the English language in the academic setting from a very young age. Immigrant youth from Central America, Mexico and Africa, however, have often received considerably less education and exposure to the English language. Regardless of how many languages youth from these countries are fluent in (many African youth enter the WCH speaking up to four languages, with little ability to write in more than one language), public schooling in the United States is largely English-only. Teachers may support youth in the native language if they are able to, but instruction is supposed to be in English. Language academies and other bilingual institutions are rarely public and/or tuition-free, and the likelihood of a sponsor being able to pay for private education is low. Additionally, undocumented youth may not be eligible for private schooling in the first place. When working with undocumented and/or unaccompanied immigrant youth, educators must strive to build upon native language literacies and value funds of knowledge. Additionally, inclusive practices such as having authentic multicultural literature in classroom libraries that speak to the immigrant experience may help support this population of adolescents in their transition.

Lastly, the current study found unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth detained in America enacting literacy for a multitude of purposes. They were also observed requesting texts and other forms of literacy in order to mediate certain activities. The literacy practices and events of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth suggest that when given ample resources, they are able to utilize literacy to achieve a variety of goals. Regardless of their native literacy levels, youth at the center were engaged in the use of reading, writing and oral language
while making important decisions about their futures, reflecting upon their experiences, identifying the roles of a student, and participating in entertainment and religious activities. Additionally, they spoke in great length of their desire to learn the English language upon discharge from the center. Within the context of an ELL classroom, educators must capitalize on the strengths of immigrant youth in order to support them in their learning. In order to do so, they must seek an understanding of the experiences and practices of unaccompanied and/or undocumented immigrant youth.

Again, unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth are unique because they do not easily fit within any one area of research or practice. Protecting an immigrant student’s well-being is not technically the responsibility of schools, social services or policy makers. This is because no laws require actors within these institutions to demand follow-up services for youth until their cases are approved. In order to set up the systems of support needed for undocumented immigrant youth, social service representatives, educators and policy makers must come together and have a conversation. The immigrant population is only continuing to grow-and at staggering rates.

**Implications for Research**

The current study is a pioneering inquiry within the field of literacy research, as no study of its kind has been conducted with the unaccompanied, undocumented, immigrant population detained in America. The most notable implication for research, cross the borders of literacy and extend to Immigration Studies, English Language Learning, Education, Immigration Law, Sociology and more. The call to action is that the population should guide future research. In this case, researchers within numerous fields of inquiry need to begin to pay attention to the
experiences and needs of undocumented, unaccompanied immigrant youth. Such youth are in the United States because of circumstances beyond their control, and they are minors. I posit that the fields of education and literacy need to strive to understand the literacies of immigrants and the ways they use language to make sense of their surroundings. Additionally, it is critical to examine the school experiences of undocumented immigrants. Sociology researchers would benefit from following unaccompanied immigrant youth as they navigate the complex legal, social service and educational systems in America. Researchers in immigration law are encouraged to take a closer look at their protocol and the documents used to mediate mandatory meetings. Again, youth are most likely to succeed as a result of actors from each of these entities coming together to speak for their best interest, regardless of how challenging the task.

The implications of the current study challenge literacy researchers to once again expand their definition of literacy to account for the unique needs of unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth within a contested space. This definition must embrace the ways in which detained youth read their environment to acquire the skills needed to broker new surroundings. It also brings forth the notion that literacy looks different among global peers. Moreover, the role of context and power significantly influence literacy and identity. In the current study, youth were largely defined by others. Although youth relied on their own voices to traverse the detention contexts, the way in which their stories were translated by others determined the youth’s futures. Moreover, the term high-stakes literacies was included in this study in order to describe the power associated with many literacy events and activities for immigrant youth detained in the United States. These literacies did not merely refer to comprehension or language, but had severe life-altering consequences that, in extreme cases, could result in the life or death of immigrant youth. Thus, the value of literacy, both jointly-constructed (between a
youth and guide) and pre-constructed (by the system) was extremely high. Immigrant youth, in fact, largely depended on the role of literacy in mediating domains of activity to secure the details associated with family reunification and immigration legal cases. Lastly, the current study emphasizes the ever-present role of politics in literacy. My journey as a researcher was influenced by systematic protocol that (deliberately or not) served to silence a population of detained immigrant youth. Furthermore, the laws that serve to detain youth in the first place are fleeting—they have in the recent past had the propensity to change at any given moment, and may continue to do so.

In this work, I aimed to discuss the experiences of unaccompanied and undocumented immigrant youth detained in the United States. Additionally, I set forth to examine the roles of youth-enacted and system-imposed literacies in order to understand the stakes associated with domains of activities within a contested space. Notably missing from the conversation in current research is the direct voice of unaccompanied and/or undocumented immigrant youth. This is a voice that deserves to be heard and should be influential in the research guiding the field. This is a voice that should be granted the power to build its own identity. Particularly in an increasingly global society, it is time to listen to the shifting demographics of our youth and thus, address the needs of a population that deserves equal access to education, literacy and promise in a new land.
Appendix A

Interview Protocols

Participant: Caseworker & Clinician

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Native Language: ______________________________________________________

Number of years at WCH: _____________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________________

Location: __________________________________________________________________

Interview Identification/Length: __________________________________________

1. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, I am working on my dissertation and would love to ask you a few questions that will help me gain insight into some of the issues I am examining. The study I am doing focuses on kids aged 13-17, so please keep that in mind when answering the following interview questions.

2. How do you see the minors being treated in the center (diff. btw. adult and child roles)?

2b. In what ways are the teens treated like adults? In what ways are they treated like minors? Can you think of examples of when decisions are made for them vs. when they make decisions independently?

2c. Is it useful for me to think about this adult/minor dynamic as I think through the situations that the participants are in? Is it the way you see it too?

3. One thing I’m interested in is, when kids are put in the adult-like situations where they have to make important decisions that affect their future, how do you think they fare in these situations?

4. When you were trained to be a Caseworker, did you discuss a certain way to help the participants with the paperwork?

4a. When a teen has to read/respond to legal types of documents, is there anything that you do or say or you may have to do or way to help the UACs read or understand the form?

4b. The participants here come across a lot of documents throughout their stay in the center. In the end, they have to make pretty important decisions that may affect their case. Do you think they understand the importance of these decisions?
5. Now, I’d like to talk about the legal experiences of the teens and the teens themselves. Who helps the teens navigate their way through the center?

6. What kinds of activities do the teens do during free time?

7. Talk to me a little about the way they decorate their room. (Lyrics, etc.)

8. Do participants ask you for books for reading? What types of books? What about journals for writing?

9. As a Caseworker, there are federal standards that you must follow but it is my perception that the center goes above and beyond this. Do you feel this way?

10. What is the most common story you hear about these children’s experience?

11. What do you think the central purpose is for detaining youth?

Participant: Director and Associate Director of the WCH

Name: _____________________________________________________________

Native Language: ______________________________________________________

Number of years at WCH: ______________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________________

Location: __________________________________________________________________

Interview Identification/Length: ____________________________________________

1. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, I am working on my dissertation and would love to ask you a few questions that will help me gain insight into some of the issues I am examining. The study I am doing focuses on kids aged 13-17, so please keep that in mind when answering the following interview questions.

2. How do you see the minors being treated in the center?

2a. In what ways are the teens treated like adults? In what ways are they treated like minors? Can you think of examples of when decisions are made for them vs. when they make decisions independently?
2b. Is it useful for me to think about this adult/minor dynamic as I think through the situations that the participants are in? Is it the way you see it too?

3. One thing I’m interested in is, when kids are put in the adult-like situations where they have to make important decisions that affect their future, how do you think they fare in these situations?

4. When staff is trained to work here, do they discuss a certain way to help the participants with the paperwork?

   4a. How do you decide which types of documents need to be translated into another language?

5. The participants here come across a lot of documents throughout their stay in the center. In the end, they have to make pretty important decisions that may affect their case. Do you think they understand the importance of these decisions?

   5a. Now, I’d like to talk about the legal experiences of the teens and the teens themselves. Who helps the teens navigate their way through the center?

6. I had sent you a document that I asked you to review prior to our interview which reviewed some definitions and legal expectations for youth at the center. Is there anything you would like to add or change about the document?

7. President Obama recently announced that a new policy will prevent deportation for people younger than 30 who came to the United States before the age of 16, pose no criminal or security threat, and were successful students or served in the military. Does this announcement affect the participants in this center? How so? What do you think the implications of this announcement mean?

   7a. Have there been any other laws within the last couple of years that have affected the participants at this center?

8. There are federal standards that you must follow but it is my perception that the center goes above and beyond this. Do you feel this way?

9. What do you think the central purpose is for detaining youth?

**Participant: Residential Instructor**

Name: _____________________________________________________

Native Language: _________________________________________________

Number of years at WCH: __________________________________________
1. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, I am working on my dissertation and would love to ask you a few questions that will help me gain insight into some of the issues I am examining. The study I am doing focuses on kids aged 13-17, so please keep that in mind when answering the following interview questions.

2. How do you see the minors being treated in the center?
   
   2a. In what ways are the teens treated like adults? In what ways are they treated like minors? Can you think of examples of when decisions are made for them vs. when they make decisions independently?

   2b. Is it useful for me to think about this adult/minor dynamic as I think through the situations that the participants are in? Is it the way you see it too?

3. One thing I’m interested in is, when kids are put in the adult-like situations where they have to make important decisions that affect their future, how do you think they fare in these situations?

4. When you were trained to be a Residential Instructor, did you discuss a certain way to help the participants with the paperwork?
   
   4a. When a teen has to read or respond to academic documents are there any things that you do or say or you may have to do or say to help them read or understand the form?

   4b. What educational documents are translated and which are kept in English? Why?

   4c. The participants here come across a lot of documents throughout their stay in the center. In the end, they have to make pretty important decisions that may affect their case. Do you think they understand the importance of these decisions?

5. Recently, the center increased their school day as a result of a federal decision. Can you explain that more? Have there been any other laws within the last couple of years that have affected the participants at this center?

6. As a Residential Instructor, there are federal standards that you must follow but it is my perception that the center goes above and beyond this. Do you feel this way?

7. What are the educational expectations held for youth at the WCH? How are these addressed? For example, how long is their school day? What courses do they take? Who follows up with the receiving institutions?
8. On a more informal level, what do YOU want them to learn while here at the center?

9. What is the main role of Residential Instructors at the center?

10. What do you think the central purpose is for detaining youth?

**Participant: Family reunification specialist**

Name: _______________________________________________________________________

Native Language: _______________________________________________________________________

Number of years at WCH: _______________________________________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________________________________

Location: _______________________________________________________________________

Interview Identification/Length: _______________________________________________________________________

1. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, I am working on my dissertation and would love to ask you a few questions that will help me gain insight into some of the issues I am examining. The study I am doing focuses on kids aged 13-17, so please keep that in mind when answering the following interview questions.

2. How do you see the minors being treated in the center?

   2a. In what ways are the teens treated like adults? In what ways are they treated like minors? Can you think of examples of when decisions are made for them vs. when they make decisions independently?

   2b. Is it useful for me to think about this adult/minor dynamic as I think through the situations that the participants are in? Is it the way you see it too?

3. One thing I’m interested in is, when kids are put in the adult-like situations where they have to make important decisions that affect their future, how do you think they fare in these situations?

4. When you were trained to be a family reunification specialist, did you discuss a certain way to help the participants with the paperwork?

   4a. When a teen has to read/respond to legal types of documents is there anything that you do or say or you may have to do or way to help the UACs read or understand the form?
4b. The participants here come across a lot of documents throughout their stay in the center. In the end, they have to make pretty important decisions that may affect their case. Do you think they understand the importance of these decisions?

5. Now, I’d like to talk about the legal experiences of the teens and the teens themselves. Who helps the teens navigate their way through the center?

5a. I had sent you a document that I asked you to review prior to our interview which reviewed some definitions and legal expectations for youth at the center. Is there anything you would like to add or change about the document?

5b. In that document, I wrote down some of the legal expectations for UACs. What are they exactly? How are they addressed?

6. President Obama recently announced that a new policy will prevent deportation for people younger than 30 who came to the United States before the age of 16, pose no criminal or security threat, and were successful students or served in the military. Does this announcement affect the participants in this center? How so? What do you think the implications of this announcement mean?

6a. Have there been any other laws within the last couple of years that have affected the participants at this center?

7. As a family reunification specialist, there are federal standards that you must follow but it is my perception that the center goes above and beyond this. Do you feel this way?

7a. What are the family reunification expectations held for youth at the WCH? How are these addressed?

7b. What is the main role of family reunification specialist at the center?

8. What do you think the central purpose is for detaining youth?

**Participant: Director of Midwest NPO**

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Native Language: _______________________________________________________

Number of years at WCH:
_____________________________________________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________________________________

Location: ___________________________________________________________________
1. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, I am working on my dissertation and would love to ask you a few questions that will help me gain insight into some of the issues I am examining. The study I am doing focuses on kids aged 13-17, so please keep that in mind when answering the following interview questions.

2. How do you see the minors being treated in the center?

   2a. In what ways are the teens treated like adults? In what ways are they treated like minors? Can you think of examples of when decisions are made for them vs. when they make decisions independently?

   2b. Is it useful for me to think about this adult/minor dynamic as I think through the situations that the participants are in? Is it the way you see it too?

3. One thing I’m interested in is, when kids are put in the adult-like situations where they have to make important decisions that affect their future, how do you think they fare in these situations?

4. When staff is trained to work here, do they discuss a certain way to help the participants with the paperwork?

   4a. How do you decide which types of documents need to be translated into another language?

5. The participants here come across a lot of documents throughout their stay in the center. In the end, they have to make pretty important decisions that may affect their case. Do you think they understand the importance of these decisions?

   5a. Now, I’d like to talk about the legal experiences of the teens and the teens themselves. Who helps the teens navigate their way through the center?

6. I had sent you a document that I asked you to review prior to our interview which reviewed some definitions and legal expectations for youth at the center. Is there anything you would like to add or change about the document?

7. President Obama recently announced that a new policy will prevent deportation for people younger than 30 who came to the United States before the age of 16, pose no criminal or security threat, and were successful students or served in the military. Does this announcement affect the participants in this center? How so? What do you think the implications of this announcement mean?

   7a. Have there been any other laws within the last couple of years that have affected the participants at this center?
8. There are federal standards that you must follow but it is my perception that the center goes above and beyond this. Do you feel this way?

9. What do you think the central purpose is for detaining youth?

**Participant: Manager of Educational Services**

Name: _________________________________________________________________

Native Language: _______________________________________________________

Number of years at WCH: _______________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________________________________

Location: __________________________________________________________________

Interview Identification/Length: _____________________________________________

1. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. As you know, I am working on my dissertation and would love to ask you a few questions that will help me gain insight into some of the issues I am examining. The study I am doing focuses on kids aged 13-17, so please keep that in mind when answering the following interview questions.

2. How do you see the minors being treated in the center?

   2a. In what ways are the teens treated like adults? In what ways are they treated like minors? Can you think of examples of when decisions are made for them vs. when they make decisions independently?

   2b. Is it useful for me to think about this adult/minor dynamic as I think through the situations that the participants are in? Is it the way you see it too?

3. One thing I’m interested in is, when kids are put in the adult-like situations where they have to make important decisions that affect their future, how do you think they fare in these situations?

4. When you were trained to be a Residential Instructor, did you discuss a certain way to help the participants with the paperwork?

   4a. When a teen has to read or respond to academic documents are there any things that you do or say or you may have to do or say to help them read or understand the form?

   4b. What educational documents are translated and which are kept in English? Why?
4c. The participants here come across a lot of documents throughout their stay in the center. In the end, they have to make pretty important decisions that may affect their case. Do you think they understand the importance of these decisions?

5. Recently, the center increased their school day as a result of a federal decision. Can you explain that more? Have there been any other laws within the last couple of years that have affected the participants at this center?

6. As a Residential Instructor, there are federal standards that you must follow but it is my perception that the center goes above and beyond this. Do you feel this way?

7. What are the educational expectations held for youth at the WCH? How are these addressed? For example, how long is their school day? What courses do they take? Who follows up with the receiving institutions?

7a. On a more informal level, what do YOU want them to learn while here at the center?

8. What is the main role of Residential Instructors at the center?

9. What do you think the central purpose is for detaining youth?
Appendix B

List of codes with definitions

(O) ORIENTATION: Orientation involves the participant’s initial exposure to the values, expectations, rules and ideals within the WCH context, the immigration legal system and the United States.

(O1) SCREENING: Includes when youth first arrive in the United States and take part in screening processes by: Immigration, the WCH, and NIJC initial intake meetings.

(O2) ENTRY: WCH/ NIJC/AMERICAN IDEALS & VALUES: This includes when participants become aware of the “appropriate” roles of minors, including prominent values in the U.S., etiquette, WCH rules and procedures, NIJC follow up meetings and cultural customs and traditions. Includes learning ‘life skills’.

(O3) REFLECTION: Involves youth’s action of reflecting upon their experience and seeking clarification on processes. Staff also clarifies meaning in this code. This includes journal writing, meeting with Clinicians and sharing their stories with peers in order to begin to cope with their struggle. It also includes when youth ask for help with something (about their case, homework, etc).

(A) ACADEMIC: Involves literacy practices used to gain scholarship in the English language, for means of translation, and for WCH homework.

(A1) STUDENT ROLE: Refers to the literacies enacted by youth within the realm of the classroom or to achieve an academic purpose of some kind.

(A1a) CODE SWITCHING: When child uses both native language and English to understand something.

(A2) ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS: Expectations placed upon youth by the contexts of the WCH, including from Residential Instructors, WCH staff members, and at the federal level.

(A2a) HOMEWORK: Involves participants reading, writing and talk practices utilized for means of completing homework or participating in class work—given to them by residential instructors at the WCH.

(A2b) LEARNING ENGLISH: Involves reading, writing and talk utilized for purpose of learning or enhancing English language.

(T) TRANSLATION: Involves participants’ use of language, reading or writing with the goal of negotiating meaning between English and their native language.
(D) DECISION MAKING: Involves participants’ and staff members’ use of speaking, reading and writing while making important decisions about their family reunification case and legal case. These include experiencing adult roles, confusion of expectations and asking for advice as they build their own argument and eventually make an important decision. This is further divided into youth-enacted and system-imposed literacies.

(D1) Family Reunification: Involves use of talk, reading and writing with family reunification specialists, peers and family members as they identify possibilities, weigh options and make important decisions about their family reunification case.

(D2) Legal Case: Includes meetings with NIJC in which participants review their legal options with their lawyers, further discussion with others about legal case, and all appearances in court and at the Consulate. It includes any correspondence with legal documents as well.

DOWNTIME (DT): Downtime refers to the literacies requested and utilized by youth during free time at the center. It is what minors are observed doing on “their own time.”

(DT1) ENTERTAINMENT: Involves participant’s literacy practices for entertainment purposes, including: watching movies with subtitles, reading books and novels, drawing and writing song lyrics and other sayings to decorate their room.

(DT2) RELIGIOUS PRACTICE: Any time in which a participant uses the Bible, Quran, or other holy book as a mediating activity for literacy.

Document analyses: make note of any references to the documents used in the document analyses.
Appendix C

Inventory of Documents

Documents excluded from the Coh-Metrix analysis are indicated with a *

WCH documents

1. Intake

a. Participant Personal Property Form: This form serves to create an inventory of property participants have upon arrival to the center. All property is kept in a box in a secure room while participants are at the center. The property form allows staff to list the clothing, money and other property of the participant. Arrival and release date, item number, quantity, participant signature and staff signature are all required. Form is in English.

b. Clothing Distribution Form: Every participant at the center is given a package of clothing when they arrive. It includes: underwear, socks, short sleeved t-shirts, long sleeved shirts, sweatshirt, sweatpants, shorts, sleeping shorts, bras, PJ shirt, polo shirt, laundry bag, and shoes. This list is a record of how many of each item is distributed to the participant. Both participant and staff must sign this form. It is in English.

c. Communicable Disease Screening Form: This form is used during the Intake Procedure. It is an initial screening questionnaire to see if the participant has a communicable disease. This form asks participants if they are experiencing any symptoms, have received immunizations or been exposed to disease. All participants (excluding pregnant teens) are given vaccines upon arrival to the center during their first medical visit. This form is administered by a physician and explained orally in the participants’ primary language. Form is in English.

d. Intake Checklist: This packet is ten pages long. It is in English and filled out by staff. It has all of the materials needed to complete intake including:

   i. documents from escort ICE
   ii. personal property form
   iii. health screening and questionnaire
   iv. communicable disease screening form
   v. stool sample paperwork
vi. legal service provider list

vii. clothing distribution form

viii. initial intake assessment: must be completed within first 24 hours of the child’s arrival at the facility. The form includes questions on demographics, medical history and mental health. It is in English and filled out by a staff.

ix. family tree: This form is filled out by a staff, it asks the participants to name their family members, including the relationship, age, address, phone number and when the last contact was with the person.

x. contact information.

2. Orientation

a. Client Orientation Checklist: Available in English, Spanish, Mandarin and Punjabi. This form includes an orientation task description and includes a space for youth to sign and date that they understand and have participated in the following tasks: received a copy of the orientation manual, understand the house rules, have been trained in personal hygiene, have been taught the correct way to make the bed and clean the bedroom, have been trained how to contribute to household and kitchen chores, understand house schedules. This presentation is given orally (usually in the primary language), and participants must sign the form to affirm that they understand the information given in the training.

b. Orientation Manual: This manual is available in English, Spanish and I believe other languages (I need to check). It is 23 pages long. It is given to the participant during orientation. It includes information on: program orientation, service provided, safety of the participant, participant rights policy, local pro bono attorneys, access to legal services, expectations of participants, residential rules, disciplinary procedures, rights of participants, and grievance procedure. It is written at a fairly high level.

3. Big Brother and Big Sister

a. Big Brother/Big Sister Application: Participants who have been doing well in the center are eligible to apply for a big brother/sister role. Big brother and sisters have extra responsibilities but are also given incentives such as: TVs, electronics and radios in the bedroom, extracurricular field trips and other activities. This form is available in many different languages and includes five questions, where the participant must write an essay response to explain why they are ready to be a big brother/sister.
b. **Big Brother/Sister Checklist:** Participants must fill out this form and answer yes or no to a long list of questions that pertain to adherence to rules in school, in the room and in the dining room. It is available in many languages.

c. **Rules Quiz:** This is a fill-in-the-blanks quiz that lists the rules in the house, bedroom, during quiet time, class/activity, milieu/free time, and dining room. It is difficult to read.

**Academic Documents**

1. **General**

a. **Youth and Residential Services Heartland Human Care Services:** Audience is for institutions where participants will be placed upon discharge from the center. Caretakers also have access to this document, as well as participants if they are able to understand it. English Only. It describes the aims and hours of the courses at the center including: ELL beginner course, ELL pre-intermediate course, ELL upper-intermediate course, ELL advanced course, Four levels of Math Courses, music class, physical education, art class, social studies, and science class. This document is aimed at a high-level English reader.

b. **UAC Progress Report:** Audience is for institutions where participants will be placed, namely schools. It allows the Residential Instructor to give the participant a score of “good, improvement needed, or unsatisfactory” in various skills such as: assuming responsibility in class, cooperation, behavior, etc. The Residential Instructor is able to comment at the bottom of the form. English only.

c. **Coursework Summary:** Audience intended for institutions where participants will be placed. English Only. This is a very brief form which allows the Residential Instructor to list the main topics covered in ESL, Math, Science, and Social Studies. A phone number is provided on this form for the school to contact the center with questions.

d. **Beginner English Language Learner Entrance Packet:** This packet is intended for incoming participants entering Group A (beginner course) and includes: schedule of classes, alphabet tracing guide, a form with illustrations describing basic classroom commands (i.e. “raise your hand”), a page with different colors and color names, a phonetic alphabet with word examples for each letter, an alphabet form with letter pronunciation written in Spanish, and a form which covers basic measurements, days, months, seasons, numbers,
time, greetings, weather and directions. This packet is available in English only.

e. **Monthly Activity Schedule:** This is an internal form used for WCH staff to keep track of which activities students participate in daily. Staff have to check off the classes/activities each student was involved in everyday before their shift is over. This form is used to report to the Office of Refugee Resettlement to verify participant’s activities. English only.

f. **Computer Use Contract:** This form is a contract that participants must sign before being able to use computers at the center. It explains the rules, including not being able to use the computer to contact anyone outside of the center (to protect the participants). It is in English and Spanish.

2. **Assessments**

   a. **ELL Assessment for Group A to B:** A short test that students must pass in order to move on to the next ELL class. This exam is 12 questions that test introductions, numbers, days of the week and months, and body part vocabulary. English only.

   b. **ELL Assessment for Group B to C:** A short test that students must pass in order to move on to the next ELL class. The exam is 19 questions that test use of am/is/are, have/has, who/what/when/where/why, answering questions, writing questions and using the past tense of a verb. English only.

   c. **ELL Assessment for Group C to Group D:** This test is for students who are being promoted to Group D from Group C. It tests the using a verb in different tenses, reading a paragraph and answering comprehension questions and having a short conversation with the Residential Instructor choosing a topic from a list of prompts. English only.

   d. **UAC ELL Assessment:** This test is for participants upon entry to the center. It is usually given to students within the first 24-48 hours of arrival. Most of the exam is oral, although some questions ask for a student to write. The test is testing English and the test is in English, but staff members are able to translate questions about background, age, etc. Test in entirety is six pages, where the staff administering the exam is able to stop the test throughout depending on student’s English ability. Purpose of test is to place the participant into their ELL class. English only with basic translation available for demographic information.
e. **UAC Math Assessment:** This test is for participants upon entry to the center. It is usually given within the first few days of a participant’s arrival to the center. The purpose of this document is to place the participant in an appropriate math class, depending on their ability. Directions are written in English, Spanish, Mandarin and either Hindi or Punjabi. The participant is required to complete as much of the exam as they can, and stop when they no longer understand the questions.

3. **Personal Academic Documents**

a. **Individualized Education Plan:** This plan is written up for students who learn differently or have special needs. It provides a summary of academic history, current functioning, modifications and goals. The audience of this is internal, for staff at the center or caretakers/Residential Instructors in placement upon discharge. English only.

b. **Educational Assessment:** This form is intended to be read by caretakers and/or Residential Instructors and administration as academic placement upon participant’s discharge from the center. It describes the duration of the participants stay at the center, and the academic activities completed in this time. English only.

4. **Exit Exams**

a. **IPT II-Oral English Forms A & B IDEA Proficiency Test Level Summary:** This form explains what a student is able to perform in English at different levels. It breaks down the exit exams for Residential Instructors and is sent to future placement with the participants.

b. **IDEA Proficiency Tests IPT II-Oral Grades 7-12 English Form A: Oral Test:** This is the formal exit exam administered orally by an Residential Instructor to a participant who is getting ready to be discharged from the center. It tests the participants English language ability. The test is 91 questions, with the tester having the ability to stop the test at various points throughout the exam depending on the child’s English ability. English only. Form A is given to students in Group C and Group D, the two highest ELL courses at the WCH.

c. **IDEA Proficiency Tests IPT I-Oral Grades K-6 English Form E: Oral Test:** This is the formal exit exam administered orally by an Residential Instructor to a participant who is getting ready to be discharged from the center. It tests the participants English language ability. The test is 83 questions, with the tester having the ability to stop the test at various points
throughout the exam depending on the child’s English ability. English only. Form E is given to students in Group A and Group B, the two beginning ELL courses at the WCH.

Legal Documents

1. **Legal Service Provider List for UAC:** ORR is required to provide a list of legal service providers in the area of the center that provides free legal assistance. ORR subcontracts with a local legal service provider organization to coordinate these services for the UAC free of charge. This list is given to all participants at the center. It is available in English, Spanish, Mandarin and Hindi. It is a list of free immigration services in different states.

2. **Immigration and You-Know Your Rights:** Know Your Rights is a manual for children created by the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), one of the free legal providers that serve the participants at the center. It is available in English and Spanish (and I believe other languages, but I need to check). This manual is 27 pages long and written to speak to youth. It is intended to serve as an introductory guide to teach minors about the U.S. Immigration system. It achieves explaining/defining the following: commonly used immigration terms, why participants are detained, different types of detention centers, rights for youth at the center, how youth may be released to family from the center, the release procedure, attorneys role and expectations, immigration laws in the U.S., important things to remember and free legal service opportunities. Although it is aimed at a younger audience, the manual is still very information-heavy and may not be accessible to all youth at the center.

3. **Acknowledgement of Receipt of Rights Presentation:** This form must be signed by the minor and an ILC representative. It ensures that the minor received the “Know Your Rights” presentation in person or via video and that the following topics were covered: the reasons for my detention and the possibilities of my release, my rights and responsibilities with respect to Immigration Court, eligibility for form of relief again removal and the difference between the court and reunification processes and timelines.

4. **Agreement Detained Minor:** Must be signed by an ILC representative and minor, it explains the general roles of the ILC in bulleted points. These roles include: ILC are not the attorneys, ILC can give general information about immigration case, ILC can share information with other organizations in order to try to find low cost lawyers to help, if court date is in location city-ILC will accompany the minor, and if minor doesn’t want to work with ILC they can cancel agreement at any time.

5. **Authorization for Release of Information:** The minor signs this form giving permission to the ILC to share information about their eligibility for immigration
legal relief in the United States to Midwest NPO and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. It is also signed by an ILC representative.

6. **Limited Representation Agreement:** ILC representative and youth must sign this form that describes the limited representation. It describes which forms ILC will file for the immigration judge. It acknowledges that no correspondence other than the Notice to Appear will be handled by an ILC representative. Minors must sign that if they change their address, they are responsible to notify the Immigration Court. The minor is able to call ILC if they have questions.

7. **Retainer Agreement for Detained Minors:** This is an agreement for legal representation and services between the ILC and the youth. It refers to the minors as a ‘client’ who must understand that the Department of Homeland Security may require the ILC to file papers in the name of family members rather than the minor’s name. Also, while detained by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, ILC will not charge fees for the services provided. Minors must sign off that they understand the services to be performed, that they can cancel the contract within three days, and that the retainer agreement is only valid during the time that the minor is detained by the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

8. **Notice to Appear:** This is the form from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security that tells a minor that they are “an alien present in the United States who has not been admitted or paroled.” Due to this, they must show up at a court date, for a specific reason. The date and location of the court dates is provided. Youth must sign and be fingerprinted for the certificate of service that is included in this document.

**Family Reunification Documents**

1. **Family Reunification Packet**
   a. **Fax Cover Sheet:** This form is the standard form sent with the family reunification packet. It includes symbols explaining where the Sponsor should sign and notarize the pages. This form is available in a variety of languages.
   
   b. **Family Reunification Packet Application:** This packet is a very important document. It is eight pages long and available in many languages. Completion of this packet allows a Sponsor to request the release of a minor who is currently in the custody of DUCS, within the US Department of Health and Human Services. The entire packet must be filled out correctly in order for participant to be released. Completion of this packet often takes weeks to months, depending on Sponsor’s accessibility, literacy and comprehension. Background checks are also completed to any person who would like to Sponsor a participant. This packet is very information-heavy and may be quite difficult to understand.
i. personal information of Sponsor, proof of relationship, identification, address, contact information, household occupant information, crime history.

ii. Form I-134, Affidavit of Support

iii. Authorization for release of information

iv. Information required for background check

v. Sponsor agreement to condition of release

2. Participant Call Log: FR is responsible for monitoring all communication participants have with people outside of the center. They are only able to speak to family, Sponsor, and lawyers while at the center. Each call must be monitored to ensure privacy and confidentiality of participants’ location and circumstance. This form includes a list where the following are recorded: date, time, name of participant, name of contact, name of staff, incoming/outgoing call, purpose of the call, and phone number. A list of codes is used at the bottom of the form to record the type of call being made. Form is in English and filled out by staff.

3. I can protect myself from sexual abuse: This form is given to all participants. It describes and defines sexual assault. Each participant at the center must check and sign that they understand the form along with a staff. Often, this form is read orally and translated to the participant’s native language.

4. Discharged file checklist: This is an internal file that the family reunification specialist fills out for the youth to make sure they have all of the documents needed for their discharge manual.

5. Discharge Packet Manual: This is another internal checklist to make sure that youth have all the forms with them in the discharge manual. It explains that the discharge packet should include: an envelope, child’s FRP, child’s file, discharge letter, discharge checklist, monthly stipend log and note for change of venue. It is a comprehensive descriptive document explaining a brief purpose of each documents and how they need to be filled out. For instance, they have to be in a certain order, some forms must have signatures, etc.

6. Family Tree: Largely, this is a blank form with many lines on it to fill up with demographic information. It is what the family reunification specialist’s use with youth to help them walk through their family tree and verify all relationships. It is five pages long, and the third page is a visual chart that looks like a concept map—that is used to help youth draw out their relatives in an organized manner. The chart is used to then identify if writing all family members, location, names, etc.
7. Placement Authorization: This is a document from the Department of Health and Human Services that explains their responsibility for coordinating and implementing the care and placement of the minor. It includes all identifiable information of the youth, including their alien number. It briefly explains protocol and procedures of: custody, education, travel, photographs and videotapes, medical care, files/confidentiality, contact with family, school programs and extracurricular activities, reason for placement, time in care, finances and restraint. It must be signed by the caregiver and official ORR representative.

Federal Documents

1. Release of Information: This form is signed by the minor and the WCH staff member. It explains that certain documents with private information will be shared with the Office of Refugee Resettlement. There is a checklist, and check marks show which information will be shared (e.g. medical records, immigration records, etc.). Once signed, the authorization is valid for one year.

2. Authorization for Medical: This document explains that the WCH is considered the youth’s caregiver and is responsible for: non-emergency care, schedule for routine exams and screenings, emergency care, immunizations, drug testing, HIV testing, and files and confidentiality. Each section is described in one paragraph. It is signed by the WCH staff member as well as the ORR representative.

3. Affidavit of Support: A document from the Department of Homeland Security that requires the youth to fill out personal information such as age, name, gender, country, address, relationship to Sponsor, etc. The affidavit serves the purpose of assuring the U.S. government that the minor will not become a public charge in the U.S., that the sponsor is willing and able to care for the , that the sponsor may be sued if the minor becomes a public charge after admission to the U.S, information on food stamps, supplemental security income, etc. Sponsor must fill out annual income, saving and checking account balances, life insurance, stocks and bonds, names of dependents, citizenship status and whether or not the Sponsor intends to make specific contributions to support the minor. It is accompanied with an oath, signed by the Sponsor and the ORR representative.

4. Initial Intake Assessment: Must be completed within 24 hours of arrival at the WCH. This form is accompanied by an interview that explains to the minor that: the caring for their safety is the caretaker’s foremost goal. It explains identifying the severity of any medical or mental health needs the child has, and includes identifying information. Two pages that ask the minor a lot of questions (e.g. do you feel safe right now?).

5. In-Processing Health Screening: A form with numerous yes/no questions related to health. It has the picture of a person on it, the WCH staff member asks the youth to
disrobe so they can check their body for visible signs of medical attention needed, abuse, etc. It also includes WCH staff member’s observations of the detainee.

6. **Juvenile Case Action:** United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement Juvenile case action worksheet. A form used to record detainment of youth and whether detained youth will be sent to: a secure facility, shelter care, removed from country, transferred to another location, released or denied release.

7. **Sponsor Agreement:** A form filled out by the minor’s sponsor that ensures the Sponsor will be the caretaker of the minor upon discharge from the center. Document must be notarized.

File Index: Includes a checklist of all documents that must be in a complete participant file. Files include various documents under the following topics: personal identifying information, medical and mental health, legal information, facility required information, education and training, and exit information. A complete file includes 51 documents.
Cited Literature


Sarroub, L., Pernicek, T., & Sweeney, T. (2007). "I was bitten by a scorpion": Reading in and out of school in a refugee's life. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 50*(8), 668-679.


ALEXIS CULLERTON, Ph.D.

email: ali.cullerton@gmail.com

Areas of Professional Interest

Literacy, family literacy, immigration studies, English Language Learners (ELLs), qualitative methods, teacher inquiry, research on undocumented and unaccompanied youth, multicultural literature, and social justice education.

Educational History

2013  Ph.D., University of Illinois at Chicago, Curriculum & Instruction: Language, Literacy & Culture. Chicago, IL.


2005  B.A., University of Kansas, Creative Writing/English; Minor in Sociocultural Anthropology. Lawrence, KS.


Dissertation


This descriptive study examined the literacy practices of unaccompanied immigrant youth detained in a residential center by the federal government as they begin immigration proceedings and family reunification. The role of the context, the institution of the World Children’s House, and the expectations placed upon youth by the institution was also investigated. Initial analysis suggests that youth utilize literacy in formal, high-stakes arenas, bearing heavy influence on the direction of their case. Preliminary findings showcase a variety of goals for literacy use, tension of adult/child roles, high institutional expectations and reliance on a system that is extremely hard to navigate. This speaks to the need for future research to be conducted on this rapidly-growing, under-researched population within the immigrant community in the United States.

University Teaching Experience

2011  Residential Instructor Assistant, University of Illinois at Chicago

CI 535: Studies in Literacy Research and Residential Instructor Inquiry: M.Ed. course in the Literacy, Language & Culture program; co-taught, presented and assisted in grading and curriculum planning.
2010  **Residential Instructor Assistant, University of Illinois at Chicago**

Children’s and Young Adult Literature: M.Ed. course in Literacy, Language & Culture program; assisted with teaching duties, focusing primarily on the use of multicultural literature with youth.

**University Research Experience**

2009-2013  **Graduate Research Assistant: Center for Literacy, Early Reading First, University of Illinois at Chicago.**

- *Coordinator, Family Literacy Outreach component of the UIC-ERF grants:* Facilitate parent literacy meetings (in both English and Spanish) and professional development days for Pre-K Residential Instructors, develop and distribute family literacy materials and create and maintain family literacy website (http://www.uic.edu/educ/erf/families.html).

- *Liaison to Chicago Public Library:* Develop and implement multilingual lending libraries in each classroom, lead book talks in order to familiarize Residential Instructors and parents with quality children’s literature, coordinate family literacy activities between schools and local library branches, including field trips, classroom visits, book clubs and author talks.

- *Data analyst:* Collect and report data on family literacy component of project in USDOE Annual Reports.

- *Assessor:* Assess children with PPVT/TVIP and PALS (Spanish and English) and conduct classroom ELLCO observations.

- *Instructional Support Tutor:* Implement Tier 3 intervention focused on early literacy foundational skills, input and analyze data for single-subject design research on the intervention.

2012  **Ph.D. Research Project: Case Study conducted at World Children’s House; a detention center for unaccompanied, undocumented immigrant youth.**

*Principal Investigator, Descriptive Case Study:*

Study was descriptive in nature and encouraged a deep contextual analysis of the center including: culture of center, literacy practices, expectations for youth, youth experiences and staff experiences. Triangulation of data including interviews, observations and artifact collection suggests that youth are expected to utilize literacy in very high stakes circumstances that have a tremendous effect on the outcome of their case. Study served to aid dissertation design.
2011  

**Descriptive Case Study: Independent Study with Dr. Taffy Raphael at UIC.**

**Co-Investigator, Descriptive Case Study:**

Study explored how reading, writing and talk is used to begin to shape notions of identity and the role that text selection plays in comprehension and participant involvement. Sample was Latina adolescents at a community center serving the needs of a low-income neighborhood. The intervention was six weeks and involved a comprehensive unit centered on themes of the Book Club framework utilizing multicultural literature of various genres, including the graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*, as the focus text. Scoring tools for pre and post assessment, essay, and rubric were used to measure youth’s ability to express identity as multidimensional. Findings showed that while students participated in rich dialogue, which exhibited a deep discussion of shifting identities, they were unable to reach the same level of complexity of meaning in their writing.

**Additional Teaching Experience**

2009-2013  

**Instructor and Tutor: Educational Endeavors, Chicago, IL.**

- Created and implemented training materials and curriculum for *Ideal Student Workshops* targeting executive functioning skills, experiential education, writing and reading comprehension.
- Teaching and facilitation reaches hundreds of underserved youth ages 12-19 in Chicago including, but not limited to: Daniel Murphy Scholars, Catalyst Charter School, Pedro Albizu Campos School, Fourthpress Scholarship Recipients and Chicago Lights.
- Conduct one-on-one tutoring with elementary and secondary level students in a variety of subjects and combine efforts of parents, Residential Instructors and students to create targeted learning plans.

2012  

**Literacy Exam Prep Residential Instructor: Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos High School, Chicago, IL**

- Curriculum Design: Built comprehensive literacy curriculum to reach target literacy goals and advance reading comprehension.
- Literacy: Successfully advanced TABE scores of students by an average of 2 years of literacy growth.
- Teaching: Taught Adult Basic Education (TABE) and Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) test preparation course.

2006-2007  

**Educational Coordinator: Food For Thought Café, Portland State University, Portland, OR**

- Educational Outreach: Planned all educational presentations, panel discussions, in-service trainings and movie screenings.
Internal Management: Developed and maintained a $60,000 budget, recruited volunteers, developed staff trainings, organized and facilitated staff meetings, and oversaw staff committees.

Organized PSU’s first student-run, on-campus garden, used to provide food for the café and educational demonstrations.

Peer-Reviewed Presentations


Invited Presentations

Cullerton, A. (November, 2012). Book Club: Examining Identity as a Multifaceted Notion through use of Graphic Novels and YA Literature. Presentation for gifted programs at Northwestern University Center for Talent Development. Online presentation. Chicago, IL.


Social Justice Education Conference, University of Illinois at Chicago, (2011). Collaborated in a forum and received mentorship from Dr. William Schubert, Dr. William Ayers and Dr. Ming Fang He on designing qualitative research with a theoretical lens of social justice in education.

Professional Organization Memberships and Organizations

International Reading Association
American Educational Research Association
Literacy Research Association
National Council of Residential Instructors of English
Residential Instructors for Social Justice-Chicago
Americorps member Project MORE: Making Opportunities for Reading Enrichment
Honors and Awards

Recipient of Graduate School of Education Laurel's Scholarship (2007), Portland State University.

Training and Certificates

Initial Teaching Licensure in Secondary Education: Language Arts and Humanities (2007).
Mandated Reporter for the Department of Children and Family Services.
Collaborative Institutional Review Board (IRB) Training Initiative’s initial (basic) human research training and consecutive credits for Social and Behavioral Sciences.

Languages

Proficient in Spanish.