INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700  800/521-0600
NOTE TO USERS

The original manuscript received by UMI contains pages with slanted print. Pages were microfilmed as received.

This reproduction is the best copy available.

UMI
As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Debra Smith entitled "Adolescent Male Gang Members' Literacy Experiences Within and Outside of School" and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dana Fox

Yetta Goodman

Kathryn Whitmore

Luis Moll

Ken Goodman

Date 1/19/99

Date 1/19/99

Date 1/19/99

Date 1/19/99

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copy of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Dissertation Director Dana Fox 4/5/99
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

This dissertation has been submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for an advanced degree at The University of Arizona and is deposited in the University Library to be made available to borrowers under rules of the Library.

Brief quotations from this dissertation are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of source is made. Requests for permission for extended quotation from or reproduction of this manuscript in whole or in part may be granted by copyright holder

SIGNED: [Signature]
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I will never forget the first couple of weeks as a new teacher in an alternative high school program. The students in front of me were members of a gang. They had been kicked out of, dropped out of, and/or asked to leave the schools they had attended. They seemed to be resolved not to do “school.” At times, however, I would see a strong desire in them that wanted to learn. After one particular day, I wrote in my personal journal:

As I looked into their eyes, the eyes that still seemed to sparkle with the childlike innocence for learning, I was determined to help make that possible

(Personal Journal Feb. 3, 1995)

As their teacher and advocate, I discovered I was learning more and more what it meant to be a TEACHER from them. I want to thank Lil Boy Blue, Kurious, Guero, Murder, Nadia, Kathy, Emilia, Dominga, Plucy, Smurf, Juice, Lil Garfield, and Garfield, for being my teachers and allowing me to be their student. They opened their world and let me in. THANK YOU.

I also want to thank Lil Boy Blue’s and Smurf’s, and Juice’s and Lil Garfield’s families. These families opened their doors and allowing me the privilege of learning from them about their world. My life will never be the same because you let me be a part of your families. THANK YOU.

As I think of a way to thank the professors who have been a part of my life for the last five years, I find myself thinking back to the statement I wrote about my students—“Eyes that still seem to sparkle with the childlike innocence for learning.” A teacher sees the “childlike innocence to learn” and then can celebrate with the student as he/she explores. A teacher can see students for who they are with eyes that can see the student for what they can become. A teacher respects that student. I want to thank Drs. Dana Fox, Ken and Yetta Goodman, Luis Moll, Kathy Whitmore for being TEACHERS. They saw past the non-traditional exterior and found the learner. THANK YOU.

I want to thank all members of my family for the traits I learned from them that gave me the ability to stick to it and complete my doctoral program. While growing up, little sisters can be a pain, but they can also be the source that keeps dreams alive. Little sister you believed in me. Thanks LUCY.
DEDICATED TO

NATHAN HALE SMITH

Grandpa, you believed in me and my dreams.

You loved and respected me for me.

Thanks for being in my corner.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. EXPLORING ADOLESCENCE</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. At-Risk Students' Desire: High School Diploma</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Pilot Study</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Research Purpose and Question</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Research Design</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Importance of Study</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A Guide to the Multiple Worlds</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Adolescence and the Culture of Youth</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Multiple Worlds and Border Crossing</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social Capital and Social Networking</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Forms of Representation: Meaning</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Making Systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The History</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Organization</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Forms of Representation in Gangs</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESEARCHER AND PARTICIPANTS: WHO ARE WE?</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. One Role: Teaching and Advocating</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Working with &quot;At-Risk&quot; Students in Arizona</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moving toward Advocacy .......................... 71
The Participants: Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield .......... 76
Lil Boy Blue and Smurf ............................ 81
Juice and Lil Garfield ............................. 86
Researcher and Participant Relationship .............................. 91

IV. DIFFERENT LENSES: A PROCESS OF INQUIRY ................ 97
A Study Begins ........................................ 98
The Case Study Design Evolves .......................... 102
Worlds Visited: Multiple Research Sites ............................. 103
Nuestra Casa .......................................... 103
Brighton High School .................................. 108
Kino Alternative High School .......................... 110
My Students' Homes .................................... 112
Lil Boy Blue and Smurf .................................. 112
Juice and Lil Garfield .................................. 114
Hanging Out ............................................. 116
Multiple Methods for Data Collection ......................... 117
Participant Observation .................................. 118
In-depth Interviews ...................................... 121
Collection of Written and Visual Artifacts ...................... 124
Analysis of Data .......................................... 125
Family Community ....................................... 129
Gang Community ........................................ 129
Formal Education Community ............................ 130
Juvenile Court Community ................................ 131

V. MI FAMILIA: FAMILY COMMUNITY ......................... 134
The Espinoza Family:
Parents, Grandparents .................................... 136
One Family: Grandpa Gonzalez
and Mom Alvarez ............................ 151
The Boy's Own Families .................... 171
  Lil Boy Blue's Young Family .......... 171
  Smurf's Young Family ................. 176
  Juice's Young Family ................. 179

VI. "CRIP 4 LIFE": GANG COMMUNITY .......... 183
  The Family Community Collides
  with the Gang Community ............. 187
  The Gang: What Is It Really ........ 190
  Heartaches of Gang Life ............. 195
  The Gang: Brothers to Brothers .... 207
  Literacy in the Gang .................. 214
    Tagging: Written Language
    in the Gang ............................ 215
    Getting Started with Tagging .... 215
    Features of a Tag .................. 216
    Function and Purpose ............ 222
    Oral Language ...................... 231
    Hand Signs .......................... 238
    Other Forms of Representation ... 243

VII. STRANGERS IN A STRANGE WORLD: FORMAL EDUCATION
    AND JUVENILE COURTS .................. 247
  Thoughts on Elementary School Years .. 248
    Parents ............................. 249
    Lil Boy Blue's Early
    Years in School .................. 251
    Smurf's Early Years in School .... 254
    Juice's Early Years in School .... 257
    Lil Garfield's Early
    Years in School .................. 260

  High School Experience: The
  Trouble Begins .......................... 262
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacies in Lil Boy Blue's, Smurf's, Juice's, and Lil Garfield's Worlds</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Community</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang Community</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Education Community</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Court Community</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural Aspects of Literacy</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Community</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang Community</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Education Community</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Court Community</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang Members' Perceptions of Their Own Literacies</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lil Boy Blue</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smurf</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lil Garfield</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Further Research</td>
<td>384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B</td>
<td>389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Forms of Representation Mediate Meaning 46
Figure 2.2 Tag Produced by Guero ............ 61
Figure 2.3 Throw-up or Bomb Produced by Murder .. 61
Figure 2.4 Piece Produced by Carlos ........... 62
Figure 3.1 Moments in Time ................... 64
Figure 3.2 A Self Portrait of a Gang Banger ...... 80
Figure 4.1 Maps Painted on Classroom walls .. 107
Figure 4.2 A map of the organization of
Chapter Four ................................. 126
Figure 5.1 Four Generations Making Tamales .... 146
Figure 5.2 12 Dozen Tamales Made ............. 147
Figure 5.3 Smurf's (Kindergarten) Writing About His
Favorite Book .............................. 150
Figure 5.4 Lil Garfield's Journal Entry about
His "Nana" ............................... 154
Figure 5.5 Juice's Journal Entry about
His Grandma .............................. 156
Figure 5.6 Lil Garfield's Journal Entry about a
Fight with Family ........................... 163
Figure 5.7 Lil Garfield's Writing about His Mom .. 165
Figure 5.8 While in Rehabilitation, Lil Garfield
Write Letter to Mom .......................... 167
Figure 5.9 Lil Boy Blue writes about
His Daughter .............................. 172
Figure 6.1 Pictures on the Walls around Juice and
Lil Garfield's Home .......................... 189
Figure 6.2 Smurf's Writing about Fifth Grade ... 192
Figure 6.3 Lil Boy Blue Writes about Homies ... 209
Figure 6.4 Lil Garfield's Letter to a Homie
in Jail ..................................... 211
Figure 6.5 Lil Boy Blue's Tag .................... 217
Figure 6.6 Smurf's Tag Written in the Classroom .. 219
Figure 6.7 Lil Garfield's Tag Written in His Journal .................. 220
Figure 6.8 The Rock House ............................................. 223
Figure 6.9 Smurf's Tag with 1 used for the Letter I ...................... 225
Figure 6.10 Lil Boy Blue's Tag Created after the Death of Plucy ............. 229
Figure 6.11 Lil Garfield's Tag about His Grandma ...................... 230
Figure 6.12 Word List Generated in the Classroom ........................ 233
Figure 6.13 Smurf's Rap Written in Gangster Style ...................... 234
Figure 6.14 A Rap Written by Smurf after the Death of a Homie ............. 235
Figure 6.15 Copy of Lil Garfield's Notebook ............................. 236
Figure 6.16 Lil Garfield's Rap ............................................ 237
Figure 6.17 Hand Shake used by Westside Manzanita Gang Members ........... 239
Figure 6.18 Hand Sign for Westside ..................................... 240
Figure 6.19 Hand Sign for Westside Manzanita ............................. 240
Figure 6.20 Hand Sign using Two Hands to Spell "Crip" ..................... 241
Figure 6.21 Hand Sign Showing WC for Westside Crip ..................... 241
Figure 6.22 Hand Sign for BK ............................................. 242
Figure 6.23 Smurf Showing Individual Letters to Spell Manzanita ............. 242
Figure 6.24 A Picture of the Blue Rag with the Hand Sign BK .............. 243
Figure 6.25 Mountain Located in the Manzanita Hood ..................... 245
Figure 7.1 Lil Boy Blue's Third Grade Report Card ........................ 252
Figure 7.2 One of Lil Boy Blue's Awards .................................... 253
Figure 7.3 Smurf's Award .................................................. 254
Figure 7.4 Letter Juice Received from Vice Mayor of Tucson .................. 259
Figure 7.5 A Certificate from Young Author Festival
                      ........................................... 259
Figure 7.6 Lil Garfield's School Assignment
        on Stone Fox  .................................. 261
Figure 7.7 Smurf's Thoughts on School ... 278
Figure 7.8 Lil Boy Blue's Poem on School  .... 298
LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 A Time Line of My Experiences with the Participants ...................... 91
Table 4.2 Juice’s Schedule at Kino .............. 99
Table 4.3 Lil Garfield’s Schedule at Kino ....... 99
Table 4.5 Data Collection Methods ............... 106
Table 4.6 Interview Questions .................... 110
Table 4.7 Overview of Case Study Data Base .... 113
Table 8.1 Literacies in Family Community ........ 322
Table 8.2 Literacies Found in the Gang Community . 324
Table 8.3 Literacies Found in the Formal Education Community ..................... 326
This purpose of this dissertation is to investigate how four Mexican American male adolescents perceive their literacy within and outside of school. Particular attention is given to the literacies found in the family, gang, school, and juvenile court communities.

Initially, the four Mexican American male adolescents who participated in this study were students in my alternative classroom. Later, I officially advocated for them and their families in the educational system. I worked with each participant for four years. Each participant is a member of a gang and has struggled with being successful in school.

The ethnographic case study design of the research, enabled me to examine each participant’s literacy story. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, participant observation and field notes, and the gathering of written and visual artifacts such as school assignments, personal journals, individual tags, personally written raps, and photographs.

Data were organized into “case study data bases” and each participant’s story contributed to a larger discussion
of the individual communities in which the four members participated. The research revealed that all four participants come from rich literacy environments and that the social and political roles of literacy varied within the different communities. These multiple roles controlled the participants' use of literacies to navigate within the educational and juvenile court systems.
CHAPTER ONE

DISCOVERING "AT-RISK" STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SCHOOLING AND LITERACY

Debbie: What is your overall impression of school?

Smurf: [raps his feelings]

Fuck school
never paid attention
tell ya the truth
the only thing I learned was suspension.
(IS 10/97, Smurf, p. 1)

The preceding dialogue is part of an interview I had with Smurf (all names of people and places used in this study are street names or pseudonyms) concerning school. I chose this part of the interview because it illustrates the tension my high school students have when it comes to school. Smurf admits he never paid attention. He is willing to carry the blame. Fine (1996) states that "these [school dropouts] young adults seem all too willing, ultimately to blame themselves for their misfortune [dropping out of school]" (p. xv). Smurf then adds, "[T]ell ya the truth the only thing I learned was suspension." This is the tension. Smurf wants to blame himself but he also feels school only taught him how to get suspended—how to get in trouble.
Smurf's rap provides an insight into how students who have "dropped out" of school feel towards the action taken.

The main focus of this dissertation is to acknowledge the literacy experiences that impact the lives of a group of young Mexican American men who are part of a gang in Tucson, Arizona. My dissertation study focuses on four Mexican American male adolescents who are in a gang and their perceptions of literacy and school. This study explores the adolescents' literacy experiences both within and outside the school. I examine how students perceive themselves as literacy users, why students choose to go back to school over and over again, and how they define school success. In this chapter, I will discuss my background and interests concerning students who struggle to be successful in school. I also provide the purpose of the study, research question, and introduce the study methodology. Finally, I provide a brief overview of each chapter.

"At-Risk Students'" Desire: High School Diploma

For the past thirteen years, I have worked with students who carry the badges or labels given to them at school of "at-risk," "remedial," and/or "slow learner." These students, both male and female, are expected to fail, drop out, and quit. However, I have noticed that they never
really give up on school even though at times the school seems to give up on them. As I listen to the stories of my students, I hear the desire to graduate from high school, to obtain a high school diploma in their voices. One such story is about a student of mine who was nineteen years old and a mother of three young children.

Sandra dropped out of school three different times. In eighth grade, Sandra was pregnant with her first child. A school counselor helped her, and she spent one month homebound (doing her school work at home with a teacher). Despite the problems a young new mother may have, Sandra completed eighth grade and graduated.

As a young mother and a new high school student, she missed a lot of school and her grades dropped. In tenth grade Sandra became pregnant with her second child, and problems with school were magnified. In the eighth month of her pregnancy, she was once again put on homebound school. However, this time things were different. Sandra stated that her teacher would come to her house and drop off her school work and leave. The teacher never stayed and helped her with assignments. The teacher never kept appointments and many times she would just show up unexpectedly. Sandra did eventually return to school; however, she dropped out two
weeks before her sophomore year was complete. The baby was sick and Sandra had no babysitter.

In what should have been her junior year, Sandra got pregnant with her third child. Sandra wasn't put on homebound this time although she requested the alternative home program. Her counselor said that she would check into homebound but nothing happened. Sandra dropped out the first semester, and tried to return the second semester, but she was told it was too late. She was not given any advice or counseling concerning other options. Frustrated, she went home and never came back to school. The next year she returned to school and was scheduled for my reading class.

In a discussion, I asked her if she had ever considered getting her GED. Sandra replied, "That is what everyone tells me I should do. But I want the diploma. This is important to me. I can say I told them because no one thought I could do it." Sandra did eventually graduate at the age of 21 with her high school diploma, May 1995.

Sandra's story of problems with school and wanting to graduate and receiving her diploma instead of a GED is a familiar story. Scott was excited because he had remained in school for the whole school year. He was 16 years old and had never completed a full semester much less a year. He was
going to complete what should have been his junior year and receive some credits. When we talked about a GED or a diploma, like Sandra, he chose the diploma.

Robert, a twenty-one year old working on his high school diploma, also had a similar story to tell. I shared with him my concern for students who have problems with school, and I asked him if I could write down his feelings about school. He continued, "One problem with school is kids don't really know what they need to graduate." He explained that they know they need credits but they don't know what credits or how many they have. This young man was completing his courses to graduate from high school. I asked him why he wanted his diploma. Robert replied, "To say I accomplished something." He was working and supporting a young family, yet for him the diploma demonstrated an accomplishment.

Sandra, Scott, and Robert's stories illustrate that students who have often been thought of as uninterested in school do have a desire to graduate from high school.

Stories like these are the norm not the exception in my experience of fifteen years teaching in "traditional" and alternative high schools. As my students and I worked together, I listened to their stories about being suspended, repeating a grade, or dropping out. I realized they all
wanted to graduate, receive their diploma and that they did value an education. Yet they were unable to navigate the school system—unable to be successful. On one occasion, soon after I started teaching at an alternative high school program, my students talked about their perceptions of school. As a teacher researcher, I took the opportunity to record parts of their stories in my field notes which I then used in an article on my classroom:

- Plucy tells how on the first day of school the vice principal comes up to him and says, "If you are like your brother you might as well go home now."

- Smurf shares how he is constantly called into the office and padded down.

- School officials would take their belts and/or belt buckles, shoes, and shoe strings, anything that "school" associates with gangs.

- The boys had nothing good to say about school. The school tells them they can't wear blue. For these kids it would be a whole new wardrobe—a new way to think. They have no good memories associated with school learning.

  (Smith, 1996, p. 8)

For my students, traditional school is a place where they were harassed—a place that didn't accept them. In the words of one of my students, "School sucks." According to Fine (1986), there is "a group of unspecific size that is literally thrown out of school" (p. 397). In trying to get a young man back into school, I arranged a meeting between the
mother of the young man and a local school official who is
the district official in charge of all alternative
educational programs in a large school district in Tucson.
The school official informed the mother that the system is
designed to "weed" students out and her job was to go back
to her son and tell him he has two choices. He could let the
system win and drop out or he could come back to school and
learn to work in the system, thereby beating the system (FN,
1/97, p. 117). As I listened I wondered if there really were
two choices. Contrary to popular opinion among traditional
education and society as a whole, my students did believe
school was important. One day I asked them to write about
school. This is what they wrote:

» I feel schools are very important. They provide
  education and knowledge.
» School is very important.
» It's very good to have an education.

My students believed in school and wanted to graduate, but
they were unable to fit in at a "traditional" school. They
couldn't make school work for them.

The Pilot Study

In the spring of 1996, I conducted a pilot study
designed to gain a greater understanding of Lil Boy Blue (a
participant in the present study) and his "failure" in
school. I had heard parts of his story in class and in discussions with his parents. I developed an ethnographic case study (Merriam, 1988) to tell the family's story about Lil Boy Blue's perceived school failure. Through in-depth, open-ended interviews (Seidman, 1991) with Lil Boy Blue's parents and participant observation (Spradley, 1980) in the home, I cultivated a better understanding of what working class parents deal with when trying to help their son or daughter stay in school. In my study, I looked at the parents' own educational experiences, perceptions of their son's education, and their involvement with schools and their son's education. I also reported Lil Boy Blue's story related to his high school experience where things started to change for the worse.

Often modern rhetoric claims that kids who are "bad" in school come from dysfunctional and/or families who care little about education and schooling. It is believed that if parents would just do a better job, then teachers wouldn't have such a difficult time teaching. Lil Boy Blue was suspended/expelled from high school his sophomore year. He attended several traditional high schools and alternative programs. Yet as I listened to Lil Boy Blue's parents' story, I discovered they were caring and involved parents.
My observation at family functions revealed a strong, active family structure.

In order to help their son get an education these parents talked with teachers, principals, and four assistant superintendents, and they tried to talk to the school board and the superintendent. In an interview, Felipe, the father, told me his thoughts after the meetings: "Why did I go and tell them how important it was for [my son] to be in school if they were going to follow the policy. It made no difference" (Smith, 1996, p. 5). As I listened to their story, I sensed the frustration of both parents. They wanted the best for their kids. The school worked hard against them, and they didn't know what to do (Smith, 1996, p. 15).

At the end of the study, I had more questions and few answers. I questioned the idea that troubled kids come from dysfunctional families. Lil Boy Blue had a strong caring family. Yet every child in this family had trouble with school. The pilot study fueled my interest in students who struggle in school. There had to be other things going on. The question I found myself asking is WHY? If the students wanted to graduate, why were they dropping out? If they believed school was important, why were they not successful? If they can function successfully in the world outside of
school, why were they unable to function in school? If the parents and family want them to get an education, why were they unable to help their child?

**Research Purpose and Question**

The purpose of this dissertation study is to investigate the stories of four Mexican American male adolescents: Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield. I examined their perceptions of their literacy experiences within and outside of school. I looked at the abundance of literacy which exists in their worlds revealing their understanding and use of language and other symbol systems. After examining the types of literacies used within the participants' worlds and how they perceive their worlds, I then examined their views of school and the role it plays in their worlds.

The young men who are participants in this study range from a freshman starting his high school to a high school graduate. In Chapter Three, I will give a complete description of each young man. They have all dropped out of school at least once and/or have attended several high schools and/or alternative programs. As I sat and listened to their stories about their school experiences and about their lives outside of school, I discovered that dropping
out seem to be their only option. Their stories are all unique yet similar. It is these stories that pushed me to question what was happening to them in traditional schools and to question the one-dimensional perspective associated with them.

The following question guides this research:

How do Mexican American male adolescents who are in gangs perceive their literacy experiences within and outside of school?

Research Design

This is an ethnographic case study (Merriam, 1988). My primary data collection method was participant observation. I have known my participants and their families for 3 years. During this time I have been invited to their homes for family parties or just casual visits. I drew from field notes written first from the perspective of a non-participant to field notes taken as a participant observer who was involved in my students' worlds. Because it was important for me to include my participants' voices in the study, I decided to use in-depth, open-ended phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 1991). I collected artifacts (writings, drawings, and pictures) from family, school, courts, and the gang. Through data analysis, I constructed individual case study profiles. I then compared
each case study looking for similarities and differences and wrote a cross-case analysis. A full description of my data collection and analysis is discussed in Chapter Three.

Importance of the Study

In my thirteen years as a classroom teacher, I watched students start the year out determined to be successful and to pass all classes. Within a short time the excitement would leave and so would the students. They quit, dropped out, were suspended, and/or were expelled. They left school. I then would see these same students back in school the next semester or the next year, excited, ready to work hard and pass classes to be successful. And like before, they dropped out, quit, were suspended, and/or were expelled. Before educators can solve the problem of students leaving school, we need to be able to acknowledge the problem. Too often when there are attempts to acknowledge, discover, and solve the problem of kids leaving school, we don't take time to hear the voices of the students who are leaving school. These voices go unheard and are rapidly dismissed as statistics rather than as individuals with compelling stories that have something to inform teachers and researchers.

Using the case study format, I have built the
participants' stories using their words and voices—voices that can provide teachers, preservice teachers, college educators, and people who are in charge of program design for adolescents with a new lens through which to see students who are usually "weeded out" of the school system. This study will help teachers, preservice teachers, college educators, and people who are in charge of program design for adolescents by helping them understand the importance of knowing their students and not to prejudge them. By knowing our students, we can design policies that will help them and not "weed" them out. This study will dispel the myths associated with kids in gangs.

This study provides a view of the literacy found in the lives of students who leave school. It also show how school has influenced students perception of themselves as literacy learners.

A Guide to the Multiple Worlds

This research study is guided by the following question: How do American Mexican male adolescents who are in gangs perceive their literacy experiences within and outside of school? In this chapter, I provided a brief history of my developing interest in students who struggle to be successful in school. I discussed my concerns about
their gang activities and their literacy. I provided a brief statement of the purpose of the study, my research question and methodology. In Chapter Two, I include information which guides this study theoretically in the following areas: 1) adolescence and the culture of youth, 2) multiple worlds and crossing borders, 3) forms of representation: meaning making systems, and 4) gangs: a choice for some adolescents.

Chapter Three is a description of the background that stimulated this study and a description the four participants: Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice and Lil Garfield. I also describe my relationship with the participants and their families. In Chapter Four, I discuss how the study began and its evolution into a formal research project. I include a complete description of the research methodology, including an overview of the various data I collected and of the different research sites. I also review and describe the process I used in data analysis.

In Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, I provide a rich thick description of each participant's literacy found in the family community, formal education community, gang community, and briefly the juvenile courts community. Finally, Chapter Eight provides the findings of the
research. I offer my conclusions and a discussion of important implications that emerge from this study.
CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

ADOLESCENCE, GANGS, AND MULTIPLE LITERACIES

My review of the literature establishes a theoretical foundation for this research study. During my preliminary readings, I became aware of the diversity of the ages of the participants found in the literature on adolescents. In my own observation, I had noticed that my participants were members of several communities: family, gang, school, courts, work, and that they had to make meaning in all these communities. I knew I needed a clearer understanding of who can be classified as adolescent, how they deal with the multiple communities of which they are members, and how they make sense of their different experiences in each of these communities. For this reason I decided to focus my readings in the following areas:

1) Adolescence and the Culture of Youth.
2) Multiple Worlds and Crossing Borders.
Adolescence and the Culture of Youth

I felt it was important for me to gain a clearer picture of adolescents. As I searched for a definition of adolescence, I discovered that there is no clear definition. Adolescence is often associated with age, puberty and cultural concepts. Muuss (1996) states:

The period of adolescence specifically referred to as social adolescence, constitutes a universal or near universal stage in the human cycle. . . infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. (p. 378)

Wulff (1996) adds, "The experience of being young is universal, but it may take different forms, partly cultural and political, partly personal" (p.6). The movement into "youthhood" varies in different societies. Some societies recognize the movement from childhood by such rituals as a "rite of passage, puberty rites or initiation ceremony" (Muuss, 1996, p. 376) In some communities there is no mark of a child leaving childhood other then age or a "change in obligation, responsibility, work tasks, display of attractiveness, marriageability, and new social roles" (Muuss, 1996, p. 378). Bernstein (1965) states, "The successful movement from adolescent to adulthood is complex and uneven in our society" (p. 22). This "complex" movement to adulthood can, at times, result in the rebelliousness associated with teenagers.
In my own classes, I have watched adolescent students act and think like children, yet I have also watched the same adolescents work through and deal with problems as adults. It is a complex time. An adolescent no longer wants to be the "little kid" with his world centered around home; at the same time he is not capable or willing to move into the adult world. Adolescents seem to move back and forth between the world of a child and the concerns of the adult world. They struggle to discover and understand who they are and where they fit into the adult world. They struggle to leave the security of childhood and move out into a larger social surrounding--the adult world, which is an "emotional dedication in establishing his own social identity which far transcends that of any other time in his life" (Eckert, 1989, p. 206).

Many people see adolescence as "a prolonged transitional period between childhood and adulthood that prepares the young person for occupation, marriage, and mature social roles" or as a "transitional or marginal period squeezed between childhood and adulthood" (Muuss, 1996, p. 366). However, anthropologists are now acknowledging adolescence as a "period in its own right with its own significance and meaning . . ." (Muuss, 1996, p.
35

Wulff (1995) states that, "Young people are active agents—in different ways and with varying force—in the construction of the meaning and symbolic forms which make up their cultures" (p. 1). The acknowledgment of youth culture and that youth are agents/producers of their culture and not in transition or waiting to become adults is new. Often youth are seen as receivers or reproducers of the adult culture (Wulff, 1995). One reason to maintain the view of youth as receivers of the adult culture is to help maintain the dominant culture. This is accomplished by referring to other cultures (such as the youth culture) which are located within the same community as sub-cultures or to view them only as a period in time (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, Roberts, 1976). As a result, adolescents are often silenced. The adult researcher tends to interpret the adolescent "stage" in the adult language and from the point of view of the adult world. Wulff (1995) claims:

Much of the writing on youth in terms of socialization, education, or human development depicts youth as objects of adult activity. It is often more concern with the institutional system in which youth are implicated than with youth culture. . . . (p. 1)

However, adolescents are active members in forming, producing, and transmitting their culture among themselves. They transmit and develop their culture through their
language, dress, music, and art, which at times appears to be different than the adult world that surrounds them. James and Prout, (1990) state, youth are "active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live" (p. 8). Wolff (1995) states, "Youth culture is what young people are concerned with and there is more cultural agency in it than most earlier studies have acknowledged" (p. 15). In the youth culture the "peer group becomes central to socialization in adolescence" (Schleget & Barry, 1991, p. 9). According to Muuss (1995) "the peer group may also function to lighten the burden of some work responsibilities" (p. 368). Their everyday lived experiences help in the construction of their social lives and take place with their peers and often right under the eyes of the adults who play a role (e.g., teacher, parent, employer) in their world.

Unlike the present study, some researchers view culture as fixed or static. For example, Coombe (1991) states that "cultures become defined by their internal homogeneity and the characteristics that distinguish them from other cultural wholes" (p.113). Jacob and Jordon (1993) quote Keesing and Keesing (1971) who state that "culture refers to
all that humans learn in contrast to what is genetically endowed" (p. 15). While discussing culture, more specifically youth culture, it is important to note that I do not look at culture as fixed or a set of discernible surface markers that assume a standard or as "a clearly defined culture 'out there' that may not take into account the everyday lived experience of students' lives" (Gonzalez, 1995, p. 233). Instead I choose to look at the everyday lived experiences.

Adolescents' "everyday lives" are the experiences and activities which take place at school, home, sports, work places, churches and with peers, families and members in their community. In trying to identify youth culture, we need to stay clear of associating culture with a specific community or a specific society. Amit-Talai (1995) referring to Ward Goodenough's argument states, "Culture is more usefully located in activities rather than communities, in the expectations people have of interaction and the standards of evaluation operating within a particular situation" (p. 226). Youth is not located in a community in and of itself. Amit-Tala (1995) points out that "youth clearly operate within a wider social network which includes relationships with people of widely varying ages and
statuses" (p.224). Teenagers can center their lives in the world of their family one minute and quickly move into the world of work and function successfully in the next.

During a classroom discussion, I realized that my students struggle to identify and talk about their culture. I asked them to tell me what comes to mind when I say the word “culture.” Their response was race, lifestyle, people, history, beliefs, morals, heritage, dress. I then asked them if they have or belong to different cultures? This question was harder for them to respond to but they mentioned race, family, and adolescence. They perceive their lives differently than their family. We moved on to discuss the lifestyle of teenagers. Their response was “partying, gangbanging, friends, what you eat, dress-blue, baggy, loose pants” (FN 9/96 p. 59). Amit-Talai writes:

Youth culture production occurs at home, at school, at work, at play, on the street, with friends, teachers, parents, siblings, and bosses, draws elements from home-grown as well as transnational influence, and intertwines with class, gender, ethnicity and locality with all the cultural diversity that multiplicity of circumstances compels. (Amit-Talai, 1995, p.231)

This may be one reason why my students struggle to identify their culture. Youth culture occurs in many activities and experiences in many places with many different people. Amit-Talai (1995) proposes “that youths may have an especially
acute awareness of the contingent character of any cultural experience" (p. 232). As I observed my participants, I noticed that their activities, experiences and the people they associated with were connected to specific communities such as the family, the gang, the courts, the schooling system, and the workplace. I was aware the each participant had to cross into these communities everyday. They were crossing borders or boundaries into different worlds.

**Multiple Worlds and Border Crossing**

As I worked with and interviewed my informants, I became more aware of the multiple worlds and roles in which an adolescent participates. A teenager’s life is full of many experiences which take place in many locations. In Boykin’s (1986; Boykin & Toms, 1985) research with African American children, he examines the interplay among three different types of experiences: mainstream experience, minority experience and Black experience. Each domain of experience contains it own distinctive socialization agenda. According to Boykin the experiences take place in different worlds. In Phelan, Davidson, and Yu’s (1991) study of students’ multiple worlds, they uses the term “world” to mean “cultural knowledge and behavior found within the boundaries” of each world. Each world “contains values and
beliefs, expectations, actions, and emotional responses familiar to insiders" (Phelan et al, 1991, p. 225). In my own study, I have become aware of the multiple worlds (family, gang, formal education, and juvenile courts) in which my students successfully or unsuccessfully participate. They must navigate the boundaries/borders of each world. Phalen and colleagues state the terms "boundaries and borders refer to real or perceived lines or barriers between worlds" (p. 225). Borders function to inform people of the roles and requirements necessary to actively participate in that world. Borders may be neutral or they may be stressful and abstract serving more as barriers allowing only certain people access to the world and keeping other people out.

In order to be successful in the different worlds, one needs to have the knowledge necessary to participate within that world. My participants could participate successfully in some of the worlds they entered but not in others. This may be because they did not have access to the knowledge needed to be active participants. For example, in the Family Community my participants were active participants where as in the Formal Educational Community they were not always successful. Chapter four will more fully explicate these
different worlds.

Social Capital and Social Networking

There are several reasons why my participants didn’t have the knowledge or resources to successfully navigate borders or become full participants within the border. One reason may be the lack of knowledge and experiences needed to successfully move within the borders. Each of us have what Bourdieu (1977) refers to as cultural capital, which is the background knowledge, disposition and skills which are passed from one generation to the next. The knowledge and experience of the group of individuals becomes collective knowledge which is transmitted and available to members of that group. Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) investigate the knowledge and the social networks found in the homes and use the phrase “funds of knowledge” which refers to the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential to household and individual functioning and well being” (p. 133). In other words, one may not have the funds of knowledge needed to transverse a border or different boundaries. Coleman’s (1987) research illustrates that a family background is made up of three different components: financial capital, human capital and social capital.
According to Coleman (1988), "Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities" (p. 598) Social capital is productive and provides resources for the person. Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch (1995) define social capital as:

Social relationships from which an individual is potentially able to derive institutional support, particularly support that includes the delivery of knowledge-based resources. . . .(p. 119)

Social capital exists within the family but also outside the family in the community. Social capital is the resource to build social networks which brings the ability to cultivate valued resources.

In order to maintain social capital two important factors need to exist: "1) [Social networks] all consist of some aspect of social structures and 2) they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure" (Coleman, 1988, p. 598). The characteristics found in social networks which make them productive are the obligations, expectations and trustworthiness found within the network (Coleman 1988). Networks are built on the trustworthiness of the people or social institutes which exist. To build social capital and social network there needs to be confidentiality—trust
(Aguilar, p. 17). This trust maintains the relationship that as I help you, you will help me.

Not all people have the same social capital and/or cultural capital to draw on when needed. Therefore, they may not have or be able to network. Individuals within the social networking who have a high level of commitment also have a greater social capital to draw from. Coleman (1988) believes, "Social capital lies in the fact that it identifies certain aspects of social structure [networking] by their functions... and value to the actors as resources that can be used to achieve their interest" (p.101). Through social networking, social capital is turned into human capital.

A child growing up in a community gains access to the cultural capital and social capital which is available to all members of the community. Stanton-Salazar (1997) states that "The accumulation and conversion of social capital appears as a routine aspect of daily life" (p. 8). He continue to state that:

Children are seldom raised exclusively within the confines of their nuclear families; rather, they are raised embedded in social networks, which extend out into various social worlds where a wide variety of socialization actors and spheres are found (p. 7).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) claim that the different social
classes have different types of cultural and social capital and that many students' failure in school is the result of the students' inability to network or the denial to network within the institution.

In the United States, schools represent the dominant culture. The minority and/or youth culture is often in conflict with the dominant culture. Adolescents spend at least seven hours a day in school. During these school hours, a teenager deals with his peers and adults in multiple settings and for various reasons. In many cases, the adolescent has little control over the setting and reason for the dealings. As he struggles to make sense of this new environment, he either figures out how to work within the school setting or he may eventually leave or drop out of school.

Coming from a culture which is not considered the dominant culture can result in problems associated with school and learning. If the students' culture is in conflict with the culture of school, the students may find themselves struggling in school and often pushed to the outer edges of the school system (Fine, 1989). Trueba (1989) suggests, "Culture has a critical role in the acquisition of knowledge and motivation to achieve, both socially and personally" (p.
37). Jacob and Jordon (1989) argue that "The differences between majority and minority cultures in interaction, linguistic, and cognitive styles can lead to conflict between school and child that interferes with effective education" (p. 8).

Society is divided between those who have and those who have not. School is no exception. A student in school can either experience success or failure. McDermott (1989) claims "by virtue of our participation that half of us do well and half of us fail--half above grade level and half below--at every stage in school" (p. 19). In other words in order to have winners we need to have losers. Smith, Gilmore, Goldman, and McDermott (1993) claim that, "[S]chool failure is inevitable in a educational system in which everyone is encouraged to do better than their neighbor" (p. 209). They continue, "School failure has become the mainstay of American culture, and that most of our efforts to deal with it--both our explanation and our attempts to confront it in the classroom--are subverted into promoting the proliferation of failure" (p. 210). Failure is a part of our school culture.

School is a world in which many adolescents' struggle to gain access. There are many reasons associated with the
success or failure of school: when students' funds of knowledge are not acknowledged, their ability to network is not able to function, and they are unable to form the network needed to be successful. Even if they desire to be successful like many of my students, they seem never to reach that goal. Another resource that is part of one's "funds of knowledge" is literacy. Each community will establish its own uses and types of literacy. To participate within any community it is important to gain access to the literacy of that community.

Forms of Representation: Meaning Making Systems

Within each community, there are experiences and activities and ways to make sense of the experiences. During the month of October in my second semester (1995) of teaching at the alternative high school program, a former student of mine and a homie (friend in the gang) to my students was shot and killed in a drive-by shooting. Each one of my students was dealing with emotions and feelings that many adults have never experienced. My students and I struggled to make sense of this experience. I watched my students draw a mural as a tribute to their lost friend and make a small shrine which included death masks and letters saying good-bye to a lost friend. I observed kids drawing
and tagging. They sat and talked—retelling their private memories with friends. They all struggled to find their way to make sense of the loss of a close friend (Field notes (FN), 10/95, p. 22).

In order to make sense of these experiences, my students and I had to find a way to represent the experience and then be able to share with each other. Eisner (1994) states that the means by which the students choose to move from private to public is referred to as "forms of representation devices that humans use to make public conceptions which are privately held" (p. 39). He continues and states that the form of representation can be visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, gustatory, or olfactory" (p. 45).

In order to understand the experience my students and I had, we needed to find a way to represent our experience. James Britton (1968) says, "We act on the real world by means of a representation" and that we "construct" this representation (p. 14). Life is made up of experiences. Making meaning of those experiences is what makes us human. Each individual's representation of the real world is different "because experience uses [us] differently" and we can choose different ways of representing what happens to
Britton (1986) states the ways we choose to represent our experiences differ because they reflect our inner self, our feelings and so on. The forms we choose to represent our experience are the tools we use to mediate our experience/interaction with the world. Vygotsky (1978) states, “The use of signs and tools share some important properties; both involve mediated activity . . . signs are internally oriented . . . tools are externally oriented” (p. 127). As we experience and interact with the world, we need to mediate the activity. Figure 2.1 illustrates how forms of representation mediate the experience when we interact with the world and engage in meaning making.

**Figure 2.1.** Forms of Representation Mediate Meaning.

Eisner (1994) states:
The ability to secure meaning in the course of our experience is a basic human need; we all want to lead meaningful lives. But meaning is not simply found; it is constructed. In a sense the ability to encode and decode the meanings constructed from different forms of representation requires a form of literacy. . . . Literacy as I use the term is the ability to encode or decode meaning in any of the forms of representation used in the culture to convey or express meaning (p. x).

Literacy is a term which is defined in many ways. For Eisner, literacy is the ability to encode and decode meaning with all forms of representation. However, many others use literacy to imply an interaction with print. Brown (1991) gives a list of many literacies of today's world, "[C]ultural literacy, civic literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, scientific literacy and technological literacy to name a few" (p. 141). He continues saying:

All these literacies entail various capacities to think and solve problems. . . . The new literacies, then, go far beyond basic decoding and encoding, even beyond basic factual knowledge to encompass how different people know what they know, communicate, think, and attack problems. . . . (p. 142)

In her work with fourth grade children, Voss (1996) states that she came to see literacies "as meaning-making systems which could be used in varied ways: functionally, communicatively, reflectively, flexibly, and pleasurably" (p. 14). Because of the multiple functions of literacy, Taylor (1994) claims that every individual has his or her
own "literacy configuration" which is as unique as one's fingerprints. Schwartz and Merten (1967) write that the world is different for people of different ages and generations. People's use of "meaning making systems" will vary depending on their need and view of the world.

At this time, I turn my interest to language and how it functions as a form of representation, not because I believe it is more important than other forms but because I consider it as a form used by adolescents. Britton (1993) claims that language is a "key way" to represent our experiences (p. 14). Halliday (1975) states, "It is commonplace that the child's [adolescent's] construction of reality [world view] is achieved largely through the medium of language" (p. 120). Vygotsky goes as far as to say, "[T]he most important behavior in children’s development is human speech [language]. Through speech children prepare themselves for future activity, they plan, order, and control their own behavior as well as that of others" (p. 126).

Ken Goodman (1996) writes "Language is a human personal-social invention" (p.12). We, as individuals and as members of a community, invented language because we are capable of symbolic thought (K. Goodman, 1996; Halliday, 1975). Language is more than a way to communicate ideas. To
see language "solely as the means by which information is shunted from one person to another" and to see "language as synonymous with communication and communication as the transmission of information is wholly inappropriate and misleading" (Smith, 1988, p.195). Language is used to represent the experiences we have as we interact with the world. As we learn language we accumulate the life view, the cultural perspective, the way of meaning distinct to our own culture (Goodman, 1986). Language provides us with the ability to structure, give meaning to our lives to pass on cultural knowledge. We use language to structure experience, to give shape to experience. Language structures our experience by providing the shape that may already exist and at the same time allowing for the shape we, the language users, give to the experience. Language makes it possible to structure the situation while we act in the situation and language makes it possible to go back over it (Britton, 1985). Language takes place in a social context. Many factors--cultural values, beliefs, social institutions, forms, personalities, histories, ecology of community--play a role in the construction of meaning (Hymes, 1974). Meaning is what we individually and socially create. We are born into a social environment and are dependent on each other.
As a result language is used for both personal and social needs. For language to work socially, its features become a social convention in the environment of the shared social meaning (Goodman, 1996).

Anders and Pritchard (1993) state, "In the struggle to establish identity, adolescents create inventive linguistic forms different from those used by adults and children" (p. 615). One thing that identifies a teenager is his or her ability to play with and change language. As adolescents grow and start to move outside the immediate family group, their world begins to change. The language of their childhood belongs to the world established by their parents (Britton, 1993). Romaine (1984) claims adolescence is a time when teenagers move away from the influence of the family language to the influence of their peer group language. Teens will change their language to match the group they want to be identified with (Eckert, 1989; LePage, 1968). The vocabulary of a language will reflect/perpetuate habitual distinctive ways of categorizing experience or modes of thought. Through linguistic devices teens keep their world separated and hidden from the adult world (Schwartz & Marten, 1967). The language used by teens accomplishes two things: first, it helps form one's identity with a group;
second, the language structures the multiple worlds of the adolescent.

Whether it is private or public, meaning making takes place in a social setting. Street's (1995) research shows how literacy is not a skill separated from the social setting in which it exists. He states, "Literacy itself, moreover, varies with social context" (p. 23). For example, a young man tagging the backdrop for the graduation ceremony is publicly praised. This same student during the school year sits in the vice principal's office waiting to be suspended for tagging on his notebook. The social setting dictates the acceptability of the literacy. A pamphlet from the gang task force using the graffiti style of writing to catch the public's attention is seen as acceptable. Yet the same tag done on a wall by a young man at night results in his being arrested by the task force. Once again the social setting dictates whether the literacy is accepted. But in all cases the form used to help make meaning is literacy.

Eisner's (1994) research informs us that we need to develop the ability to construct meaning through many forms of representation. "These forms are not less important in the fine arts than they are in the sciences: they are no less important in mathematics than they are in the
humanities" (p. x). For my students and for me, the death of a fellow student, their homie, created a need to share our experiences. The social setting, a shared classroom community, allowed us to explore multiple "forms of representations" to make sense of our experience. A drive-by is associated with gangs. My students chose to represent their private experiences with tagging, writing a rap, and drawing. They also chose to talk and share stories. And many students chose simply to talk with each other.

Gangs: A Choice Made by Some Adolescents

For many teachers and parents, the word "gang" conjures up the picture of a bunch of young male juvenile delinquents driving by firing guns at a kid who is wearing the wrong color or walking through the wrong neighborhood. Some people may picture these same young males with spray paint cans destroying the walls and buildings with graffiti. These pictures come from information sent out through such groups as Crime Prevention League or the local gang task force located in the police forces. Information such as "Characteristics in gang behavior can range from a poor general attitude to clear-cut personality disorder that can at times parallel the criminal mind" (Crime Prevent League, 1998) reinforces the negative perception of the youth who
join gangs. In the California Penal Code Section 186.22[f], the gang's primary function is the "commission of criminal acts" and its members are "any person who actively participates in any gang with knowledge that its members engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity." The handbook *Gangs Draw the Line* (n.d.), a resource guide for parents and teachers compiled by R. Brock, defines gangs as "juvenile and young adults associating together for serious especially violent criminal behavior with special concern for turf." This type of information promotes stereotypes that affect all students.

The media plays a big role in the formation of societies' perception of gangs. Often the criminal event is reported as a gang-related crime by the news. By reporting it as a social event and not related to a specific individual, the news reporter doesn't jeopardize the investigation of a criminal act. But it is never clear if the individual is in a gang or if the criminal act was committed by a group of people (Jankowski, 1991). Documentaries of gangs are filmed and advertised as a way to better understand the gang phenomenon in society. But what needs to be understood is these documentaries are only "snapshot or glimpses of gang life" (Jankowski, 1991, p. 281).
The public seems to accept this information as fact and never takes the time to question its source or reliability. The relationship between the media and gang membership is limited, because there is not enough time to develop trust between the members in the gang and reporters. Often media reporting becomes a tool for the gang in promoting their gang as number one in the community (Jankowski, 1991). In the following paragraphs, I provide the reader with an additional view of gangs. I briefly address the history of gangs, the organizational structure of gangs, which adolescents may join gangs and why, and the literacy found in gangs.

The History

According to Vigil (1988), gangs have been a part of U.S. society since the 19th century. However, the frequent reporting of gang-related activity has placed them in a different light in the 20th century. Mexican American "boy" gangs surfaced in 1920 with a large scale migration to the urban areas. The change from boy gangs in the 1940s and 1950s to gang kids of 1990s result from the "externally imposed barriers and obstacles namely, working and living conditions, had taken their toll to affect a large number of second generation Mexican American youth" (Vigil 1988, p.
As a result of these conditions, gang culture has persisted over several generations. Some Mexican American youth see gangs as a way of coping with the street pressures and realities. Today Mexican American youth join gangs that are part of a barrio or gangs (Crips and Bloods) whose history is located in the African American culture. African American gangs became an issue in the late 1950s. Because of the political changes in the late 1970s and the withdrawal of many economic and social programs, the gang population reached alarming proportions in the 1980's (Vigil, 1993). Often the barrio gangs feel that Mexican Americans who join gangs associated with African American youth are traitors to their Mexican American heritage. These gangs become rivals.

**Organization**

In his ten year study of gangs, Jankowski (1991) discovered three main organizational structures found in gangs. He discusses the following information about each model: formal leadership categories assigned with different degrees of authority, definition of roles and duties for leadership rank, and file and codes that each collective creates and enforces in an effort to engineer order. Jankowski (1991) places the gang's formal structure within three models of leadership. The first is a "vertical
hierarchical" model. In this organization you can find a president, vice president, warlord and treasurer. Each office has specific duties and responsibilities. A second model of organization is "horizontal commission." In this model there are different officers but no hierarchical order. This is the model that best represents the organization of my participants' gang. The third model of leadership, Jankowski (1991) has labeled "influential." In this type of organization there is an understanding among gang members who is the leader—who is in charge. Within each organization there are three different ways to recruit new members. Fraternity type recruitment involves making the organization seem hip or cool to join. The obligation type of recruitment informs the youth that it is their duty to join the gang and if they choose not to join they are turning their back on their community. Coercive recruitment uses physical and psychological intimidation to bring in new members. In all three recruitment styles, it is considered important to bring in only new members that have the ability to fight and who are courageous and committed to the gang. It is important for all gang members to know their "back" will be covered by all gang members. The initiation of new members involves beating up the new member by older members.
Padilla (1993) refers to this as "one of the most horrifying rituals making up the culture of the youth gang" (p. 56). However, this type of initiation is designed to make sure they new members can fight and will be able to "back up" the gang.

Who Joins?

Gang members are often perceived as coming from the lowest of the lower economic class and that they have no initiative. Jankowski (1991) points out that there are many types of kids who join gangs. Many of them are quite intelligent and capable of developing and executing creative enterprises. People who join gangs do so for many reasons. It is a decision that is well thought out and seems right at the time. The decision to join a gang is a rational one. If there are not benefits then there is no reason to join. The popular press often suggests that kids join gangs because they come from broken homes, lack a father figure, or have a desire for fun and intimidation. Jankowski (1991) states there are several reasons for joining a gang such as recreation and social events, physical protection, a way to get away from family traditions, a chance for money, the protection of a group identity and commitment to community. To simply stereotype the people in gangs or to generalize
the reason for joining a gang is to fail to acknowledge the individual and his or her story and the complexity of gang formation.

Forms of Representation in Gangs

A specific form of literacy associated with gangs is graffiti or what my participants call tagging. Brewer & Miller (1990) has developed three categories of what he refers to as "hip hop graffiti." The first category is referred to as a tag (see Figure 2.2), which is the simplest and most elemental form and the most prevalent. They are stylized signatures written in markers, spray paint, grease pencil, paint sticks, or shoe polish. They represent the writer's chosen self-fashioned street name. A second category is throw-up or bomb (Figure 2.3) as my students call them. They contain the writers name formed in bubble, block or similarity expansive styles. The third category is called a piece (Figure 2.4). This graffiti is a multicolored mural depicting a word or words (frequently the writer's name) and often includes backgrounds, designs, characters, the writer's tag, messages, or comments.
Figure 2.2. Tag Produced by Guero.

Figure 2.3. Throw-up or Bomb produced by Murder.
Other forms of representation found in the gang community include style of cloths, color of cloths, hand signs, and oral language.
CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCHER AND PARTICIPANTS:

WHO WE ARE?

These kids for whatever the reason can't or will not attend the "traditional" school. So we have an alternative school—What does "alternative" mean? What comes to your head? This school isn't an alternative. It is a warehouse for kids that are not wanted in the "real" school. My heart is heavy, because of how the kids are treated. They are being abused with worksheets and false hope. (Field notes, 2/9/95, p. 3).

I wrote the paragraph above one week after I started working as a teacher in an alternative high school program. This was the beginning of a long journey with many new experiences and relationships with students. In this chapter I share my personal history that led me to this class of students. I provide a brief description of the students who are part of this study, and I discuss our relationship. A timeline that includes the highlights of our relationship can be found in figure 3.1.

One Role: Teaching and Advocating

My teaching career started in a small public high school in Texas. The first year I taught freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior English classes. After my
Figure 3.1. Moments in Time
first year, my principal asked me if I would like to start a remedial English program. I was excited to take this opportunity to work with students who carried the same label that I did in high school, students to whom I felt I could relate.

When I was a student in high school, I was placed in what I now believe was a remedial reading class. At the time, I knew it was a different type of class, but I didn't care. I was actually glad to be assigned to this class because it was easy and fun. I never believed I was a slow, poor, or non-reader. Being a reader was a choice for me. I didn't feel a need for reading at that time. Although labels such as "learning disabled" or "dyslexic" were not mine in high school, for me the labels came in college where I was diagnosed with a "reading problem" (Smith, 1996). Because I then had a reading problem, I no longer believed that I chose not to read. I had to admit I was "dumb" and I didn't know how to read because I had a label. All through high school, I struggled to be successful. I felt like there were rules that made school work, but somehow I didn't know the rules. I was losing at school and I didn't know how to win; I became a survivor of school not a winner.
Having the opportunity to work with other kids who were labeled and put into a remedial classes was what I dreamed of doing. I said "yes" to the principal in Texas and started a remedial English program for struggling students. In this program, I met students who really wanted to be successful in school, yet were not. As I struggled to develop a program, I realized how much I didn't know about this field so I decided to go back to school for advanced graduate work.

**Working with "At-Risk" Students in Arizona**

I decided to enrolled in a master’s program at Arizona State University (ASU), where I became aware of language and its function in a person's life. I also learned about the concept of kidwatching, "learning about children by watching how they learn" (Y. Goodman, 1985, p. 220). While at ASU. I took a job teaching and for the next nine years, I worked with students in Arizona who were labeled "at-risk," "remedial," and "slow learners" in our public school system. I have always paid attention to my students but as a kidwatcher I began to ask questions of them. Observation became a part of my teaching. As we worked together, I listened to their stories concerning school. All the stories consisted of being suspended, repeating a year, or dropping
out to return and try again. I started to ask my own questions: Why were these students not successful when they wanted to go to school and valued education? Why were they unable to navigate the "school system?" Why were they always starting over? Why didn't they feel a part of the school environment? Why were the students not successful in the eyes of school personnel? Why was the high school diploma so important that many students were willing to go back to an environment where they were mistreated, where school was more of a negative experience than a positive one? I watched many students start the semester off excited and ready to learn, but as the weeks passed, the excitement was lost and the students' names would appear on the drop list. I discovered behavior that seemed to be inconsistent. What seemed to be problems stemming from the student were actually generated from the educational system. In search of answers, I decided to go back to school once again.

I came to the University of Arizona doctoral program with these concerns. While attending the university, I got a job teaching at Nuestra Casa, an alternative high school program where most of the students were affiliated with gangs. I use the word "program" because it wasn't a school. We were located in an office building within the community.
In this alternative program, I taught students who followed a familiar cycle: dropping out of traditional high school, registering in an alternative program, dropping out of the alternative programs, re-entering the traditional school to drop out, and, in some cases, registering for a new alternative program. I met ninth grade students who started their school experiences in a traditional high school only to quit or who were dropped within four weeks.

I was excited when I started my new job, but I quickly learned that this teaching experience was going to be different. The strategies and methods I used to teach with in the past were not going to work. In an article where I reflected on my teaching I wrote:

On the first day of class I brought in several books and informed my students that we would have a reading time everyday. I was anticipating resistance, but what I encountered was something more. They had no desire to even handle books. (Smith, 1996, p. 20)

I wanted to believe the problem was that my new students were not interested in the books I had picked, so I brought to class books and magazines on topics about which I had heard them talk. Believing this would solve the problems I set the books out for browsing. On February 9, 1995, I recorded the following as I observed my students:

I placed books out in front of my students. They handled every book. It was like the books were strange
objects, something they had never handled. Getting them to read was another strange event. They would read a little then turn the pages and read some more. Some never read—they just handled the books and magazines. (Smith, 1996, p. 20)

I soon learned I would have to celebrate what I saw taking place in my classroom such as just coming to class. I recorded in my journal:

I think right now trying to get the kids to come to school and in active learning--dialogue--inquire--discovery--would be nice but a realistic goal is to get the kids to come! To realize they are valued as a learner. That they are learners!(FN, 2/12/95, p. 4)

I found myself gaining comfort in Salvage’s (1993) article, “Risk taking bit by bit.” Salvage states that as a teacher it is important to remember the little victories and to celebrate them, for the celebration of little steps make it easier to continue moving forward. On February 25, two weeks after meeting my students, I wrote, "I am learning how valuable the little steps are. It is the small things that keep me going." Even though not all of the students were reading, they were at school and were buying into a quiet time to read if they wanted and if they chose not to they didn’t disrupt anyone else. I started seeing my students reading comic books, magazines, articles, and books.

I'm excited the class is learning and exploring. Today during reading time they sat quietly for twenty minutes. Not everyone read but they either were reading or drawing. (FN 2/17/95 p. 6)
However, we were not out of the woods. I was continually reinventing school and school work with my students. One day I brought in poems from Barrio Warrior: Homebody of Peace by Gus Frias (1982). One student read the poems aloud to the other students. However, I wasn't getting any response so I decided to ask questions. I recorded their reactions in my journal:

"Miss, we don't like things that tells us gangs are bad. People are always saying things like that." I asked them if they felt this poem was saying that. "Yes" You know the fact is they are in gangs. It is their way of life. Do I have a right to point out all the negative? (FN 2/25/95, p. 13)

I learned a lesson on that day: I must first view and respect my students for who they are and not for what I think they should be. I decided I wouldn't use poems, articles, or my own questions and statements that dealt with the negativity of gangs, urging them to "say no" to gangs. I was consistently negotiating with and learning from my students. My teaching was changing. We discussed history after watching the movie "Forrest Gump." We examined the role of gangs in the movies they liked. We went to movies, parks and museums. They taught me about tagging and what life in a gang was like. They shared what it was like being them in "school." I realized and "believed the behavior my students exhibited--their resistance to reading and
responding--was actually a reaction to their negative conceptions of school and school learning" (Smith, 1996, p.22). In order to be successful I knew I had to make my lessons seem less like conventional "school" to them.

My students were a ready-made community. They grew up together in the same neighborhood. I was an outsider--a stranger to their community. In their own words they are "down" (with support, help) for each other, meaning they have proven worthy of each other's loyalty. I, too, had to earn their loyalty. On one occasion, we were talking about loyalty. They were teaching me about gangs and how they look out for each other. I tried to explain to them that I was there for them, too. One student said, "Do you want us to jump you in [initiation for membership in the gang]?” (FN 3/12/95, p. 5) We all laughed. Finally, we achieved a mutual sense of loyalty and respect for each other.

Moving toward Advocacy

After two years in my classroom, my students were informed that they would not be able to attend the alternative program during 1996-97 because the district policy states that students may only attend an alternative community-based program for two years. They had to return to traditional high school. They were both excited and
scared. Their biggest fear became, "What if we mess up?"
"What if . . . ?" is a common way they start a sentence when they are taking risks. I was at a point in my graduate program when I needed to spend more time reading and writing, so I decided to resign from my teaching position at the alternative program and become a full-time advocate for the students returning to traditional high school (Smith, 1997). This seemed to relieve their fears. I told them I was there. In their words, "I would have their back."

According to Webster's Dictionary (1981), "Advocacy is the act of pleading for, supporting a cause or course of action," and an "advocate is a person who speaks or writes in support of a cause." The Court Appointed Special Advocate Association states that an advocate is a volunteer "who speaks up for the best interests of a child--ordinary people who care about kids."

In the book *Teaching and Advocacy* (Taylor, Coughlin, Marasco, 1997), Taylor interviews Coughlin concerning her role of advocating. She states her work was named as advocacy "once there was a controversy." As the interview continues, Coughlin restates that advocacy and controversy seem to go together: "It did not get named as advocacy until the controversy" (p. 43). By integrating the definitions, I
conceptualize advocating as the ability to support, speak up for, care for a cause or for kids in a controversial setting or time. Advocating means I will be there to help my students navigate a system which places them "at-risk." As I started out I wasn't sure what my exact responsibilities would be as an advocate. I did know I had to be available for my students when they needed me. My definition of "advocate" included someone who believed in students and therefore would do what was necessary to help them be successful on their terms. Many times that help meant I had to sit back and wait for them to work through the problems. My role then meant I had to be a "safety net".

My students defined an advocate as someone who had their back. They asked me once what I would do if I was with them and someone started a fight with them. I looked at them and thought, I don't believe in fighting. I responded "I would be there to help you. If that meant fighting, I would. But I would hope I could stop the fighting. I would have your back." When I told them I would be there for them at school, they seemed to relax, having nothing to fear. I thought my new role as an advocate would be simple. I soon learned it wasn't.

From 13 years of teaching in public school settings, I
knew and understood the educational system. Therefore, I believed that I could advocate for my students and help them navigate the school system. It is important to point out that even as I advocate for the students, I was also actively involved with the parents and family. I soon learned that advocating would be harder than I thought. My first responsibility was to get parents' permission in writing. With letters in hand, I started my first official attempt to advocate. I recorded the incident in my field notes:

I took Lil Garfield to school. We got his classes changed and I think he is on a smooth road. I shared the paper [letters] with Dr. Thompson the principal. She rejected the letters. My heart exploded. All she said was this isn't acceptable--too general. She claims this is what the district stated. Why is it so hard to work for kids? They [the high school] have over 2000 students. You would think they would want help. (FN 9/11/96, p. 119)

I was frustrated and I couldn't understand the problem. The next step on my advocating journey was to read the district handbook and to rewrite the permission letter using the formal language of the handbook. I then had the parents sign the letters and had them notarized. I made an appointment with the principal, believing that if the principal understood I was there to help the students be successful that there would be no problem. This did not happen. I
entered the principal's office and I shared with her my background with the students and their families. I described my role and how I was there to help the students be successful. I then handed her the letters and waited for her reaction. With a quick glance she handed the letter back. She once again rejected the letters. I wrote:

I walked out of her office shocked. In fact, I wanted to turn around and make sure there were two people in the room. The principal had no emotions, no reaction. The wall had more of a response. I literally felt no emotions. This was so strange to me and once again I was frustrated. All I wanted to do was help kids that I had promised to help. (FN 9/19/96, p. 120).

Because I believed there was a way I could get the access I needed, I returned to the district office. This time I went to the department concerned with equity in the school. A person took me to the assistant superintendent's office to discuss the problem. The assistant superintendent was out. (This was not my only visit to the assistant superintendent's office.) I was told that the assistant superintendent would contact me. I was never contacted. The controversy that Coughlin (1996) stated earlier was part of the advocating process and definitely part of my role. I was informed that the "real" problem was I was an "outsider" to the system. I realized I had to find different roads to help my students.
I believed that, as an educator, I would be able to navigate the system. I believed I could help my students and their parents understand the school system and be able to work within the school system to help their children. I felt that as my students developed the ability to move successfully through the school system, they then as parents could help their own children. I soon learned that as an outsider, a non-teacher, I would be denied access, an experience many of my students' parents also had.

The Participants: Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice and Lil Garfield

At the end of the school year (1995-96), I had 15 students coming regularly to my class. Five of those students graduated that year. Three were allowed to stay in the alternative program and seven returned to traditional high school. I began to actively advocate for those seven students and their homies. I was advocating on a full time basis for nine students ages 14 to 19. Three of the five seniors graduated that school year and four students were removed from high school.

I worked with my students and their families for three years as a teacher, advocate, and friend. I was aware of each of my students' stories about their worlds both inside
and outside of school. I noticed the similarities in their stories, but also knew that their ages, family backgrounds, and positions in the school system gave each student unique experiences. For this reason, I chose four of my students who were of different ages, family backgrounds and locations in the school system to focus on for this study.

Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield (these names are their street names) are the students who participated in this study. All of these participants have known each other for a long time. They attended the same middle school located on the westside of Tucson. My students are third generation American Mexican males. I have chosen the term American Mexican because two of the participants' mothers explained to me that they raised their children as Americans with a Mexican heritage. Even though they were all born in Arizona and English is their first language, they have been exposed to Spanish throughout their lives in all family activities.

As I try to classify the socioeconomic position of the families, I struggle. Lil Boy Blue and Smurf are brothers and their family is working class. Both of their parents work to meet the family's needs. The mother works in a Yoyo factory and the father is a manager of a refrigeration
store. Juice and Lil Garfield are half brothers. Their situation is different. They come from a single parent family and live on welfare and food stamps. Their mother works at a menial job and puts in overtime trying to provide some extras for the boys. Lil Boy Blue and Smurf were raised in the Catholic church. Juice and Lil Garfield were raised outside of a church, but have studied the Catholic religion. At the time of the study, the participants ranged in age from 15 to 21.

Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield are affiliated with the gang called Manzanita Lynch Mob Crip (MLMC). Crip (Community Revolutionary Inter-Party Service) is one of the two nationally known gangs in the U.S.—Crips and Bloods. While Crips are associated with the color blue, Bloods are associated with the color red. There are several versions of the history or origin of these two gangs. One story about the Crips comes from a police report on a group of young men who were harassing some older people. While the older people were reporting the incident to the police, one older lady reported there was a young man who was crippled. The police picked up the word Crip and a gang name was born. Another story about the origin of the Crips claims the name came from a comic book *Tales of the Crypt* (Sachs, 1997, pp.
10,11). Another story claims the gangs came from rival schools whose colors were red and blue. I also heard the gang was started by a crippled Vietnam veteran who return from the war. This veteran recruited young men to steal for him, and these young men would shoot anyone who resisted in the knee cap, crippling the person.

After reading and hearing several stories concerning the origin of Crips, I have decided to accept the version found in the Source magazines which contains the name of "Tookie" Williams, a cofounder of the Crip who is now on death row. (Tookie Speaks Out, 1996). The article claims both gangs were founded in the 1960s and were neighborhood activist groups. They were designed to help young parents who didn't have jobs and to provide for after school programs. The economy took a turn for the worst, drugs moved into the neighborhood, and the gang became what we see today. (Source, 1996, pp. 58ff). They dress in what is referred to as gangster dress. They wear oversized, baggy clothes, pants riding low on the hips (commonly referred to as sagging). Figure 3.1 is a self-portrait which one of my students drew to illustrate how a gangbanger dresses.

Each participant in this study has been marginalized, "banished from the center to the margins" (Fine & Weis, 1993,
At one point or another each adolescent dropped out of school for a period of time. They have all attended alternative schools and/or programs and have also returned to traditional schools.

Figure 3.2. A Self Portrait of a Gang banger.

As a teacher, I once heard a school office worker refer to such students as "revolving door students" because they keep registering for school--dropping out--re-registering--a process which my participants know all too well. One of my
participants is a ninth grader, and he is just beginning the routine. The other three participants have been through the process several times.

In the following paragraphs, I will briefly introduce the reader to the individual students who became the participants in this research.

**Lil Boy Blue and Smurf**

Lil Boy Blue and Smurf are brothers. Lil Boy Blue is the middle child in the family while Smurf is the youngest. They have an older sister. They were born in Tucson and have lived on the west side of town all of their lives. Lil Boy Blue and Smurf's first language is English. Their mother grew up speaking Spanish and their father's first language is English but he understands Spanish. However, I have never heard the father use Spanish in a conversation. At family gatherings both English and Spanish are spoken. The family members are "die-hard" Dallas Cowboy fans. The home is turned into a Cowboy shrine during the football season. Both Lil Boy Blue and Smurf are what I would call natural athletes. As young kids they competed in little league baseball. Their mother has shared many stories of the boys' success. Lil Boy Blue ran track in eighth grade. In a state track meet Lil Boy Blue won three ribbons—first, second,
and third place. I had the opportunity to play on a co-ed softball team with both Lil Boy Blue and Smurf. I watched Lil Boy Blue run from center field to shallow right field and catch a fly ball. Smurf could hit a slow grounder to the pitcher and outrun the throw to first base to be safe (FN 5/19/95, p. 63).

Lil Boy Blue is a tall thin young man. When I first met him, he was 17 years old. For a long time, I never really knew if Lil Boy Blue had hair because he always had on a Cowboy baseball hat. He did have a long tail (a chunk of hair going down the back of the head lower than the hair line) that his dad promised to pay him $150.00 to cut off.

Lil Boy Blue is a private person. He is quiet and could fade into the walls. There are times when he will speak up, but even in those times, he is still quiet and reserved. He is very caring. His friends/homies are important to him. He often brags about how in the "Hood" (neighborhood, gang) everyone knows each other.

When I asked Lil Boy Blue to describe himself he wrote, "I am . . . a father, a Chicano, a student, a smoker, a Crip. I have a Blue heart. A heart for family and locs [friends in the gang] (Artifact, LBB, p. 32). In a letter to a pen pal he wrote, "I'm Mexican American, we call ourselves
Chicanos. I am 5'9" with light brown hair and light brown eyes. My teenage life is quiet, average. I'm a Crip" (Art., LBB, p. 30).

Lil Boy Blue attended two high schools and three alternative schools or programs over a two year period, before he graduated with a high school diploma in May, 1996. His problems with school started in tenth grade. According to his mother, Lil Boy Blue always talked about going to college. However, he struggles with the idea of going to college today. I believe this is because of the negative experiences he had in high school.

Towards the end of this study, Lil Boy Blue had been working close to 50 hours a week at a bottling company. He had been there for one year and was promoted in the company structure several times. He presently lives with his girlfriend/fiancee and their little girl in a trailer on the northwest side of town. Before the birth of his daughter, Lil Boy Blue was gangbanging--putting in work for the gang. After his daughter was born, another side of Lil Boy Blue emerged. He wrote about his daughter, "She's so special to me. She changed my life in a lot of ways" (Art., LBB, p. 37). He believed that God sent his little girl to him so he would quit "gangbanging". Getting a job and supporting his
new daughter was now a priority. He knew he had to complete school to get a good job. With this in mind, I knew it was important to structure his schooling so he could work full time and still attend school and graduate. Between school and work he was busy seven days a week with no break, but he was determined to graduate.

When I first met Smurf, he was 14 years old and small for his age. He is now 17 and has grown into a well-built young man. Smurf is darker than his brother and has black hair that he combs straight back when it is long. Against his mother's wishes, he wears his hair very short, almost shaved. Smurf has long eyelashes and a cute twinkle in his eyes. His mother shared with me that when Smurf was in seventh grade, they couldn't afford the school pictures; however, the girls in his class got together and collected enough money for Smurf's picture. When Smurf had his picture taken, one 8X10 was given to his mother and the girls kept the rest. In a letter to his pen pal, Smurf wrote, "I'm a gang member on da streets of Tucson, Ariz. I'm a Crip gang member from dat insane wiced ass westside Manzanita Lynched Mob Crip. I'm short and have black hair and I'm always dressed in blue. I like to rap." When I asked Smurf to describe himself he wrote, "I'm short. I wear nothing but
blue and gray clothes. I don't know how I feel inside. I don't know what makes me hurt. I worry about dying. It seems everybody dies in the gang. My dreams are to become a rapper and make lots of money" (Art., Smurf, p. 6).

Smurf is a natural leader both in the classroom and in the gang. Even though he was a peewee (the youngest in the gang), he seemed to have a status not given to the other pee wees. Smurf dropped out of traditional high school about one month into his freshman year. He transferred to Nuestra Casa, an alternative program, with his brother, Lil Boy Blue. Because of the policy which states students can only attend two years of school in a community-based alternative program, Smurf had to return to traditional school his junior and senior years. He wasn't happy. He didn't like traditional school. He was afraid he would mess up. His mom and I spent the whole summer convincing Smurf he would be successful in traditional school. He lasted about one month before he was dropped from the traditional program.

Currently Smurf is not in school. He is a father of a baby girl. Like his brother, he takes his responsibility seriously. He is working full time in a yo-yo factory. Because he is working full time, he has not been able to return to school. During this study, Smurf moved into an
apartment with his daughter and girlfriend. His dream is still to become a rapper, and he has been writing raps since he was young. He doesn't want to work at the yo-yo factory forever. He hesitates going back to school because he needs to work to support his family. However, he has asked me to search for a program he could attend and work full time. Most of the time Smurf believes he will never make it at school. He once told me, "School and I don't mix."

**Juice and Lil Garfield**

Juice who is 17 and Lil Garfield who is 15 are half brothers and come from a single parent family. They live with their mother in a little house behind their grandparents' home. Juice and Lil Garfield’s first language is English; however, their family also speaks Spanish. At family gatherings you can hear both languages: Spanish and English. Juice is the older brother. He is short and small for his age. Lil Garfield is a large young man. I would never had believed they were brothers because they look nothing alike. Juice and his brother, Lil Garfield, are members of the Manzanita Lynch Mob Crip (MLMC) gang. Along with Smurf they are peewees (youngest members in the gang). Most of their young life, they lived with relatives: aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Juice shared with me that they did
at times live with their mother when she wanted to "play mom" (FN 9/12/97, p. 230). At the beginning of the 1997-98 school year, Lil Garfield moved into his grandfather's home located next to his mother's home.

I first met Juice the day I was interviewed for the teaching position at the alternative program. Three students were allowed to be part of the interview process. Juice and I were the only San Francisco 49er fans. As I think about Juice, I would have to say he is a charmer. With his engaging smile and sweet talking, he put me at ease and I felt like I've known him for a long time. He was completely bald when I first met him. I later learned this was a result of stress. Like all gangsters, he dresses in oversized clothes, but Juice's pants are big enough to put three of Juice in them. He pins the bottom of his pants to his socks so they will not drag on the floor. Juice has a baby girl. He worries about how he is going to support his daughter and whether he wants a long term commitment to the mother.

Juice has been enrolled in two traditional high schools and two alternative high school programs. He worked at a neighborhood organization designed to provide service such as counseling and GED classes for the surrounding community. By the end of the study, he quit that job and began working
at a telemarketing company. During this time he also was a student.

Juice only attended my classroom for one month before he transferred back to traditional high school. However, he had some problems and was removed from school. He would come to my class to visit and did try several times to get back into my class. Because he is a member of MLMC, he is part of the community of my students, and he is involved in many of my students' activities. He was an unofficial part of the classroom community. I started actively working with him when I started advocating for my students. During 1996-97, the year I started to advocate for my students, he returned to Nuestra Casa, but he wasn't really happy and asked me to make sure he was taking the right classes. Within two months, Juice dropped out of Nuestra Casa. The second semester of the 1996-1997 school year, I helped Juice register for traditional high school. This semester was a turning point for him. He completed the semester and passed four of his classes, his first completed semester out of six semesters at any school.

I first met Lil Garfield when he was doing community service for Nuestra Casa. Later he would visit the students in my classroom. As a member of the MLMC, Lil Garfield was a
member of the community, and this allowed him access to our classroom where he became an unofficial student. At this time he was only 13 years old (in eighth grade) and was not allowed to attend Nuestra Casa which was for 9th through 12th grade. Lil Garfield is the youngest of the peewees. He comes across as a "tough" gangsta. He is a large young man. He keeps his short hair almost shaved. He has a close relationship with his grandfather and looks a lot like him. Lil Garfield is shy and at times very quiet. He seems to ponder things at a deep level. When his homie was killed, Lil Garfield broke down and cried in front of the other homies. He didn't try to hold back. He seems to have a heart that feels to the extreme, yet he can be very angry and tough on the outside.

Within the first couple of weeks of advocating for my students, they asked if I would help Lil Garfield get back into school. This was Lil Garfield's first semester of ninth grade--in high school. If he was going to be successful he needed to start off successfully. I stopped by his house and asked him if he wanted my help. When he agreed, I arranged a time to come back to the house to meet his mother and to talk about what it would take to get Lil Garfield back into school. After I met with him and a school counselor, his
schedule was changed and he was ready to start again. However, Lil Garfield was soon on long term suspension for "throwing up" gang signs and showing disrespect to teachers. This meant when he returned he wouldn't get any credit. I advised his mother it would be better to start him again the second semester.

Because I was having a hard time describing him, I asked him to describe himself. This wasn't easy for him. After a long silent pause, he finally said, "I don't know, just a Crip."

Debbie: What are your dreams?

Lil Garfield: To be successful to be wealthy have a nice house and a good family, barbecue on Sunday.

Debbie: What type of job would you like to have?

Lil Garfield: I would love to be a rapper. . . . I don't think it will happen.

Debbie: Let's say you couldn't be a rapper. . . . What would you be?

Lil Garfield: Probably if that happened a lawyer, or doctor or maybe an architect (IG, 9/5, Lil Garf. p. 1).

Second semester we met with the counselor and picked out teachers who she felt would be a support for Lil Garfield. He did better this semester. He was only suspended twice, and by the end of the semester, Lil Garfield seemed to enjoy going to school. He wanted to be there. The next
school year (1996-97), Lil Garfield decided to attend Kino
Alternative High School, his first alternative school.

During the time I spent with these adolescents, I
discovered how diverse they are in their personalities,
abilities, and family structures. I also realized that even
though they come from different families and different
backgrounds, they had essentially the same experiences in
school. Over the last three years, my students and I became
more than teacher and students; we have forged a
relationship that allowed us to learn from each other. In
the following section, I describe that relationship in more
detail.

Researcher and Participant Relationship

In a qualitative study, it is important to examine the
role and relationship of the researcher to his or her
participants. One of my fears in doing this study is
associated with the relationship I have with the kids and
their families. I have been their teacher, advocate, and
friend, but I worried that the new role of researcher would
somehow change the relationship. Calling and making
appointments to do the interviews seemed to add a formality
to a relationship that had been more informal. I soon
learned this was more of a worry for me than for the kids.
I think back to a barbeque at Lil Boy Blue and Smurf's home. Kristina, the mother of Lil Boy Blue and Smurf, informed me that this was my second visit to the home where I was no longer a guest but part of the family so I had to serve myself. "I am no longer a guest but part of the family" is a quote that describes the relationship I developed with my participants and their families. I could be introduced as a friend or the kids' "teacher" to aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and family friends. In many cases, I was "the" teacher who was talked about in family circles. Many family members knew me long before I met them. I was invited and expected to participate in birthday parties, garage sales, and any family gatherings. On one occasion I was referred to as the student's second mother because I would worry about them so much.

At Juice's little girl's birthday party, I got up to serve myself and returned to find someone sitting in the chair I was using. Jokingly, I stated someone took my spot. I was told the rule of the family: to save a spot you have to say "safety pin." My answer was I did. I come from a large family and know how that works. We all laughed. As the uncle left, he reminded me of the two main rules of the family: first come first serve, to save a place say "safety
pin." I was part of the family and was expected to act accordingly.

Not only was I part of the families' community, but I also had to gain entrance in the gang community. Two events took place which showed me I was part of that community. The second year of teaching I began to realize that when one of the gang members was having a hard time with school, my students asked me to help their homie [a friend, a member in the gang]. Many times they would bring their homie to the classroom for me to meet and help. On one occasion I heard one of my students explain to their friend that I was okay because I was an OG [old gangster].

The second confirmation of my acceptance was the placing of a blue rag (Crip colors) over my rear view mirror in my truck. This was their way of showing me respect. I was part of them. But this acceptance was a mutual acceptance. Together we negotiated this acceptance. They knew I didn't agree with some of their behavior. And we had many class discussions about drugs, alcohol and violence. Many times I was invited to parties or meetings the gang was having, but I often chose not to go because of what might take place at these parties and meetings. My students understood and respected my feelings, but they also knew I 'had their
back", so I was never denied access.

Our relationship involved "being together, being real and being open" (Mercado, 1993, p.98). This relationship allowed for learning "from one another, no matter the level of experience nor the background of the individual" (Mercado, 1993, p. 98). They took me to their hood [neighborhood], they showed me the parts of town and what happened there, in terms of gang history, and they took me to the rock house [a partially torn down house made of rocks] which was their place to hang out. We went to movies and to amusement parks together.

My students took me into their world, and I took them into my world. They helped me by participating on panels in my graduate classes. After one such participation Smurf asked, "Did we do good enough for you to get an A?" (FN 4/26/95, p. 56). I introduced them to my professors and colleagues. Our relationship grew strong as we mourned the loss of friends and students to tragic death. In her dissertation studying the development of identity in three of my female students, Taylor (1997) wrote about my students concern about how I would take the news of the death of a student (p.135). They worried about me and I worried about them.
Because I was willing to "cover their back," I became confidante, counselor, chauffeur, friend, mentor, and advocate. Many times while I was their teacher, I would pick them up for school and take them home afterward. This carried over to traditional school. I would get phone calls asking me to pick them up for school. Many times I picked them up, and we would go to breakfast and then to school or I would pick them up after school and we'd go to eat to celebrate their going to school. The relationship we had developed allowed me to move beyond observer or participant observer to active member of their individual communities.

My relationship with the participants can be seen as both negative and positive forces in terms of this study. It could be considered as a limitation, because I could analyze the data to show a strong bias in favor of my students. On the other hand, the close relationship with students has a positive influence on the data analysis, because I have access to the worlds of my students which would not be available to other researchers. My participants have been free to share, because we have talked about school, gangs, drugs, violence, revenge, God and other aspects of their world and mine. I have had many conversations with parents concerning their sons. As a result of our relationship, I
also believe I am better able to interpret the data I collect. My relationship with students is an important factor in data collection and.

Since the beginning of this study, the beginning of my teaching at the alternative program, my students have been involved in helping me better understand their world. During spring semester (1997), I met with each young man and discussed my ideas and shared my questions for this study. They agreed to be a part of the study and "help me graduate." They wanted to make sure I could graduate. I have received written permission from their parents and from each adolescent himself.

Now that I’ve provided profiles of each of my informants and a discussion of my role in the research, I turn to a detailed description of the data I collected and analyzed and the research methods used to understand my communication and interactions with Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield.
CHAPTER FOUR

DIFFERENT LENSES: A PROCESS OF INQUIRY

We attend to life, constantly looking outward into the world to see what is happening. As we observe what is going on around us, we build mental connections between ourselves and the world. These connections are what allow us to create the understanding about the world that we use to guide our lives.

(Short & Burke, 1991, p.11)

This qualitative research is designed to look into the world of four American Mexican male adolescents and their perceptions of their literacy experiences inside and outside of school. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), a qualitative research study is descriptive and concerned with process rather than simply with outcome or product. By observing and describing what is going on, the process, in Lil Boy Blue's, Smurf's, Juice's, and Lil Garfield's, world, we gain a better understanding of the literacy in their lives. Merriam (1988) states that qualitative research assumes that there are "multiple realities" and these realities are created through "personal interaction and perceptions" (p. 17). As I worked with the young men in this study, I wasn't focusing on finding the "true" reality. Instead I wanted to try to discover their meanings through
In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the different sites where my students and I associated and a description of the research methods I used to support my inquiry into their lives. These methods allowed me to accumulate the data needed to respond to the following research question:

How do four American Mexican male adolescents who are in gangs perceive their literacy experiences within and outside of school?

A Study Begins

After a particularly hard day in the classroom I wrote:

I am still very excited, but my heart is so heavy—so sad. One minute I want to scream the next I want to cry—it seemed both feelings seem to come from anger and being mad. Almost a hatred and then a heavy sadness. I look into their eyes, the eyes that still seem to sparkle with the childlike innocence for learning—for being valued (FN, 2/12/95, p. 5).

The need to help these students and the desire to understand their world became the initial drive for this research.

Short and Burke (1991) write,

[O]ur attention is especially drawn to the ambiguous—to the structures or relationships that appear to be incomplete or flawed. It is the "yet to be understood" that fascinates us and serves the demands of our brain (p. 11).

As I worked with my students during the first year of the
study, ambiguity in what I was seeing and what I had read regarding youth in gangs led me to question and to search for new and clearer answers. I observed young men and women showing me respect by asking me if I wanted the last piece of pizza before anyone else would eat it, or helping me carry my things into the classroom or out to my car. But within one minute the respect would be gone. They would be "giving me the finger" or telling me to "fuck off." The interesting thing was no event seemed to cause the change. Our relationship appeared incomplete and flawed. They would sit for hours and tag, but when it came to school work they refused to do any work. The "yet to be understood" drove my need to be able to help my students. My research started as an inquiry--a curiosity.

Short, Harste, and Burke (1996) tell us more about the inquiry process in their book *Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers*. They discovered that young children's "inquiry comes from exploring and being interested in the world" (p. 257). Through their exploration "tension arises and they ask questions." Children then scrupulously examine those "questions or tensions" and "create new understandings, new questions, and issues they want to explore further" (p. 257). During the first month of
teaching in the alternative program, in three different entries I wrote, "I don't know what to do" (FN 2/95, pp. 10-19). After a frustrating day I wrote about what was going on in the class:

I told the kids we are going to do math this morning. Smurf informs me he is too tired. They sit and talk--no math is done. Not much work was done today. They got into the *Lowrider* magazine. This is their favorite magazine. (FN 3/95. p. 23)

As I explored my own beliefs and what I was seeing in my classroom, tension was becoming a way of life. I knew as a teacher I had to understand my students' world if I was to help them take the risk in school and learn. I was puzzled by what I was seeing and hearing in my classroom. I continued to search for an explanation and an understanding that would help me be a better teacher.

When Short, Harste, and Burke (1996) were examining their own inquiry process, they claim they spent as much time discovering their questions as they did looking for the answers. Without specific questions in mind, I started to read in order to understand what I was observing in my classroom. I was documenting what was working. One such time involved the students planning a trip around the world. I wrote about this experience in an article:

I brought in several travel magazines and placed them on the tables. I gave students the guidelines. The
students went to the magazines and read about different countries. Lots of dialogue between groups and individual members within the groups took place. They were negotiating where to go and what they would see. One group wanted to go to the Great Wall of China so they could "tag up". All of a sudden, they discovered they hadn't had a break. Smurf said, "Miss we have been working hard." Tiger said, "But at least it is fun work." A positive experience with reading in school. (Smith, 1996, p. 22)

I also wrote about days when nothing seemed to work. On one such day I wrote:

Boy today is a crazy day. I can't get them engaged. Kurious and Lil Boy Blue are drawing. I tried to get Smurf to work. Not much work was done. Today was not a good day. (FN 3/95, p. 28).

I would have days where only four students would show up and days when 15 students would come to class. I would have days when nothing related to "school" would get done, and days when every student would work. I struggled trying to figure out what was working and what wasn't. I kept reading and watching trying to figure out what my questions were and to discover what was happening in my classroom and in the lives of my students. I soon concluded that if it didn't look like "school" to my students, they would risk and do what was asked of them. I started wondering if my students' resistance to school was actually related to their negative conception of "school" and "school learning" which may have resulted more from school resisting them (Smith, 1996, p.
Short, Harste, and Burke argue, "Inquiry is not always in the form of specific questions but can be a 'wondering' about something we 'wanted' or 'needed' to know" (p. 258). I needed to know why one thing would work one day and not the other day. As I listened to my students I discovered that each student had a unique story or experience that brought him to this alternative high school program. It is in the uniqueness of their stories that I believed I would find the understandings I was looking for.

**The Case Study Design Evolves**

Merriam (1988) writes, "Case study is an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group" (p. 9). Each student’s story, in this study, is a glimpse of the worlds they are participants in and the literacies found in those worlds. Merriam (1988) states,

> An ethnographic case study ... is more than an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a social unit or phenomenon. It is a sociocultural analysis of the unit of study. Concern with the cultural context is what sets this type of study apart from other qualitative research. (p. 23)

Each participant’s story constitutes a unit of study. Their stories are constructed through their lived experiences which takes place in cultural settings. Careful examination of my participants’ experiences, and at times, my own
participation in these experiences, provides the basis for the case studies in this research. I have been involved with my students for three years. In Table 4.1 I provide a timeline of the dissertation research. I highlight different events that became a part of the study and the different stages of the research.

**Worlds Visited: Multiple Research Sites**

This research was conducted in Tucson, Arizona, a southwestern university city. As I worked with Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield, I learned about the many worlds that made up their lives of which school was a small part. Their lives took place in homes, work sites, church, local restaurants, and other places. Each participant had their individual sites that were a part of their individual worlds. In the following paragraphs, I will describe in greater details the major sites that are a part of my students' lives.

**Nuestra Casa**

As stated in Chapter Two, I met my students when I started teaching at Nuestra Casa Alternative high school program. It is important to note it was a high school program not a high school. Nuestra Casa is an office building located on the
Table 4.1.

**A Time Line of My Experiences with the Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1995</td>
<td>Started teaching at the Alternative high school program. I had six students. School was held from 8:00 to 12:00 five days a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1995</td>
<td>Summer school. Program is stable. New students join class. I have a total of 12 students. We meet for 8 hours a day, five days a week. English class studying how gangs are portrayed in movies and in the media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1995</td>
<td>New school year starts. All but two students returned. High school curriculum: science, history, math. Begin collecting field notes. We meet 8:00 to 12:00 five days a week. Plucy a former student and my students' homie was killed in a drive-by.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1996</td>
<td>No school. Stayed actively in touch with students through phone calls and visits. One of my students and my students' homie died August 19. Reported as a suicide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1996</td>
<td>Remaining students return to traditional high school. I become their advocate. A third student dies in a car wreck.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1997</td>
<td>Contact the four students Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield about research and begin interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1997</td>
<td>Conduct audio-taped interviews, collect field notes during informal meetings and family socials, visit classrooms and college dorms, transcribe audiotapes, reflect on field notes and personal log, develop theoretical categories. Begin initial analysis of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall &amp; Spring-Summer 1998-99</td>
<td>Complete analysis and writing. Conduct last interview. Shared drafts with students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
west side of town. The people who work in this office building provide services such as counseling, a food and clothes bank, emergency funding to pay bills or rent, and emergency housing for the immediate community. The executive director approached the local school district in 1994 proposing to start an alternative high school program. The goal was to get students from the community who had dropped out or were expelled reinstate in school. At Nuestra Casa the students could have the opportunity to get caught up on their skills and on the 20 credits which they need to graduate. Nuestra Casa was given permission by the district to go ahead. There were two rooms in the building designated as classrooms which became the site for the alternative high school program. Another teacher had one classroom, and I had the other.

My classroom was a rectangular room with no windows located in the interior of the building. When I first started teaching, the walls had posters displaying GED information in math and writing. There was a portable magazine rack full of old GED material. There were four long tables and several folding chairs in the room. There was a chalk board on one wall, and four locked cabinets which contained computers were located in the back of the room. I
was informed by the other teacher and gang counselor that the students didn't want to use the computers. There were two doors on each side of the classroom. A desk was at the front of the room (opposite the four cabinets). On one wall there was a cabinet with cubby holes for students to store their notebooks.

The curriculum, approved by the school district, consisted of packets in all subject areas. On the average, the students had to complete ten packets to receive one credit. The best way to describe the type of work in the packets is as an individualized, outcome-based, mastery learning worksheet. The packets were written originally for California migrant workers. A colleague who completed a research study in my classroom wrote:

Expectations held by administrators and many teachers for these students were low. They were simply required to work on packets of worksheets each day. To a great extent the program did not require growth or empowerment but rather as a holding tank until the student graduated. (Taylor, 1997, p. 33)

Because Nuestra Casa is an alternative high school program and not a high school, the students had to transfer their credits back to their home school for graduation.

At the end of our first semester, the students and I decided to remove the GED posters from the wall and paint the wall with a lighter color. We also removed the magazine
rack that had old GED material. This became a classroom activity. When summer school started we had a new classroom which seemed bigger and brighter. We now could decorate the walls the way we wanted. Many discussions finally led to the painting of the world on one wall, a painting of the map of the United States on another wall, and a map of Arizona painted on a third wall (see figure 4.1). This was done because we were studying world and US history. Arizona was included because we wanted to show our local communities.

Figure 4.1. Map Painted on Classroom Walls.
The majority of the students who participated in the alternative program came from the neighborhood around the office building, but my students were from a community that was in the southwest of the city of Tucson, about a 20 minute drive to the school. The school was made up of about 40 Mexican American students ranging from the age of 14 to 20 years old. During our time at Nuestra Casa (Feb. 1995 to May 1996) we went to amusement parks, movie theaters, and the university. My students took me to places in their "hood" [neighborhood].

Brighton High School
During the 1995-96 school year, I had six out of fifteen students preparing to graduate from traditional high school. This brought us to their home high school where I started to actively advocate for my students. Their home school is Brighton High School which is located on the south side of Tucson. Currently the school enrolls approximately 1800 students of whom 87 percent are Mexican America, 12 percent are White, one percent are Native American, and less than half a percent are African American. There are 130 teachers (Taylor, 1997). The school campus is surrounded by a large fence with three entrances which are kept locked at certain times of the day. In the morning students enter
campus through the front and back gates. During the school day, the back and side gates are kept locked. Anyone leaving or coming must use the front gate. A school monitor dressed in a yellow shirt carrying a walkie talkie guards the gate. Anyone entering or exiting must show identification and state a reason for the visit. The campus includes a large two story building with classrooms and a library. There is an auditorium, a large cafeteria, twenty portable classrooms, two gyms, a pool, and a large courtyard. The campus also has the necessary football, baseball, and practice fields. During the school day the monitors and police officers patrol the halls and courtyard and are also present at all school functions. As six of my students were getting ready to graduate from high school, I went to their home school and met a counselor who was willing to work with and help get my students ready to graduate. At times, I met with the principal and vice principal asking for permission for students to walk in their graduation line and to clear up any fee problems. Four of the six students were allowed to walk in the graduation ceremony of their home school. Two students if they chose to walk they had to participate with Kino Alternative High School. All six students did graduate.
The next school year 1996-97, seven of my students returned to Brighton High School as students--five were seniors and two were juniors. We had to meet with vice principals and school officials to get them all registered for the upcoming school year. During this school year, Juice and Lil Garfield officially became a part of my student group. As an advocate for my students, I attended parent conference meetings, discipline hearings, and meetings with counselors.

Kino Alternative High School

By May 1997 the end of the school year, three students graduated, four students were removed from school and two students were still in school. During the summer, Juice and Lil Garfield decided to attend Kino Alternative High School, located in downtown Tucson. The school is for students who are unable to or not allowed to attend traditional school. The school operates on quarters (four quarters equals one school year), and students earn one fourth of a credit for a class each quarter. They need 20 credits to graduate from high school. Kino is an official high school where students may earn a diploma. Currently the school enrolls approximately 220 students. The school is an "open campus" which means students may come and go as they please. The
campus itself is made up of a large two story building in a "v" shape. In the middle is a courtyard where students hang out before and after school and between or during class time. There is a small library and an auditorium. One monitor patrols the campus grounds. During the first and second quarter at Kino, Juice’s and Lil Garfield’s schedules were organized as described in Table 4.2 and 4.3. They attended school from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm five days a week. They were required to pass four classes to stay at the school. Three days at the beginning of each quarter, they attended orientation before they could register for class.

**Table 4.2. Juice’s schedule at Kino**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Classes 1st quarter</th>
<th>Scheduled Class Time</th>
<th>School Class 2nd quarter</th>
<th>Scheduled Class Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
<td>Learning More [study skills]</td>
<td>Tues/Thurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
<td>Advisement</td>
<td>Tues/Thurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning More [study skills]</td>
<td>Tues/Thurs</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisement</td>
<td>Tues/Thurs</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
<td>Algebra</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3.

Lil Garfield's Schedule at Kino

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Classes</th>
<th>Scheduled Class Time</th>
<th>School Class 2nd quarter</th>
<th>Scheduled Class Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning More [study skills]</td>
<td>Tues/Thurs</td>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisement</td>
<td>Tues/Thurs</td>
<td>Advisement</td>
<td>Tues/Thur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre Algebra</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
<td>Life skills</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
<td>Latino Literature</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>M,W,F</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Tues/ Thur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My Students' Homes

As I became more acquainted with my students, I would visit their homes and the homes of their relatives. When I first started working with my students, they lived at home with their families. Like each student, each home is similar and different.

Lil Boy Blue and Smurf at the beginning of the study lived with their parents in a three bedroom house located on the southwest side of town. The house is located at the bottom of three mountain peaks shaped in a "W"; this "W" represents home to them because it symbolizes "west side." The front door of the house opens into the living room. The walls and tables have photographs of the kids, relatives,
and religious icons. To the left, is the kitchen and a family dining room. The dining room has a table and chairs where the family gets together to talk about the daily activities and family news. Kristina, Lil Boy Blue and Smurf's mother, told me that as the kids grew up they would sit around the table at dinner time eat and share the happenings of the day. One year, the table was removed for Christmas and never put back. The kids kept complaining, that they had no place to eat and talk together as a family, and wanted the table set back up. Behind the dining room and kitchen is a multiple purpose room that was added on. It is used as an area for grandchildren to play or a room for family celebrations. On the opposite side of the dining room are three bedrooms and a bathroom.

During the course of this study, Lil Boy Blue and Smurf moved out of their parents' home and into their own homes. Lil Boy Blue, his fiancee and young daughter moved into a furnished trailer which belongs to the fiancee's father. The trailer has a living room which contains a couch, a love seat and an entertainment center. A kitchen/dining room is to the left and down the hall are the bedrooms and bathrooms.
Smurf moved into a one bedroom apartment with his girlfriend and their daughter. On one wall there is a three-part glass picture of God. On the opposite wall is an entertainment center which has a TV, pictures of their daughter and several different yo-yos. Next to the living room is the dining room and the kitchen.

Juice and Lil Garfield's home is located on the south side of Tucson a typical urban neighborhood. When I first met them they lived with their mother in a small one bedroom house. This was a one car garage converted into a house. A very small living room which contains two small couches and a TV is in the front part of the house. On the walls are religious artifacts and some pictures of the family. Next to the living room is another room which is a hallway and a bedroom. There is a single bed and a make shift closet and dresser. In this room there are religious icons on the walls and on top of the dresser. To the right is a bedroom that contains a single bed, a full size bed, and a dresser. The back of the house included a kitchen and bathroom. In the kitchen there is a very small stove, sink, and a table.

On the same property is Juice and Lil Garfield's grandfather's house. The first room after entering through the back door is a utility room where the washer and dryer
are kept. Next is the kitchen and then the living room. The living room has a fireplace, one couch, a lazy boy chair and a television. This room is covered with pictures of the family: over the wall above the fireplace, and on the mantle above the fireplace. On the wall opposite the fireplace is a picture of a young soldier, Juice and Lil Garfield's grandfather. During one visit while I was waiting for Lil Garfield, I asked the Grandfather about the awards which were next to the picture. I learned he was a Ranger in the army and served behind the enemy line. He told me he didn't like talking about the war and the things he experienced (FN 2/21/98, p. 254).

Six months after I met Lil Garfield, he moved out of his mother's house and into his grandfather's house. He has a bedroom that includes a bed and a dresser for himself. Lil Garfield has a stereo, religious pictures and pictures of the homies on the wall. Eventually Juice joined Lil Garfield in the house with the grandfather. He moved into a room that looks like it may have been part of a utility room at one time. There is room for a bed and built-in shelves. However, the boys mother lives at both her small home and the grandfather's house.

Typically, when I picked up students or as I took them
home, I would have short visits with family members. In many ways teaching and advocating for these students also meant getting to know the family and advocating for them. As I met with and talked with family members, we would sit in the kitchen or family rooms.

School and home are only two of the many places we would meet and hang out together. During the three years I have known my students they held several jobs, which I describe in the following sections.

Hanging Out

It is hard to provide descriptions of all of the sites that became a part of the relationship I had with my students. Many times we ate breakfast or lunch in a restaurant or fast food places. As stated earlier, we went to movies together. They took me to the rock house, the hangout for the gang, which is an abandoned house located in their neighborhood. We also spent one day at the caves which were located in the "hood," a place where they played as little kids. The year end school picnic took place in a park in Lil Boy Blue's and Smurf's neighborhood. Because the park is in their neighborhood they considered it their park. Not only did they include me in their world, but I brought them into my world. Many times they would accompany me to the
university where I would introduce them to my professors and fellow colleagues. One time they helped me with a presentation for one of my classes. They also participated in a Graduate Colloquy sharing their world with many professors and students. They were very much aware of and a part of my life as a graduate student. Often they spent time at my own apartment.

I often picked my students up at home and took them to school, stopping along the way for breakfast, or I would also pick them up after school stopping to get food to celebrate another day completed. During this time we talked about school, teachers, and their experiences on campus. In each of these varied settings, I would take notes and when appropriate collect artifacts.

Multiple Methods for Data Collection

The "literacy stories" of the five adolescents in this study have been developed through ethnographic techniques of data gathering. Merriam (1988) writes:

Ethnography is a set of methods used to collect data, and it is the written record that is the product of using ethnographic techniques. . . interviewing, documentary analysis, life history, investigator diaries, and participant observation. (p.23)

As I began my journey with these students, I started to collect artifacts and take field notes. Later I interviewed
each participant. Table 4.5 below provides a framework for the understanding of a fuller description of my data collection methods and procedures which follow.

Table 4.5.

Data Collection Methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION</strong></td>
<td>Participating in family activities such as birthday parties and baby showers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy events in school and out of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attending court sessions and school hearings. Wrote notes after event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcribed audiotape of hearing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS</strong></td>
<td>Four individual interviews were conducted with each participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions concerning their gangs activities, school, and literacy were asked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A total of twenty sessions were audiotaped and transcribed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One in-depth interview with parents. A total of two sessions were audiotaped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and transcribed. Many informal conversations with families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wrote notes after the informal conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WRITTEN FIELD NOTES</strong></td>
<td>Notes written after informal meetings with participants and families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes taken while teaching participants and while acting as an advocate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes written after social events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Notes taken after each interview session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COLLECTION OF WRITTEN AND VISUAL ARTIFACTS</strong></td>
<td>School texts and written assignments, leisure reading, letters,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>journal entries, official documents, tagging, music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photographs taken by participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School records.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Observation

As I stated earlier, I was involved with the five participants and their families for three years. I am no longer a guest but often considered part of the family. I am invited to family gatherings and parties. When I don't show up, people are concerned and want to know why. There are
times when I sit and talk with parents and grandparents seeking their advice and sharing stories. But there are also times when I sit with my students in the school court yard listening and observing. I am a participant with access to the students or family members whenever necessary. This has been a role that my students and I have negotiated and developed over time.

Spradley (1980) states all researchers are participants and are involved at different degrees depending on the activity. Researchers may be an "ordinary participant" who act in situations without thinking about the specific cultural rule that is a part of the event, or a "participant observer" who studies the event. The participant observer has two purposes: "to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation" (Spradley, 1980, p. 54).

As a participant observer, I struggled continually with how involved I should become. Spradley (1980) examines the degree of involvement a researcher may take in the study. Researchers may move from non-participant, a researcher who has no involvement, to complete participant, a researcher who is involved at the highest level of involvement for ethnographers. This takes place when ethnographers study a
situation in which they are already ordinary participants. My three year relationship with my participants and their families has at times resulted in my being "totally absorbed," a "complete participant" to a participant who is just observing. As I sat and learned more about the gang, I was more of a "moderate participant" a researcher who "seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, participation and observation" (Spradley, 1980, p.60). As a new teacher in the classroom moving toward advocate and other roles I was an "active participant": a participant "who begins with observation but as knowledge of what others do grows the ethnographer tries to learn the same behavior" (Spradley, 1980, p.60). In other words, my role of participant observer evolved over the three years I have worked with my students and their families and friends.

Merriam (1988) states that "participant observation is a schizophrenic activity . . ." (p.45). I have experienced such feelings throughout my study as my roles changed and my involvement changed. But I believe the roles of my students also changed over the three years. They became more than just students or participants in my study. We were teacher and learner to each other. We cried together over the tragic death of classmates, and we celebrated together at the
success they had. Because of the close relationship with my participants, I have made every effort to make their voices heard in the study.

**In-depth Interviews**

According to LeCompte (1993), the researcher's duty is to render the voices of the unheard in a language that is accessible to the people telling the story and those who hear the story. Learning about others through their stories offers a window into their reality and their world. By listening to their voices it is possible to develop an understanding that is different and deeper than one based solely on observation and interpretation of the same event or statistic. For this reason I conducted in-depth interviews with Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield. These interviews are an important means of collecting data but also a way to highlight their voices.

As Seidman (1991) writes, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning making of that experience" (p.3). Because I am aware that I can never totally understand the perspectives of another, I include the voices of the students in this study. I believe that in-depth interviewing provides me with an understanding of my
students and their literacy.

The in-depth interviewing involved a series of three separate interviews. A fourth session was added for clarification, member checking, and analysis at the end of the data collection when I was already writing the dissertation. Table 4.6 provides a selection of the questions used in the four interviews.

The purpose of the first interview was to discover the experiences each student had with gangs, the literacy found in a gang and its uses, and the effects the gangs had on the family life. In the second interview, I asked questions concerning their past and present experiences in school, their relationship with teachers, and their conception of a successful student. The purpose of the third interview was to ask the participants to reflect on their literacy, to examine how reading and writing fit into their world. As I analyzed the data, I went back to my participants for a fourth interview and asked them what they thought was important in their stories. What did they think their story was saying? I was asking my students how they would present their stories to other people. Because the interviews were conducted in my home and in the car while traveling, the sessions lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours. Each
Table 4.6.

Sample Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Interview—Gang Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explain the gang to somebody who never heard about gangs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How has the gang influenced you? What has it provided for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you talk for a minute about the tragedies that the gang has experienced?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How have these tragedies affected the gang? Affected you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What role/function do you have in the gang?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What characteristics do you see in a tag?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What messages are you trying to get across in a tag?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Interview—Experiences in School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tell me some of the memories you have of school: elementary, middle school, high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a difference in school and education? If so, describe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe a successful student. How would you describe yourself as a student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you consider good grades? Do you consider yourself a successful student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think your parents or other family members perceive school? Do you remember your parents or any family member telling you anything about school? Did they talk about college?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the teachers that stand out as your favorites? Why do they stand out? Is school important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a difference between school and learning? If so describe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Third Interview—Literacy Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define Literacy. Define illiteracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you remember about reading and writing before school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you learn to read and write? What was reading and writing like in elementary, middle school, high school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of reading and writing do you do at your job? At home? At school? In the gang?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What type of reading and writing did/do you see your parents do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you like to read?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fourth Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This wasn't a straight question and answer interview. During this session I tried to get my participants to just talk about their reading and writing, what they would say to teachers, and how they saw their stories helping others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for analysis. During the interview sessions, I shared the artifacts I had collected with each participant and recorded their reaction. The data collected through the interviews
became central to developing the participants’ individual stories.

**Collection of Written and Visual Artifacts**

When I first walked into the classroom, I observed my students tagging and I started to collect these tags. As the school year progressed I collected all artifacts to support my exploration of the worlds in which Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield, interacted.

I collected written texts created by the students, parents, friends, and courts which included raps, tags, and stories. I collected visual texts such as drawings and video tapes the students made in and outside my classroom. I collected school assignments they completed in my classroom and in other school settings and documents from the courts and school hearings.

In order to facilitate my analysis, I carefully reduced and organized the data into four large three ring binders, one for each of the selected students. Each case study data base contains: transcription of interviews; artifacts collected from schools, homes, and work; field notes written while I was their teacher and advocate, and field notes taken after interviews and visits in the home and school. A complete overview of data sets appears in Table 4.7. One
example of each type of data collected appears in Appendices A, B, C.

**Analysis of the Data**

Merriam (1988) states that data collection and analysis are an ongoing processes and this recursiveness begins with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read. Emerging insights, hunches, and tentative hypotheses direct the next phase of data collection, which in turn leads to refinement or reformulation of one's question . . . (p. 119)

She emphasizes the need for on-going analysis stating that without it you "run the risk of ending up with data that are unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming . . . " (p.124). In this section I provide an in-depth discussion of data analysis that began with my data collection and concluded with the final draft of my dissertation. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) state, "Analysis involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p.145). In order to begin analysis, "the information must be organized so that intensive analysis can begin" (Merriam, 1988, p.126). For a case study, Yin (1984) states that data should be organized into a case study data
Table 4.7.
Overview of Case Study data Base.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Description of Data</th>
<th>Citation Key</th>
<th># of Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Espinoza, Lil Boy Blue (LBB)</td>
<td>Interviews: Parents (IP), Gang (IG), School (IS), Literacy (IL), Talk session (ITS)</td>
<td>IP, 2/97, IG, 9/97, IS, 9/97, IL, 10/97, ITS, 10/97</td>
<td>13, 9, 9, 3, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smurf</td>
<td>Interviews: Parents, Gang (IG), School (IS), Literacy (IL), Talk session (ITS)</td>
<td>IP, 2/97, IG, 9/97, IS, 9/97, IL, 10/97, ITS, 10/97</td>
<td>13, 10, 13, 5, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvarez, Juice</td>
<td>Interviews: Parents, Gang, School, Literacy, Talk</td>
<td>IP, 2/97, IG, 9/97, IS, 9/97, IL, 10/97, ITS, 10/97</td>
<td>3, 11, 19, 6, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lil Garfield</td>
<td>Interviews: Parents, Gang, School, Literacy, Talk</td>
<td>IP, 2/97, IG, 9/97, IS, 9/97, IL, 10/97, ITS, 10/97</td>
<td>3, 13, 11, 8, 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

base, or what Patton (1980) refers to as the case record. A case record pulls together and organizes the data into a comprehensive primary resource package. My analysis followed three phases. In each phase I found myself reorganizing, breaking the data into workable units, and merging data.
During these three phases, I always choose the appropriate information. This involved taking pages (400+ pages) of field notes and artifacts (tags, letters, notes, portfolio) gathered from four semesters (1/95-5/96) of classroom work and reducing this set to manageable units.

In phase one of data analysis, I placed all artifacts and research field notes I gathered while I was their teacher into files marked with participants' names. I began to sift through the artifacts and pick the ones that illustrated the literacy found in the school and gang. In the second phase, I examined each file, transcribed interviews, marked field notes for each participant. I then placed the transcriptions, artifacts, and field notes into four large three ring binders labeled with each participant's name. In this phase, I chose the data that seemed to be the strongest in illustrating each participants' story and for answering my research question. I organized these binders into four sections: interviews, gang artifacts, school artifacts, and field notes. Each section was arranged in chronological order. Merriam states, "Data analysis is the process of making sense out of one's data" (p. 127). As I was conducting interviews and reorganizing my data, I kept asking, what is going on, and
why is it happening?

My participants have been involved in "all phases of research from envisioning the study to writing up findings" (Merriam, 1988, p. 170). In the third phase of analysis, I turned to my students to help me "make sense" of the data. It was important that they help in the analysis of their story. I wanted to know what they thought was going on and why. As I kept revisiting the data and the professional literature, I became aware of the diversity of my students' lives. Their experiences took place at home, in friends' houses, at church, in the park, at work and while hanging out. Phelan and colleagues (1991) state:

Adolescents in this society move from one social context to another. Students' movement from one setting to another . . . such transitions frequently require students' efforts and skills especially when contexts are governed by different values and norms. . . ." (p. 224)

As I reviewed my field notes and listened to the audio-taped interviews, I became more and more aware of the different social contexts my students were participating in and the different experiences they were having. These experiences were taking place in different worlds. Boykin's 1986; Boykin & Toms, 1985) research of African American children states that experiences are part of a world with distinctive socialization agenda.
Within each world in which my students participate there are rules and conventions associated specifically to that world and its form of literacies. The social contexts of the world dictated the function of the literacies. From my data, I was able to construct four different worlds my students participated in: family community, gang community, formal education community, and juvenile courts community.

Family Community

Family community consists of the participants and their immediate family, extended family members, and their own new family. In this world my students take on several roles. Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield are sons, cousins, nephews, uncles, brothers, boyfriends and fathers. All roles do not apply to all participants. For example, Lil Garfield is not a father. The family community included the activities such birthday parties, family get-together and holidays when the family comes together with friends. If a need arose, such as putting on a wedding, resources were gathered from all members in the family.

Gang Community

As adolescents the majority of my participants’ experiences seem to take place in their gang world. As stated in Chapter Two, the informants are members of the
Manzanita Lynch Mob Crip (MLMC). The gang holds parties where all members get together. At times, members gain financial support from the gang. In the MLMC organization Lil Boy Blue is known as a midget, and Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield are peewees. The leaders are OG, "original gangsta." The OG's started the gang and dictate what the gang will officially do.

**Formal Education Community**

In this educational world, Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield's roles are placed upon them. They are all students. When they first entered school as kindergartners, they inherited this role, and it stays with them until they complete their formal education or leave school. Many students in the school system are often pushed aside or pushed out (Fine, 1991; Smith, 1996). One day after teaching these students, I sat and reflected on the day. I wrote:

> The fact is these kids have been marginalized--outcasts. They have been thrown out, Cast aside because of their language, music and the way they dress. School doesn't want them. They didn't want school.

(FN 3/21/95, p. 21)

My participants inherited another role in the formal education community--the bad student, the troublemaker, someone not wanted in this community.
Juvenile Courts Community

When an adolescent allegedly breaks the law, he or she is moved into the world of juvenile court. This involves one or more court appearances and in some cases placement in juvenile detention center. The role these adolescent have is one of juvenile delinquent—law breaker. They become parolees who have probation officers. The families also have a role in this world of juvenile courts, but this is rarely officially recognized. Nevertheless each family is affected by this world.

The last phase of data analysis resulted in still another view of the data I had collected. Towards the completion of data analysis and the writing of the dissertation, I moved from four case studies to two case studies. Since I was working with two sets of brothers often their stories were similar so I decided to combine case studies to be representative of families instead of individuals. I then organized the two case study data base into four major sections. Each section contained my interpretation of the transcriptions and artifacts associated with each of the two families. With this organization, I was able to look at the literacies used by this boys and how they function in each world. However,
after writing the first case study, Kathy Whitmore, a committee member, suggested a different format for the case study. She suggested looking at the worlds and the roles each participant took within these communities. I decided to organize my interpretation of the data according to the four communities: family community, gang community, formal school community, juvenile court community. In one three ring binder I placed the data related to family community and gang community together, because in these two worlds my participants achieved greater success. In a second three ring binder, I organized data related to formal education with juvenile court. In these two worlds my participants had the least amount of access to the resources they needed to be successful.

In Chapters Five, I share my interpretation of the family community. I include each of the four participants and their stories (see figure 4.2). Chapter Six is the participants' stories in relation to the gang community. In Chapter Seven, I share my interpretation of the formal educational community with the juvenile court community. Within each section I share each participant's experiences.
Chapters Five, Six, and Seven feature the participants' words in order to hear their voices as they talk about their worlds and literacies.

Figure 4.2. A Map of the Organization of Chapter Five.
On February 11, 1998, I attended Lil Boy Blue's daughter's birthday party at the local pizza parlor. As we sat and ate the pizza, Lil Boy Blue, Smurf and I recalled all the pizza we ate at Nuestra Casa (alternative high school program). Smurf stated, "I didn't eat pizza. I was always working." More jokes and teasing took place. At that time, I realized just how far Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, and I had come from that first day in class.

As I reread my field notes and my personal journal, I pictured that first day of school: February 1995. I was apprehensive and not sure of what I was going to find. Smurf the class leader was there. I think it was about a week later that a very quiet Lil Boy Blue showed up. Those first couple of weeks were a testing time for us all. They kept asking what happened to their other teacher, wanted to know why she left them, and wondered if I would do the same. A little over a month later, I noticed some changes in Smurf. I wrote in my field notes,

I'm worried. Smurf was my worker, and the one who kept things going. But the last couple of weeks I have gotten very little from him. A couple of times he
worked on his raps, but he has lost interest in them. (FN 3/6/95, p.16)

I took the opportunity to talk with Lil Boy Blue and Bad Boy about Smurf and the incident that resulted in the death of Oso. I recorded the incident in my field notes:

Lil Boy Blue was here today. He and his friends worked hard on math. We talked about grieving and the death of Oso (an older member in the gang). They asked me about grieving. They talked about how they think about Oso all the time. They wake up in the morning thinking about Oso. On the way to school, they look up at a mountain where a cross was put for Oso. I told them I was worried about Smurf. Lil Boy Blue said he was locked up for three months. (FN 3/6/96, pp.17, 18)

I learned that the boys had never really experienced grieving and that Smurf was locked up in a Juvenile Detention Center while the homies were mourning together the loss of Oso. What I was seeing in Smurf was anger and hurt. Smurf was tagging EBK (everybody killa). I decided to call and talk with his mother, and this telephone call was the beginning of a new understanding of my students and their families.

For the purpose of this study, family community includes the immediate family and the extended family. It also includes the new young families of Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, and Juice. In this community, I include activities that bring the families together: birthday parties, weddings,
garage sales, funerals, and times when the family sits together to talk.

The Espinoza Family: Parents, Grandparents

Lil Boy Blue and Smurf are third generation American Mexicans. Their father, Felipe, was raised on the southwest side of Tucson and their mother Kristina was raised on the west side of Tucson, but moved with her family to the southwest side. In an interview with Kristina, their mother, she shared with me how her family came to America:

Lil Boy Blue and Smurf are third generation on both sides of the family. My grandma’s, their great grandma’s marriage was having a hard time so they decided to come to America. It didn’t work out and he left her and the daughter. This all took place during the depression. My grandma earned money by cleaning house. She got $1.00 per house. She would rush and clean one house then rush and clean another. She was also a seamstress. My mother was the oldest. My father was abandoned by his parents. He and his sister and I think another sister lived under the St. Mary Bridge in a cardboard box. They got married at a young age-18 year old. (IP Espinoza, 2/96, p. 7)

When I asked Felipe, Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s father, about his family, he replied:

I don’t know much about my family. My grandfather worked for the railroad. I’m not sure where he was from. He fought in the Mexican war. My grandmother is still alive. My mother was born in Tombstone. My father was born here [Tucson] and lived his whole life in Tucson. My father was in a gang-pachucos, zoot suits. But now he is really religious. (IP Espinoza, 2/96, p. 7)
Both Kristina and Felipe were born in Tucson and have lived on the west side of Tucson for 22 years. They lived two blocks from each other during their high school years. It was Felipe's senior year when they finally met. Felipe described how they met:

I decided I was going [senior prom] so I had to pick the best looking chick I could find. I saw her coming down the hall. I said, "haven't I met you somewhere." Kristina's response was, "you can't try that line on me I don't think so, I don't go out." Two weeks later I bought her a watch for her birthday and asked her out. (IP Espinoza, 2/96, p. 8).

Kristina was raised very strictly and wasn't allowed out of house without permission. According to Kristina, "we couldn't even look out the window if someone drove by and honked. That wasn't what nice girls did" (IP, Espinoza, 2/96, p. 8). After the prom they continued to date, but when Felipe and Kristina were dating, they had to take Kristina's cousin with them as chaperone and Kristina had to be in by 9:00 pm.

Felipe and Kristina have been married for 26 years. Kristina shared with me that Felipe never really proposed. He would say, "when we get married," but never an official proposal. He did promise her that when they got married he would have a house for her to move into, so Kristina went from her parents' house to her own house.
In a second interview, Kristina, Felipe and I talked about the boys. Kristina said:

Lil Boy Blue was a typical middle child. He just went along with everything. He would be pulled from one side to the other. "You are a boy so you’re on my side," said Smurf. The older sister would say, "he’s a brat, you’re on my side, you’re closer to my age."

(IP Espinoza, 2/96, p. 3)

Smurf is the youngest child, the youngest grandchild, the baby of the entire family. According to Kristina, Smurf is very spoiled. She shared with me that when Smurf was small, her mom had a special drawer full of candy just for Smurf and that she still keeps the draw full for him today. To Kristina the boys were just typical boys. There is a cul-de-sac down from their house where the older boys in the neighborhood would get together and play baseball. Smurf would tag along with Lil Boy Blue because there was no one his age. Kristina explained:

The only kid close to him [Smurf] was a little boy across the street. They were really religious and were always at church. I mean they go to private school and they go to church. Whenever he [Smurf] got a chance he’d go play with him, but that was very rare. Smurf always tagged along with Lil Boy Blue and his friends. That’s how Smurf started hanging around with older kids.

(IP Espinoza, 2/96, p. 5)

Throughout the interview Kristina would remember stories from when the boys were young. This memory was triggered by an action taken by one of the granddaughters. Lil Boy Blue
came into the family room and stated he needed some money for gas. One of Kristina’s granddaughters gave him three pennies. Kristina looked at Felipe and said, “What does that remind you of ah?” They smiled and Kristina shared with me another story:

One time we were... I don't know where we were going. We were in the car. They [the kids] were all sitting in the back seat Felipe and I were discussing bills and Felipe goes, “I don't even have money for gas.” He goes like that to me, you know, and then Lil Boy Blue pops his little head and he pulls out a nickel a dime and a penny. “Here dad, I got money. He gives him his money.”

(IP Espinoza, 2/96, p.6)

When the boys were younger, Kristine explained that they had chores they were expected to do every day:

They all had chores to do: like one had to set the table, the other one had to clean the table, and the other one had to sweep, and they would rotate. When they got older one had dishes one day, the other one had to clean the living room, the other one had to clean the company bathroom. That’s what they called it. They used to hate that one and the dishes. I think they hated the dishes more than anything else and vacuuming. They all had to take turns vacuuming. They all know how to wash and cook and clean.

(IP Espinoza, 2/96, p.8)

Like many “typical boys,” Lil Boy Blue and Smurf got involved with sports. Baseball was their favorite:

Lil Boy Blue is the one that liked baseball. Every year you know he came home with a flyer. “Look, mom, they’re going to have baseball at the park and he’s all excited. My Dad was a real baseball fan and he [Lil Boy Blue] used to go and watch the baseball game with my Dad on TV. Felipe goes, “I’ll put you in cause that’s what you want.” Then Smurf just followed along. The
fact is Smurf would always join at the last minute. "I don't want to play baseball this year I don't want to."
At the first game, "I want to play baseball all my friends are on that team I want to be on that team."
(IP Espinoza, 2/96, p. 6)

The boys who played baseball in the cul-de-sac would also join. The cul-de-sac team became an official team, playing baseball in the city recreational sports program. Felipe would be either an assistant coach or the coach. During an interview Kristina and Felipe laugh as they think back to trying to coach Smurf. Felipe explains:

I would try and teach him to throw the ball this way and [Smurf would say] "I know how I know how." [Felipe said] Let me just show you the way I want you to try." "No I already know I already know. . ." (IP, Espinoza, 2/96, p.7).

Kristina stated, "he would come home upset."

Smurf always had advantage because of Lil Boy Blue because like when Lil Boy Blue was playing ball, Smurf would go with him to all practices. So by the time Smurf got to t-ball he had it made and them he even played one time. We were short a player. We had to forfeit. Smurf joined in at that point. He was playing with majors, Lil Boy Blue was in the minors. They decided to play for fun and Smurf played with them. (IP, Espinoza, 2/96, p. 9)

Kristina shared that the boys still have all their awards. I played with Lil Boy Blue and Smurf on a co-ed softball team that was organized by Kristina and Felipe. Watching Lil Boy Blue and Smurf, I could tell they were very talented athletes. I wondered if they had ever played school sports.
Debbie: Did they play on any school teams?

Kristina: No.

Smurf: We never did play anything for school Lil Boy Blue had tried.

Kristina: That’s when Lil Boy Blue got into track [middle school], he was doing really well.  

(IP, Espinoza, 2/96, p. 3)

During an earlier visit at the Espinoza’s home, we started talking about Lil Boy Blue’s experience with track. He had the opportunity to participate in a state track meet for middle school. At this meet, Lil Boy Blue took first in the 100-yard relay, second in the 100 yard sprint and third in the mile relay (FN, 3/30/96, p.11). I kept asking about school sports because I found it hard to believe that Lil Boy Blue was never approached to run track. He told me he wanted to, but he said he never knew where to sign up.

Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s family did a lot of things together:

Debbie: Do you take family vacations?

Kristina: When the kids were little we would go to Disneyland every two years. We took the same route as we did when we got married. We leave Tucson and go to San Diego spend the night and go to Sea World, from Sea World we go to Disneyland.  

(IP, Espinoza, 2/96, p. 8)

Not only do they take family vacations, but they do so to relive memories of their honeymoon.
As I became more involved with the Espinoza family, I was invited to many different family activities. The first activity was a garage sale. Kristina’s parents were getting ready to celebrate their 50th anniversary, and the family had decided to put on several garage sales to earn money. I told them I had some things to contribute. I was invited to come to the aunt’s house. Saturday morning, I loaded my truck and nervously drove to the aunt’s house. I wasn’t sure what to expect, but Kristina and Felipe said they would meet me there. After unloading the truck, I was invited into the house to eat breakfast and soon noticed that this was more than a garage sale.

All the relatives showed up: aunts, uncles, grandparents, and the kids also came by. This was a family social. Everyone took part. While the family members talked and laughed together in both English and Spanish, the garage sale took place in the background.

I was invited to come back on Sunday. Entering the home, I discovered the same thing taking place. Family and friends were sitting around talking and eating. I learned this was only the first phase of the garage sale. The second phase took place at the grandparents’ (Kristina’s parents) house the next weekend. At the grandparents’ house, I found
the same social setting. Things were being sold from the garage sale on both weekends and stories were being told. I never heard how much money was made or if the garage sale was a success. The success was the coming together of the family and friends. While at the grandparents’ house, I was given the tour of their small home. In the grandparent’s bedroom, Kristina showed me the drawer that had candy and toys just for Smurf.

Next, the Grandma took me into a room located on the side of the house. This room was full of religious artifacts hanging on the walls and sitting on tables. There was an altar with candles, statues, and written prayers. As the Grandma pointed out different artifacts, she told me the stories behind them. She later told me how all the boys (Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s friends) came over after the death of Oso and prayed for their friend and for Smurf who was locked up.

The next social events I was invited to were Birthday parties. Kristina said, “Birthdays are a big thing” and I soon learned that for the Espinoza family they are big things. The extended family is invited, as well as friends and their families. The first birthday party I was invited to was one of Kristina’s granddaughters. The house was
decorated and full of people gathered together in different locations talking. There was food to munch on while we talked and waited for dinner. Everywhere you went you could hear dialogue. Once again, I found myself in a setting where people code-switched between Spanish and English with ease. While visiting with Kristina and her mother, I asked them why they switched between the two languages. Kristina’s mother told me that when the kids started school they would bring friends home who didn’t speak Spanish and as parents they were making friends who didn’t speak Spanish. The family had friends that spoke only English and friends that spoke only Spanish. They switch back and forth between the two languages so everyone will know what is being said. In the second interview with Kristina and Felipe, Kristina shared with me what a birthday was like for her kids growing up:

I always used to make them their favorite French toast or pancakes or whatever. I always used to stick little candles in there and sing, “Happy Birthday,” then I would wrap their birthday outfit and put it on their beds at night so in the morning they wake up and they knew they were going to get a new outfit for school.

(IP Espinoza, 2/96, p. 5)

In the evening, there would be the big family party. This little ritual wasn’t just for the kids. Kristina shared how the kids would celebrate her birthday:
When it was my birthday they would do the same thing. Sylvia [the oldest daughter] learned how to make breakfast. The very first time they started doing this Sylvia made me scrambled eggs and Lil Boy Blue made the toast and Smurf [said] "I passed the food to Lil Boy Blue and Sylvia. Sylvia the eggs and Lil Boy Blue the butter."

(IP Espinoza, 2/96, p. 10)

As the kids have grown older and have their own families, the special birthdays are now celebrated for the grandkids.

Another series of events in the family community I was lucky enough to be a part was the Christmas season which starts on Thanksgiving day and ends New Year's Eve. The first event of the season takes place on Thanksgiving. Names of relatives and friends are put in a bowl for people to draw. You buy a gift for less than $5.00 for the person whose name you draw. The family (grandkids, great grandkids, uncles and aunts) and friends get together on the first Saturday to decorate the grandparents' house for Christmas. Tons of lights are strung around the outside of the house and many decorations are put up inside the house. After all the decorations are strung, the family eats dinner and exchanges presents. This event signifies the beginning of the Christmas season.

Next is the tamale making ritual, designed primarily for the women in the family community. At one time there were four generations (from great grandma, to great
granddaughter) standing around the table making tamales (see figure 5.1). The youngest member was four years old. When she was ready to help, she was placed on a chair and given the tools needed. She wanted to work; I'm not sure who made the biggest mess, her or me. According to Kristina, I had more maza (dough) on me. Figure 5.2 shows the number of tamales we made that day. As we made the tamales, stories were shared. I learned that the amount we made was nothing compared to what was made in the past when tamales were a second income for the family.

While we waited for the tamales to cook, Kristina's mom brought out the newspaper and turned to the section where

Figure 5.1. Four Generations Making Tamales.
word games are located. I sat and watched her quickly complete the seek and find word puzzle. I was told that she is the champion scrabble player. I began to understand where Lil Boy Blue got his ability to play and win the word games in class. As I sat at the kitchen table where we gathered to talk, I looked around and noticed the uses of literacy in this home. On the kitchen table was a holder full

![Image of 12 dozen Tamales](image.jpg)

**Figure 5.2.** 12 dozen Tamales were made.

of letters from people and bills that needed to be paid. The refrigerator was covered with magnets that were pictures or quotes and these magnets were holding up work done by the grandkids and great grandkids. While sitting around the table, catalogs were passed around. Always present was oral
dialogue. It was finally time to taste our work. After everyone was served, Kristina's mother sat down at the head of the table. I am not sure what happened, but as she sat she told me this is a "matriarchal" house. We laughed.

The next big event during this season is Christmas Eve. The whole family--cousins, aunts, uncles, grandkids and friends--come together at the home of Kristina's parents. When I arrived, Kristina's father greeted me with, "I'm sick, I think I ate one of the tamales you made." This became the joke. As I ate the tamales, I would say, "Mmmm, good, I must have made it," and if anyone else stated how good the tamales were, I quickly claimed them as the ones I made. Lil Boy Blue and Smurf laughed as they told me they heard how I got the tamale maza all over me. Kristina reminded me I did the same thing making cookies the year before at Christmas time.

At midnight we got together in the living room. We stood in a big circle and Kristina's mother stated how grateful she was for family and friends. Everyone gave each other a Christmas hug and gifts were passed out. Kristina explained that this tradition came about because as kids got married, holidays would be split between in-laws and their immediate family. By coming together and exchanging gifts
among cousins, uncles, aunts, and grandparents on Christmas Eve, it left Christmas available for immediate family celebration and time to visit in-laws (FN, 12/97, p. 201).

Over the last three years, I have seen the Espinoza come together as a family during tragedy and during the celebrations of holidays and birthdays. They have supported each other as the kids have moved out into their own homes and struggled to make their families. This is a family that understands what a family is, and a family that has multiple uses of literacy.

As I became a regular visitor in Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s home, I witnessed the closeness of this family community. I also started to notice the literacy in the home. On the refrigerator there were magnets holding pictures, notes and bills. When the grandkids were there Kristina opened a cabinet which had a shelf full of children books. She explained that these books were Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, and Sylvia’s, when they were little, and now these books are for the grandkids. I asked Kristina if she ever took the kids to the library and she said they each had their own library card and would go once a month. She would let them go and pick their own books. Smurf’s favorite book was Curious George. In kindergarten, Smurf wrote about this
favorite book (see Figure 5.3). During the month the books were checked out, she would ask the children about the books and they would tell her what they had read. However, when they got older and in school, she felt the school library would be there for the kids to check out books (FN, 11/97, p.110). There were greeting cards located on the counter and

![Figure 5.3. Smurf's (kindergarten) writing about his favorite book.](image)

in a bookshelf. I noticed magazines and catalogues in the living room. At one time, Felipe brought in his brief case which contained all the important papers such as W2 forms, tax forms, school papers. I realized that in this home, the kids were raised in a literate environment.
As I retell these experiences, I recall Kristina's statement about family:

My mom feels like when there is a tragedy in the family that is when the family should be the closest. Nothing is going to break that or take that. My family is really close. (IP, Espinoza, 2/96, p.11)

This quote described the Espinoza family. They come together to support each other in time of need. Nothing seems to be able to break the strength they have as a family.

One Family: Grandpa Gonzalez

and Mom Alvarez

In the same way that there are no two fingerprints that are the same, there are no two families that are the same. Juice and Lil Garfield's come from a single parent family. This is a family that struggles every day to maintain the family structure. Discovering the story of this family was not easy. Juice and Lil Garfield seldom talk about their past. However, through interviews and asking questions when the moment was right, I was able to put together a small part of this family story. Juice and Lil Garfield rarely talked about their fathers, and as far as I can tell their fathers have never been a part of their lives. Juice told me the only memory he has of his father is of a grandmother and jewelry (FN 9/22/97, p. 213). Lil Garfield has never talked
about his father. The only family they know is their mother and her side of the family.

For many children of single parents, grandparents become very important. This was true for Juice and Lil Garfield. Their childhood was divided between living with their mother and living with their grandparents. Juice once told me that when his mom felt like being a mother they would live with her. Diane (Juice and Lil Garfield’s mother) told me, “I’ve done my booze, I’ve done my drugs, and I’ve done my men.” When they lived with their mom, this was Juice and Lil Garfield’s world.

Their grandmother (Diane’s mother) is from Kansas and their grandfather (Diane’s father) is from Tucson, Arizona. Often I waited in the living room in the grandfather’s house for the boys to get dressed, admiring the picture of the young soldier and the many military awards that hang on the wall. I finally asked the grandfather about the picture, and he told me that it was him. I asked him what war he served in and he reply, “WW2.” The grandfather joined the army at the age of sixteen serving in the Rangers. Often he was behind the enemy’s line. I was excited to hear stories about the “war to end all wars.” However, to my disappointment he told me he doesn’t like talking about the war. I only could
imagine the sadness and hurt he must have felt. I found out he got a purple heart and was wounded several times. He is now on veteran disability. The boys told me they have never heard him talk about the war (FN 2/5/98, p.232).

After World War Two, the grandfather went to a plumbing school in Kansas on the GI bill where he met his wife. They lived in Tucson in the same house (the one the grandfather lives in today) for 40 some years. I met the grandmother a couple of times. The first was at the car wash the kids put together for Plucy (a homie killed in a drive by). She came to get her car washed and to check on her grandkids. Juice introduced me to her and we talked. She told me about her daughter who was also a teacher. She told me how much she worries about her grandkids and the other boys in the gang, but she also said that they are all good kids (FN 10/95, p.91).

The next time I met the grandmother, she was very sick. I learned from the boys she had cancer and was dying. She passed away in December 1996. This was a hard time for both Juice and Lil Garfield. After the funeral Lil Garfield wrote in his personal journal (see Figure 5.4) about his grandmother and grandfather: "Today my Tata [grandfather] for the first time I ever heard him speak out of his heart
and not the cold man society made him." Lil Garfield was aware of how society had turned his grandfather into a cold man. Diane has shared with me that Lil Garfield and Tata have a special relationship. He is Tata's favorite. During early August

![Figure 5.4. Lil Garfield’s Journal entry about his “Nana.”](image)

1997 the courts were trying to decide if a live-in treatment center for alcohol and drug abuse would be best for Lil Garfield. He kept telling them he couldn’t leave his Tata.
His fear was that while he was gone his Tata would die. In his journal, he wrote about how his grandparents have given him every thing — "love, a house, food... and so much more. And also the tools that I need to live and to be the successful person I want to be." On the following page of the journal is a picture of his Nana with the words "I miss you" written beside it. On the top of the page in big print are the words "I HOPE U CAN HEAR ME.

Like Lil Garfield, Juice also wrote about his grandmother in his journal. Juice explains just how important Nana meant to him in the first sentence (see Figure 5.5). "My Nana was like a mother to me." Diane told me that Juice was Nana’s favorite. As you read more of the journal entry, you learn just how much Nana meant to him:

When I was small before I went to bed we [Nana and Juice] would pray the Our Father together. But now that she's dead I feel [sic] lost I can't talk to nobody because I have no trust so I write in my journals to myself about how I feel [sic] inside... (Juice’s journal 12/27/96)

Both Lil Garfield and Juice turn to writing to express and to understand their feelings during the death of their Nana. It is obvious that both Juice and Garfield have a deep love for their grandparents.

Diane is not a neglectful parent. However, Diane was very much aware that she wasn’t a real mother to her boys.
She knows that her mother was more of a mother to them then she was. Diane said:

I walked into being a mother at their teenage years which is extremely hard. I wasn't the mother from the beginning my mother was the mother. (IP, Alvaraz, 2/97, p. 3)

Figure 5.5 Juice's journal enters about his grandma.

When the boys were young, she seemed to know she needed to do better for her children. She decided to go back and get her GED:

...
Debbie: So you did get a GED?

Diane: Oh yea, I went back and this is how they [school teachers] led me to believe I was stupid that I couldn’t, but when I went back I didn’t even try the test I just want in and boom boom I took the test.

Debbie: Did you take the classes?

Diane: It was all welfare mothers. I lived two blocks from there. All we ever done was go to the house to get high. I never study or nothing, but they [school teachers] had me believe and I had such fear cause I was stupid, but I passed them.

Debbie: What seemed to make the difference?

Diane: I can comprehend better. When I went back the lady told me the key to it is read, read, read books. Anything you can get and as long as you can comprehend you can pass. That’s what I done. I read everything I could read mostly junk: Inquiry, true romances, dirty books. I went in there and I passed never knowing that the whole time thinking I was going to flunk, cause I was so stupid. I had the attitude I’m still going to flunk anyway. (IP, Alvaraz, 2/97, p. 11)

As she told me the story, I could tell she was so happy and had pride in her accomplishments. I decided to ask her what was her next step:

Debbie: Now what do you plan to do?

Diane: I want to go back to school one day when my Lil Garfield is 18. Right now, my thing is more trying to get him ready for society. (IP, Alvarez, 2/97, p. 6)

While getting ready for the GED, Diane discovered the joy of reading. I wanted to know if this was shared with her boys. I asked her if the boys had books and if she read to
them when they were young. She replied:

They didn’t do a lot of reading. They had books. They wanted me to read, but I was in my own thing. I never done those things. (IP, Alvarez, 2/97, p. 11)

When Victor was in seventh grade and Lil Garfield was in fifth grade, Diane went to jail for possession of marijuana. In an interview I asked Diane about this time.

Debbie: When you went into prison who did they live with?

Diane: They started out living with my sister and Lil Garfield lived with my brother. Then my brother kicked Lil Garfield out and Lil Garfield came by [the house] riding the bike twelve midnight over here. (IP, Alvarez, 2/98, p. 4)

As Diane shared this part of her story she was sad and started to cry. I told her she didn’t have to tell me if it hurt too much to remember.

Debbie: How old was he then?

Diane: He was little. He was just going on twelve late at night on the bike.

Debbie: What was your brother’s reason for doing that?

Diane: [Diane takes a deep breath] He [Lil Garfield] wouldn’t do what he [the uncle] said. (IP, Alvarez, 2/98, p. 4)

Juice’s time with his aunt wasn’t much better:

Juice went to live with my sister, and they weren’t very fair to them. They made them clean the yard, this and that. They would be punished and yet her kids wouldn’t have to do the work, and my kids have to do the work. I think that’s why my kids have a real problem with that sister. They love my other sister but
this sister they can take her or leave her. They can’t stand her kids.  
(IP Alvarez, 2/98, p. 3)

Diane went to prison for two years and according to her  
"those two years, it seemed like 50 years." She served her  
time in a prison in Bear Canyon near Flagstaff, Arizona. The  
family had to rent a van to go visit her. It was an all day  
trip. The family also sent her money while she was in  
prison. Diane stated the hardest time was when they left and  
she was left alone (FN 2/23/98, p. 243).

Both Juice and Lil Garfield have stated that when their  
mom went to prison, their life changed. They started to have  
problems and get into trouble. This is when their cousins  
introduced them to the gang. Juice felt like he had no one  
to talk to, no one to trust. Diane was released from prison  
when Juice was in ninth grade. She is still on probation and  
will be for another three years. This is another stress on  
the family. Her probation officer can come into the home at  
anytime.

Several times I asked Diane what life was like when the  
kids were little. She reminded me that she was high most of  
the time when they were little. Because I wanted a better  
understanding of her world, I decided to have her share a  
little of her background in school and growing up. She grew
up on the south side of Tucson and attended Brighton High School. Often as she went and tried to help her boys at Brighton High School, she would deal with people who had been her teachers. As we sat at the school and waited for our appointment, she would tell stories of when she was a student. High school was not a good time for her.

Debbie: What was your experience as a student?

Diane: It wasn’t good. I didn’t comprehend a lot, and I came from a time when they would throw erasers at you. You know it was legal. It wasn’t like now, they can’t touch you. It was like you get in trouble, you got paddled or you got a eraser thrown at you. I couldn’t comprehend as far as junior high. I didn’t really like school. I think it was because the teacher would have favorites, and they would help their favorites and the rest, oh well. I couldn’t really comprehend a lot, I really couldn’t read.

Debbie: What made you just finally quit, drop out?

Diane: ahhhumm I wasn’t happy in school. I was overweight. I seen a lot of people you know doing what you do in high school. I wasn’t included in that, so I was like a sore thumb I guess, and umm the teachers never made it easier.

Debbie: Did you ever get in trouble?

Diane: All the time, because I wasn’t happy at school, you know, I couldn’t learn. Teachers didn’t really didn’t help you, and so I just started ditching. (IP, Alvarez, 2/98. p. 2)

Diane was unhappy in high school. She felt like she didn’t belong and teachers didn’t care.

Diane’s biggest regret is not being a mother to her
kids. However, today she is doing everything in her power to be their mom, to be there for them now. She has cried several times on the phone and in person as we talked about her kids and their future. For Diane, everyday life is hard. She works 40 to 50 hours a week to support her family. She has to deal with government bureaucracy as she tries to maintain her family. She has asked me to write letters to the welfare agency verifying she lives alone with her sons. The first time she concluded the conversation with me by saying that she didn’t have anyone else to ask.

In late December 1997, I had the opportunity to help Diane move into her father’s home. She made this move so her son, Juice, could have her little house for his new family. As I helped her move her possessions into a back bedroom, I became more aware of Diane’s simple life and the fears and struggles she faces each day to make her world work. Through the struggles of this family you find a mother who cares.

Around the same time Lil Garfield was court ordered to go to a live-in-treatment center for teenagers with drinking and drug problems. Diane asked me to take him to the home, because she had to go to work. If she missed work she wouldn’t get paid. I called her that night and reported how the house looked and how Lil Garfield reacted to having to
stay there. She told me she was grateful and explained that she felt like she couldn't take her son, because she wasn't sure she would be able to leave him. She was crying. She did in fact have to work, but the real problem was she wasn't sure she could leave her son at the center in the hand of strangers. Keeping her own life going is hard and discouraging, and it has had its effect on the boys. Diane, Juice and Lil Garfield are always struggling to make the family community a reality. Several times, when I have gone to visit Juice and Lil Garfield, I would arrive during an argument where both mother and son were yelling at each other.

Lil Garfield wrote about one incident when he got into a fight with his cousins and then the family (see figure 5.6). In his journal, Lil Garfield wrote that when he got home he and his cousin started "tripen" or fighting. This soon included the aunt, mom, and Big Pops (Grandfather) and everybody. Lil Garfield writes:

I felt real bad, sad, confused, betrayed, bewildered, nervous, and scared. At the same time I wated [sic] to fight somebody But I dident [sic]. I went out side and prayed But I still dident feel right so I got my clothes ready and went to Sunday mass. (Lil Garfield's journal, June 15, 1998)
After mass Lil Garfield claimed he "felt good" and even though he was angry and mad, he wanted to apologize to his aunt.

**Figure 5.6** Lil Garfield’s journal entry about a Fight with Family.

In April 1997, I attended a teacher-parent conference meeting at Brighton High School with Juice and his mother. I watched Juice hold his mother’s hand and at one time he laid
his head on her shoulder. He seemed to feel safe in this room with his mother. As Juice and Lil Garfield sat in court, it was their mother who stood at their side. It was their mother who picked them up from juvenile detention center. When they were in trouble, Juice and Lil Garfield knew that all they had to do was call their mom and she would be there to fight for them. When the school was willing to "throw" them aside, it was their mother who came to their side. But there were also times when their mom let them down.

While in the treatment center, Lil Garfield wrote about how his mom sacrifice stating, (see figure 5.7) she "makes sure me and my brother don’t go without. . . ."

In January 1997, I discovered just how much the aunts and uncles didn’t really believe in Juice and Lil Garfield. I picked them up to take them to their first day of school, and Diane informed me that the uncles had made bets on how long they would last in school. They gave him three days. When he completed his first semester, there was no celebration at that time.

I have been invited to the Alvarez’s family parties. But my relationship with Juice and Lil Garfield’s family is quite different than my relationship with Lil Boy Blue and
Smurf’s family. I am the teacher, the advocate for Juice and Lil Garfield and as a result I am respected by the other family members, but I haven’t been able to get to know them like I know Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s extended family.

Figure 5.7. Lil Garfield’s writing about is mom.

However, as I have joined the family parties, I see a family who loves and supports each other. They laugh, tell jokes and cry together. There are also times when the Alvarez family structure seems to struggle to maintain the integrity
of the family. At the end of April 1998, Juice and Lil Garfield went to a party. While at the party they were jumped (beaten up) by 15 other boys from a rival gang. Both boys were sent to the hospital. I talked with Diane and she shared some of the events with me. She had to deal with two forces. On one side, the police officer drilled her about gangs and that she needed to get her children out of the gang. She prays at night that her sons would leave the gang. One the other side, the family that came to support her started yelling at her and the boys. The grandfather got upset and worried, and as a result, he needed to take nitroglycerine pills for his heart. This upset the aunts and uncles and they took it out on the boys and Diane. An aunt told Juice he would be dead before he reached the age 18. Juice turned eighteen in July 1998. The family often supported each other during times of need, but their worries seemed to get in the way and they struggled with how to support one another.

Like most kids Lil Garfield learned just how much he missed his family when he was away at the treatment center. If the kids in the center don’t follow the rules the family is not allowed to visit. Lil Garfield lost visitation
privileges for one weekend. He expressed in a letter (see figure 5.8) to his mom how he missed their visit and how

Figure 5.8. While in rehabilitation, Lil Garfield’s letter to his mom.

sorry he was that the family couldn’t come and visit and he promised they would be able to visit the next weekend. He explained the program and what level he was on. He ended the letter with “I’m doing real good except the fact I haven’t seen the family so that sucks. I really miss everybody and Tata most importantly.” He even reminded them to bring the
baby. Diane, Juice, and Lil Garfield are a fragile family, a family that struggles to survive each day.

After several visits to the grandfather's house, I became more aware of the literacy in this family. In the grandfather's house, I always found the newspaper and the TV guide. There were bills and notes stuck to the refrigerator door in the kitchen. On the door frame between the kitchen and living room was a container for paper and pencils. Juice and Lil Garfield saw their mother and grandpa read and write.

Juice: They read the newspaper and the news. My Nana loves to write. She would write letters to her brothers that are all out of state. My Tata is always reading books, western books before he goes to bed.

Lil Garfield: My mom used to read a lot

In Lil Garfield's room, there are Play Station magazines, CD inserts, and religious artifacts on the walls. I asked Lil Garfield if he remembered when he learned to read. He couldn't really remember how he learned to read but he remembered reading in 1st grade. He remembered getting little animal crackers when he read the books right. When I asked him about learning to write, he simply replied, "I fucked up my arm. I've never been a good writer." I continued to ask Lil Garfield about going to the library as a young kid and being read to. He stated he did go to the
library when he was little and that he did win reading contests when he was "seven eight maybe nine." He was never read to as a little kid. As I got to know Lil Garfield, I discovered he squinted a lot when he looked at the menus at fast food restaurants or when he was reading magazines. I believed he needed glasses. It seemed that the need for glasses was the problem not his inability to read. This was verified when I asked him about reading in school he responded:

I don’t know. I didn’t really do any reading. I don’t like to cause my eyes have always been fucked up. I know how to read, and shit, you know what I’m saying. But my eyes... when I was reading the letters were going this way, so I said fuck this. I don’t want to do this.

(IL, Lil Garfield, 10/97, p. 5)

Lil Garfield made a deal with his grandpa and an aunt that if they would pay a third, he would also and he could get glasses. He wears them at school and is doing better. I decided to ask Lil Garfield if he likes to read at this point in his life.

Debbie: Do you like to read?

Lil Garfield: Some books that I find interesting, but I don’t really find books interesting. Books like Monster Kody I like. I would read that.

Debbie: What type of reading do you do?
Lil Garfield: Fuckin on the walls, school work, computer shit, my play station, I have read some books. I don't really like to read that much.
(IL, Lil Garfield, 10/97, p. 5)

I thought it was interesting that after he listed the reading he does, he then stated he really doesn't like to read.

Just before we started an interview Lil Garfield asked about my dissertation. I showed him the first three chapters, and he immediately started reading it. As he skimmed through the papers he came to the chapter where I describe the kids. He started reading and he would not stop. The purpose of the visit was to work on his math and to complete the interview, but he wouldn’t stop reading. I had to wait until he was finished before we could work on math. Yet somewhere he has formed the idea that he doesn’t like to read. I decided to ask him if he knew someone he considered to be a good reader. He responded:

Shit I don’t know. What the fuck a good reader is. I mean me I fuckin read. You know what I’m saying, but I don’t read. I just skim through all the fuckin pin point words. Like if you got an article on this sort of thing. I see what the question is, where is fuckin Africa? I am saying I won’t read the whole fuckin paragraph that says Africa was discovered for this long and the first man came. I don’t give a fuck. That’s not what I am looking for. I’ll just skim through it until it says Africa is. You know what I am saying, in the east. Oh here it is. (IL, Lil Garfield, 10/97, p. 7).
Lil Garfield looks for clues in the paragraph to find the answer to the question, a school task. But I knew he wasn’t skimming the dissertation. So I asked him about the reading of the dissertation. Lil Garfield said, “I was reading it all because it interested me.” Even though Juice and Lil Garfield don’t really see themselves as readers and writers, I noticed a great deal of literacy in this family community, and that they use reading and writing in their life every day.

When I first met Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, and Juice they were sons, cousins, and grandsons. As the years passed, they became fathers. As young fathers, they have struggled to build their new family.

The Boys’ Own Families

During the study Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, and Juice moved into their own homes to build their own families. In these new young families I found a caring supportive family.

Lil Boy Blue’s Young Family

Lil Boy Blues little daughter was born two weeks after I started teaching at the alternative high school program. For one of the writing assignments, I asked my students to describe a person in their life who has changed their life. Lil Boy Blue (see figure 5.9) wrote about his daughter. He
stated, "... my daughter because she’s so special to me. She changed my life in a lot of ways." He continues, "And remember no one said it was easy, but it's the greatest

Figure 5.9. Lil Boy Blue Writing about His Daughter.

thing that will happen to you." Lil Boy Blue works an evening shift, and his girlfriend (soon to be wife) works the daytime shift. Lil Boy Blue takes care of his little
daughter during the day. When I watch him, it is obvious that this is the "greatest thing." He is a proud father. When I first visited Lil Boy Blue’s home, I noticed the newspaper on the coffee table. There were also magazines. Lil Boy Blue reads the *Dallas Cowboy Weekly*, a weekly newspaper, put out by the Dallas Cowboy Football team. I decided to find out how Lil Boy Blue perceives himself as a reader.

Debbie: Do you consider yourself a reader today?

LBB: Ummm yea and no. I like to read, like I read the paper everyday. But I don’t read any books.

(IL, LLB, 10/97, p.8)

Lil Boy Blue wants to say he is a reader. Yet he also believes he is not a reader. This may have more do to with that in school reading for him meant sitting in a desk being assigned to answer questions after reading. He also doesn’t see himself sitting down and reading books. The first semester I taught Lil Boy Blue I took my students to a book store so they could help me pick out books. He was the only one who didn’t complain and knew what book he wanted to get—*Where the Red Fern Grows*. During this same time I was supplying him with books from the library on Al Capone. I knew he was reading because he would share interesting facts with the class.
I decided to asked what type of reading he does at work. At first he wasn't sure what I was asking him.

LBB: Like labels and stuff

Debbie: Do you read like order forms?

LLB: Yea. (IL, LBB, 10/97, p. 5)

Talking more with Lil Boy Blue, I learned that he is like a supervisor at work. The first thing he does when he gets to work is read the information left in a file from the preceding shift. When his shift is over he then leaves, instructions for the next shift. Lil Boy Blue must read and write every day at work.

On my first visit to Lil Boy Blue's home, a particular incident which helped me realize just how much literacy is in the home. Anna, Lil Boy Blue's two year old daughter, brought books for daddy (Lil Boy Blue) to read. She climbed next to daddy and turned the pages telling him the story. Anna held the book and read left to right, very much aware of the social structure around reading books. Lil Boy Blue said she knows the stories so well that when he tries to skip parts of the reading or change it in some way, she corrects him. Anna has a collection of books. Within her collection are books I have given to her that are signed by authors and illustrators. Every time I give her a book she
immediately sits down and reads it or finds her mother to read to her. Anna is very familiar with books.

After the reading, Anne wanted some cereal. Lil Boy Blues told her to get it, and he told me she has a favorite and can pick it out. She came over with the box. I asked her what it was and she said cereal. I then asked her where does it say cereal. She pointed to the big print of the front of the box which read Frosted Flakes. It was apparent to me that she was aware of print and how it functions in her world. She developed this awareness because she is part of a family that values literacy (FN, 10/13/97, p 178). Both Lil Boy Blue and Teresa [girlfriend] read to their daughter regularly.

Writing was like reading for Lil Boy Blue; he wasn’t willing to admit he is a writer.

Debbie: What about writing at work?
LBB: Numbers that all I really write.
Debbie: What about home?
LBB: No don’t know I don’t write nothing.
Debbie: Who does the bills?
LBB: Teresa [girlfriend] does.
Debbie: She sits down and write out all the bills?
LBB: All I do is sign the checks.

(IL, LBB, 10/97, p. 11)
Lil Boy Blue isn’t willing to say he is a writer. However, I have watched him order from the Internet a subscription to the *Dallas Cowboy’s News* magazine which he reads cover to cover. He has ordered information about rims for his car. He has checked on information on different careers. Both reading and writing are a part of Lil Boy Blue’s life.

**Smurf’s Young Family**

Smurf is just starting his family. They moved out of Smurf’s family home in October 1997. In an interview with Smurf he stated:

> . . . I have a family now everything changes. I never knew I was going to change. I mean it has completely changed my whole life. I never thought I could have fun with my own family, and everything you know like mom and everybody else. I never thought I could have fun, but I only thought I could have fun with my locs [homies] and shit, and now I have a family and Dea and the baby, they bring me closer to my family you know. . .

(IG, Smurf, 9/97, p. 5)

Smurf’s young daughter, Sabrina is 8 months old. My first visit to Smurf’s home, I found him taking care of the bills. He said, “Did you know they give you envelopes [return envelopes for the payment of bills].” I watched him carefully read the statement then carefully fill out the check. He was proud of himself and the fact that he was taking care of his family.
Smurf struggles a lot to keep his new family going. He was 17 years old and his girlfriend was 16 when they moved into an apartment together. As they learn to be a family, they often argue which has ended up with one of them leaving. But the desire to be a family brings them back together. They are both proud of their daughter and want the best for her. They both work at the Yoyo factory.

In June 1998, Smurf and Dea celebrated their daughters first birthday. As I watched Smurf, I saw a proud father who wanted everyone else to know how wonderful his daughter is.

When I asked Smurf about writing he stated he does more writing at work and he writes his raps. He also had just written a poem to his girlfriend. Smurf often told me that he doesn’t read:

Debbie: What about reading?

Smurf: Rap you gotta know how to read to rap.

Debbie: Do ya?

Smurf: Yea, I mean, because rapping you got to use words. I mean, you gotta use different words. You can't just use... you can't use just regular words, Crip and Blood gang this and westside and south. You can’t use just that all the time. You gotta come up with some other words that mean the same kind of stuff that you’re trying to say, but it’s a different word, you know, that’s where reading comes in. You got to look through dictionaries and find words or thesaurus.

Debbie: Do you consider yourself a reader?
Smurf: Yea, I look through the dictionary to try to find new words to put in my rap. I don't, well, read. I don't consider myself a reader. I never, I'm really not one to sit down to read a book. Not me, I mean I'll do it. I mean when I was locked up of course. I'm not a reader.

(IL, Smurf, 10/97, p. 4)

Like Lil Boy Blue and Lil Garfield, Smurf struggles with defining himself as a reader. At first, he stated he is a reader and that you need to be a reader to write raps, but then his comments change. Smurf doesn't sit down and read a book cover to cover. And somehow to him this means he's not a reader. This confusion continued as I questioned him more about reading.

Debbie: What about a typical day now. What are some of the things you read?

Smurf: I don't... at work maybe on the computer. naaaa I really don't read. (IL Smurf, 10/97, p. 4)

Smurf wasn't going to give himself permission to be a reader. As we talked he told me he reads the insert in CDs; the Source magazine, a hip hop magazine, which is delivered to the house; article on the Internet; and the newspaper. In Smurf's everyday life, he reads road signs and at work he reads messages. In my class, Smurf was the one who was willing to read out loud to the class. Yet Smurf doesn't believe he is a reader.
Smurf knew he was a writer because of his raps. But he also wasn’t sure how to classify what he does with his raps. He doesn’t write them on paper. He does them completely in his head.

Debbie: What type of writing do you do on a typical day?

Smurf: Ahh I do a lot of writing at work and then I write a lot of raps. The thing now a days, I don't write my raps on paper. I ...at work I make them up in my head and I memorize them. I'm very proud of myself. Cause of all those years of writing rap now I can just do it in my head. I can see it in my head. (IL, Smurf, 10/97, p. 4)

Smurf has spent hours on my computer searching for information about his favorite football team, the Dallas Cowboys. He has spent time in a chat room dialoguing in writing with several other young kids. He reads the inside of CD inserts, learning about the groups and where he can go to get information to record his own raps. Even though Smurf feels he can’t say he is a reader it is obvious he is literate.

Juice’s Young Family

As I stated earlier, Diane moved out of her little house which made it possible for Juice and his new family to move into the little house and become more of a family. Like his family, Juice’s young family is also struggling. Juice wrote about this struggle in his journal (refer back to
Figure 5.5). He stated he doesn’t feel the same for Melinda his girlfriend, but he also believes he loves her and their baby. He struggles with all the pain inside. He feels "stopped up by the pain," and is tired of it. He writes, "I feel like crying." This journal entry tells a lot about Juice’s relationship with his girl friend. He is loyal to his daughter but struggles with his feelings with his girlfriend, unsure if he wants to be totally committed to her. I was invited to Juice’s little daughter’s first birthday party. I watched Juice play with her and feed her. Even though they are struggling trying to make a family, Juice and his girlfriend are devoted to their little girl. This was also evident when I visited Juice in his home. I saw him feed her and dress her, and lay beside her comforting her. He loves his little girl and wants to be a good father.

In Juice’s little home, I was aware of notes and bills under magnets on the refrigerator. There were religious pictures hanging on the walls. I talked to Juice about his reading and writing. He struggled with some of his answers. It was as if he did see himself a reader and writer, but he also realized he doesn’t read and write. I found this to be strange because one of my memories of Juice is he’s sitting.
in the front of my truck reading *Monster: The Autobiography of an L.A. Crip Member*. As we walked into the Mall, he was still reading. He always reads the magazines or books he finds on the front seat of my truck. At first in our interview, he claimed he was a writer not a reader.

Debbie: Do you consider yourself a reader?

Juice: Nah, I really consider myself a writer. When I get bored or when I get mad, I can sit down and tag that be cool.

Debbie: What are some of the things you like to read?

Juice: I don’t. It has to be really interesting can’t be something like boring, because I don’t even like to read myself. (IL, Juice, 10/97, p. 5)

Juice claims when he was younger he wanted to read real bad. He claims, “I got mad because everybody would be reading signs and bill boards. Little tiny things like that.” In second grade Juice connected with reading. He stated, “I read everything I could get my hands on.” I asked Juice if he remembered how he learned to read. He responded:

By reading. Looking at the letters. I think I had to learn to spell before I learn how to read to pronounce the words, the letters and every thing cause we used to have spelling test. I had to spell and than while I was spelling, like I kind of more or less like all of a sudden, when the year was over, I know how to read. (IL, Juice, 10/97, p. 5)

I then asked Juice how he thought he learned how to write:

Juice: Through the spelling test I learned how to read. You have to learn how to write. To learn how to write
you have to learn how to read. Can’t read without writing, because if you don’t know what you are writing than you know what I mean. You can’t read it you know what I mean.  (IL, Juice, 10/97, p.4)

For Juice, reading and writing went together. I went on and asked him what he liked to read today. He replied, “I like the book C-Monster.” I kept probing to find out what else he liked to read. Juice finally stated, “I’m not really into reading. Miss, I hate reading.” I asked him why and all he said was he didn’t know, “ maybe I’m just lazy.”

Of all the interviews I held with Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice and Lil Garfield talking about their literacy was the most difficult. The everyday reading of the TV guide, magazine, CD inserts, bills and notes and the everyday writing of checks, order forms, and poems to girlfriends were easily dismissed as things they did, but were not considered literacy according to these four young men.

In the next chapter, I discuss another community important to my participants: their gang community.
CHAPTER SIX

"CRIP 4 LIFE": GANG COMMUNITY

A Gangster Prayer

Heavenly Father please hear me tonight. I need so much guidance to live my live right. Sometimes the pressure is to hard to bear. I often wonder if anyone cares. How can I wake up to face this crazy way?

Heavenly Father forgive all my sins, I want to change but where do I begin? Give me the strength to resist this wild life I desire. Help me get away from the mighty gunfire.

Please "Diosito" bless my "Familia" who cries every night worrying I'll be killed in yet another gang fight.

Heavenly Father please answer my prayers, please let me know you're listening up there.

When will it end? What's it all for? To prove to my homeboys and homegirls I'm down. That I'll do anything for that big bad "West Side Manzanita Lynch Mob Crip" gang.

Sometimes I even wonder how I will die. By a bullet wound? Or a knife in my side?

Heavenly Father please hear me tonight. Give me the strength to live my life right. Please show me the way. Please show me the light. Help give my heart peace so I don't have to fight.

Thank you for your forgiveness lord; and for still being here and most of all thank you for listening to this gangster prayer. Amen

There that no easy answer to why an adolescent chooses to join the world of gangs. But when they do cross the border into that world, they enter with full rights and privileges. In other words they are given access to the
knowledge and power of the gang. My students seem to live in a state of tension between the hurt and the sadness found in their lives and the benefits of having what many call a family.

The only people who have complete access to the gang community are the gang members. However, I had a glimpse into this world and with the help of my participants I write about that glimpse. My first glimpse came at a pizza parlor. The co-ed softball season was over and we were celebrating. After eating and talking it was time to go. I recorded the incident in my field notes:

I said my good byes. The boys were already outside. I walked out and noticed the boys were talking with another group of boys. "Sizing each other up." I was just standing listening hoping Felipe would walk out. I wasn’t sure really what I could do. He came out and the boys moved to the cars. Before I knew what had happen the two groups of boys were fighting. I stood in a daze. I was trying to make sense of what was happening. I’m not sure but I wasn’t even scared. The manager of the pizza parlor came out and shouted the police are on their way. The kids went their separate ways. We got the boys into the cars and drove off. I later learned that one of the boys was stabbed. In reality a gun could have been pulled. I needed to understand. The next day in class I was still upset. The boys came in sort of bragging. I couldn’t be silent any longer. I looked at them and said, "How could you? There were kids there. Your own daughters." No one wanted to hear that. I told the kids I didn’t want to judge them I just needed to understand. They talked about respect and not letting the other gang disrespect them. It was for pride. Pride and honor is so important.

(FN 6/22/95, p. 68)
The second glimpse into the gang community was at the death of one of my students, Plucy (mentioned in Chapter Two). In the form of a story I wrote about this experience in my personal journal:

It was a good day. My presentation went well or so I think. I made some connections for my students. Yes it was a good day. Light footed with no worries I unlocked the door to my apartment. Like a beacon in a dark cave my message light was blinking.

"Debbie it is Kristina, Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s mom. I have something to tell you."

The joy in my heart is drained. I call Kristina back, "Kristina I got your message, what’s up?"

I wanted you to know Plucy was shot and killed last night."

(Personal journal, Oct. 30, 1995)

Friday night Plucy was killed in a drive-by. I had the weekend to get myself prepared for school on Monday, and for the boys who would be talking of revenge. I arrived early to get ready. Slowly the kids came and so did all their friends. We sat together and shared memories. The kids drew and tagged always telling stories of the times they spent with Plucy. That day I saw big tough gang boys in tears. As the week proceeded I had to help them process their feelings and I needed to understand my own feelings. I had to respect their hurt and their need for revenge. We also talked about how "revenge is never full," meaning it doesn’t stop with
getting revenge. In my classroom, we did things to help each other mourn. The students built a shrine which consisted of three death masks, candles, and letters of farewell. The students wrote to their dead homies. As a class, they drew a mural that was placed next to the casket during the wake.

At the wake, I depended on them. They had been through this before:

As I entered the funeral home, I saw several of my students. We hugged each other. One of my students accompanied me to the casket. Plucy was so young. I noticed the kids had placed pictures and notes in the casket. I paid my respects to the family and walk back down the aisle. I saw Smurf’s mom. I stopped to pay my respects. Kristina and I hug. I break into tears. She guided me in to sit next to her.

(Personal journal, 10/26/97)

I sat there and watched my students walk up to the casket and in their own private way they said goodbye to a friend. After this experience, I became more than a teacher to my students and their family. They saw me hurting and I saw them hurting. Often my students would talk about the two years when they lost five close friends. I looked into their eyes and shared the same loss. The loss of a homie was part of their world—the world of the gang. But I also witnessed homies coming together supporting and helping each other.

The gang community easily at times flows into the family community. Many times decisions made for the family
were influenced by activities associated with the gang community. This is apparent at the funerals as families came to cry and comfort each other, but it was also apparent in other aspects of every everyday life.

The Family Community Collides with the Gang Community

Lil Boy Blue and Smurf were absent when I received a phone call from their mom. I recorded it in my field notes, "Kristina called. She kept the kids home. Smurf’s life has been threatened" (FN 11/95 p. 92). Later in the week while talking with another student, she shared with me that Smurf was scared and wanted a gun. I recorded my reaction in my field notes:

I am worried. Naughty (a student) said Smurf wants a gun! This scares me. I hope she is too smart to give him a gun. This really shows that he is concerned. (FN 12/95, p. 93)

This fear is real. As a result of the phone calls, Kristina had the phone number changed and unlisted. The boys were not allowed to give the new number to any of their friends. Smurf got a pager. The homies could now page him and he then would return the call. Not long after this experience, Lil Boy Blue’s and Smurf’s house was shot at several times. No one was hurt.
Kristine and Felipe were the type of parents who wanted to know their son’s friends. Often they would allow the kids to have a bar-be-que with their homies at the house. Many times Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s homies would stay over night. The kids respect Kristina and Felipe, and they would come and talk and share their feelings (FN 1/14/96, p. 56). But the heartache and fears were constant every day.

The headline read, “Tucson teen slain last night; The shooting death of a 15 year old boy the city’s 55th homicide.” This headline was about Plucy. The picture next to the article is of Juice. He is covered with Plucy’s blood. Juice and Plucy were in a car driving down the road heading home when another car pulled up beside them. Individuals in both cars were throwing gang signs. A gun was pulled and Plucy was shot. Juice held Plucy in his arms waiting for the ambulance. Juice had to move in with an uncle, because the family was afraid the shooter would come looking for Juice.

During the time I have known Juice and Lil Garfield, a window in the little house was shot out. Rocks were thrown through the rear window of Diane’s car, plus her car was tagged. Around their home there are tags (see figure 6.1) made by rival gangs and Lil Garfield and Juice. The two
worlds of the family and the gang often became one for my informants. I was made more aware of these two worlds colliding after a visit with Juice. I noticed he had rearranged his house,

![Figure 6.1. Pictures of the walls around Juice and Lil Garfield's home.](image)

the living room was now in the middle and the front room had storage in it. When I asked him why he had made the changes, he informed me that someone had shot at his house. He then showed me the bullet hole. The bullet had gone through the bedroom wall and into the kitchen.

As we prepared for Juice to go to summer school (June 1998), I talked with Diane. She stated she didn’t want him
to go to Brighton High School. She felt like every time Juice went there the gang activity around the home increased. She was worried for the baby. I called around and found a new school. Many family decisions were made because of conflicts associated with the gang community.

The Gang: What Is It Really?

For Lil Boy Blue and Smurf, the gang carries a different role then what society has painted. In my first interview with Lil Boy Blue and Smurf, I asked them to define gangs:

Debbie: How would you describe the gang to an outsider someone who knows nothing about it?

LBB: Group of kids that grew up together.

Debbie: You know that most people in the community think that gangs are really bad.

LBB: Yea, but everybody grew up with a gang, think about it. They grew up in the neighborhood. They have friends. They grew up close. I guess now a days it turns more. . . to more of a rival of neighborhoods. (IG, LBB, 9/97, p.3)

For Lil Boy Blue, a gang was a group of kids together. He believed everyone who grows up in a community also grew up in a gang, because it is just a group of friends.

For Smurf joining a gang was no different than being part of the neighborhood friends who played T-ball and became skaters together.
Debbie: If you had to explain the gang to somebody whose never ever been associated to gangs or seen gangs, how would you explain it to them?

Smurf: Damn I could write a book on that shit. (laughs) It's like. . . to me it's something like, I grew up in my neighborhood all my life since I was a little baby. You know I did everything in my neighborhood. I grew up around everybody in my neighborhood from elementary and everything. Just growing up, and it happened to be that my neighborhood was a Crip neighborhood. So you know I seen everybody around me, Crips. So you know I learned that was my neighborhood thing. So I mean just like . . . it was like everybody was skaters, into skate boarding, so we were skate boarding. It wasn't really about being a follower. It was about, it was like a crew. Like you know, it was like just. . . like the thing we should do then. Everybody got into baseball and everybody was into sports and then boom everybody got into gangs, and gangs became a big part of our lives. I mean it was like a family to me. I mean I didn't really know anything else. I was young when I got into it. I had a lot of fun with my home boys. I had a lot of love for them.

(IG Smurf, 9\97, p.10)

The idea of representing an organization, fighting for one's turf, and competing to be the best was part of Smurf's early elementary experiences. In a class writing assignment (see Figure 6.2) he shared his memories of elementary school. He writes how "elementary was all about what class you were in." Smurf continues and tells us he was in 5th grade, so "that's what I was claiming. The concept of "represent" (part of a gangsta's responsibility in the gang) was developed in elementary school, or as Smurf writes "puttin' in work" was done on the playground. Often the "represent"
Figure 6.2. Smurf’s writing about fifth grade.

was done through sports-class competing against another class to see who is the best. In the gang, to “represent” involved participation in any activity that built the reputation of the gang. The concepts associated with gangs were a part of Smurf’s growing up; moving into a gang was
natural to him.

During the interview, Smurf asked what else is there to do. He was too young to get a job.

Smurf: Because of my environment... I mean that’s what you do. If I didn’t, what else did I have if I was to stop. I could’ve said, yea, I am not in a gang. What was I gonna do? I couldn’t get no job at this time... am not going to school full time, you know, what was I going to do. You know what I’m saying? What was I gonna do? I’d still want to party and drink beer. I still would of been... I’d been with the same people. I’d ran into the same people, the same shit would of happened. I’d go...there’s nothing I could’ve done.

Debbie: So when people tell kids to get out of the gang do you thing the best thing they could do is help the kids find something else to do.

Smurf: Yea and none of this bull shit. Like, we can get... not like boys and girls club shit. All that does is give the gang somewhere to kick it. (IG Smurf, 9\97, p.8)

There was nothing else available for Smurf. Recreational sports was reaching the level of competition found on high school teams. Moving into a gang was the activity available.

This group didn’t start out as a gang. Lil Boy Blue said it was just “the westside.” They all took pride in living on the westside. Several of the boys who are Lil Boy Blue’s age first formed a group know as Campaz, which is a group of about eight boys who grew up together. Often Lil Boy Blue stated that the campaz came before the gang. For Smurf moving into the gang was as natural as taking his turn
to play in T-ball. For Lil Boy Blue and Smurf the gang was about friends and the Hood (neighborhood). I once asked Smurf if he would be a Blood. His response was he would be Blood if the Hood was Blood (FN 4/17/95, p. 51).

I asked Juice and Lil Garfield about their perception of gangs. Juice was required to write a research paper in his English class (school year 1996). He wrote about how the gang was first formed (Appendix E). Juice claims the gang started in 1985 by a Hawaiian boy known as Kilo G:

[H]e was talking to a vato who decided to start up a gang called "Manzanita Lynch Mob Crip." Manzanita came from the name of the neighborhood, Manzanita Terrace. This gang became popular in the hood with the other teens. The teens in the hood were looking for something to do so as a friendship, they all joined the gang. There were at least 350 heads but now there's only about 30, due to death, and family problems and getting into trouble homies stopped banging. In those days, everybody was just going everywhere yelling "West Side Lynch Mob," cruising the avenue starting fights and shooting—trying to let everybody know that we were coming up. It was all good for a while.

(Juice's research paper)

Juice wrote "The teens were looking for something to do." As friends, they joined the gang. To Juice there was nothing else to do and it was good for a while.

Lil Garfield was one of the youngest members of the gang when I first met him. He claimed he had been "gang banging since I was ten." In an interview, Lil Garfield talks about his feelings toward the gang. This was a hard
interview for Lil Garfield, because he wasn’t sure what he could really share with me.

Debbie: How did MLMC get started?

Lil Garfield: A Bunch of fools that’s got each others back.

Debbie: How did you get involved with the gang?

Lil Garfield: I started claiming, started kicking back with the peewees, started being down for Mazanita. Started hanging around with everybody. (IG Lil Garf, 10/97, p. 8)

Joining a gang gave the boys something to do and was as natural as joining little league. The heartache that came as a result of being a gangbanger (member in the gang) were not anticipated.

Heartaches of Gang Life

I asked Lil Boy Blue what benefits he thought the gang gave him.

LBB: What do you mean benefits?

Debbie: Was it good for you?

LBB: Not really all it did was get you in trouble with were friends.

(IG LBB 9/97, p. 5)

In Lil Boy Blue’s writing notebook, I found a page that contained the following sentence: "My advice to someone who’s thinking about joining a gang is don’t do it." Even though Lil Boy Blue is part of a gang, his advice is not to
join. While at the rock house I asked my class what they thought Oso (the first homie killed by a drive by) would say to them, unanimously, they all said "Get out of the gang" (FN 3/24/95, p. 45). This tension of being in the gang, knowing the consequence and not wanting to be in the gang seems to be an inevitable part of the gang scene. Smurf recognized the good but then discovered the bad. He also knew that there is a time to move on and leave some of that behind you:

What I did for the neighborhood, it was good, but it turned out to be bad. Like, when I was young, everybody told me that's the way it was going to be, but I never believed them. Sure enough to this day that's how it is and some of these fools don't realize it. And like, look at Bad Boy. He's 20 years old and he's still out there gangbanging and doing his little thing. You know trying to be a "g". . .I want to tell him, like, grow up and shit. . .I don't know He has. . .I have a kid, he has a kid, but I think it changes you a lot, but you know his kid is in Colorado. It doesn't give him. . .I don't know I think he should be doing something to get to Colorado. . .I don't know. I think its time for everybody to grow. I mean I've seen a lot of other homeboys grow out of it. (IG, Smurf, 9/97, P. 9)

The bad things that Lil Boy Blue and Smurf are referring to are such things as getting kicked out of school, being arrested with a gun, shot at, and fighting for the respect of the hood. The greatest hurt comes at the loss of friends to drive-by shootings, gang fights, and by other means.

However, when they became a gang they didn't anticipate
the trouble and sadness. Lil Boy Blue talked about how young and innocent they were when the gang was first formed.

Debbie: If you could go back and do your life all over would you still join the gang?

LBB: I probably would. I just would be more careful about things. We didn't know. We were young. We didn't know what we were getting into. How much trouble, you know what I mean, you don't realize how much danger.

Debbie: Was Oso the first one you guys lost?

LBB: Yea, Oso was the first.

Debbie: How did you react to it?

LBB: It's real hard. Everyone went crazy. He was the first homie to die.

Debbie: Did it make everything more real?

LBB: Yea ever since that time it was never the same.

Debbie: Good or bad?

LBB: I would say bad. That's when it started happening. Not to be fun you know what I mean. Before we never realized that this gang killing. We were just out having a lot of fun. After Oso got killed, you know, we realized that's not really worth it. You know, he could still be alive. (IG, LBB, 9/97, p. 5)

The homie Oso was one of the leaders of the gang. Lil Boy Blue and Oso grew up together. As I tried to reconstruct the story of Oso’s death, I realized that Smurf was fourteen and Lil Boy Blue was seventeen when Oso died. Reconstructing the incident involved the memories of two boys who were in shock.
Lil Boy Blue, Smurf and three other homies were in the car driving around a barrio on the westside of town. I'm not sure how the trouble got started but guns were pulled and fired. After the shooting they discovered that Oso was hit between the eyes, and they drove him to the nearest hospital. The boys were all arrested at the hospital. After about 24 hours, Lil Boy Blue was allowed to go home. Smurf was locked up in juvenile hall. In Lil Boy Blue's eyes everything changed after Oso's death. They were no longer innocent (FN 9/97, p. 222). When I first started teaching in the alternative program, stories of Oso filled the room. I felt like I knew him. On the first anniversary of Oso's death, I heard Smurf talk about Oso for the first time at school. I recorded the incident in my field notes:

For the first time here at school, Smurf talked about Oso. I mean really talked. His whole face was racked with emotions. But he talked! Smurf is still hurting big time. The hurt comes out as anger many times. (FN 10/23/95, p. 89)

Smurf also shared how the deaths of his homies seem to affect him and the gang:

Smurf: I think of all the deaths, Plucy and Guero's hit everybody the hardest. Before Guero died, Plucy's hit everybody the hardest. When Kilo died, I guess it didn't hit everybody hard, because there was no funeral. I don't know. It didn't really seem like he was gone or anything. I don't know. He was nearly nineteen years old. I guess Plucy hit everybody the hardest.
Debbie: Because he was a peewee?

Smurf: Because he was only 15 years old and Kilo suffered, you know, a little bit, but Plucy suffered a lot, you know. What I'm saying is he didn't just die. He suffered about half an hour or 45 minutes... at least a half hour. You know that's a long time to suffer, you know. Everybody knew that he fought for his life.

Debbie: Why do you think Plucy's death had such an influence on everybody?

Smurf: There was just something about Plucy that just bothered everybody a lot. It was like all this time praying.

Debbie: He was only a fifteen year old boy.

Smurf: The thing that bothered me a lot about it... because when he first tried to get in the gang and everything. We tried to get him in, you know. We were the ones that influenced him and everything, you know. I was always trying to bring things up. Then he wanted to get out and everybody started talking shit. "You don't want to get out. Why, you want to be a pussy?" You know. We were all like that with him, and right when he started to come back in, he got to his crazy style. That's when he was really down and everything, and that's when he died. I guess that's why. Plucy was a peewee, because we kind of feel like it was our fault. Cause, you know, he was trying to go away, and we drove him back to us. (IG Smurf, 9/97, p. 7)

Smurf was very much aware of the heartache that comes from the gang community. He struggled to make sense of the loss of homies. This was also true of Juice who saw the gang as fun. In Juice's own writing he states "the gang was for good times."

But things changed for him the night friends started to
die. In a research paper, Juice wrote about the changes:

Homies started getting locked up or moving out of Tucson with their families due to gang violence uprising in the city. Some got jumped out because things got too crazy for them. In 1994, Oso an OG [original Gangster] was murdered in a drive-by. Seven months later another OG was shoot and killed. Soon the first peewee [the youngest member of the gang] was shot and killed. (Art., Juice, 9/97)

The peewee that was shot and killed was Juices’ close homie, Plucy. Juice was riding in a car with Plucy on their way home. After Plucy was shot, he laid in Juice’s lap bleeding to death. As Juice and I talked, he still struggled to talk about the events of that night. He remembered crying until he could cry no more. In our interview, Juice reflected on the stress associated with gangs and how important it is for gang members to act as if they are in control. But Juice also admitted he is Crip for life:

Juice: Mentally in my head and . . . it made me stress out lots and I tried my hardest not to show it, because I didn’t want to look like I was weak or anything.

Debbie: Once a Crip always a Crip.

Juice: Yea, it don’t matter even if I say I don’t tag no more. I mean yea, I still got that in my heart. Forever, I’ll always be down for Crip no matter what nobody disrespect me. (IG, Juice, 9/97, p. 4)

In an interview with Lil Garfield, I asked him if he felt the gang was worth it.

Debbie: Do you think its been worth it being in a gang?
Lil Garfield: Not really.
(IG, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 3)

Lil Garfield claimed the gang hurt him more than helped him. Dead homies, fights between the family and getting arrested are the things Lil Garfield said hurt him. I wanted to know if Lil Garfield believed the gang had helped him in any way.

Debbie: How has the gang helped you?

Lil Garfield: Can't really say it helped me. It's like a false kind of help, loyalties. You say loyalties, yea, when we're on the street, loyalty but... alright, say, that me and Lil Boy Blue did a drive by. Lil Boy Blue is the only one who gets caught. They [police] say, "If you snitch on this fool, we'll give you a lesser things. You got a daughter, you know." You think he's going to... You think he's going to snitch me out, so he can see his daughter? I think he would. I think anybody would.
(IG, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 6)

Lil Garfield pointed out something new. He discovered that on the street, members in the gang are loyal to each other but off the street this isn't really true. He calls this a false loyalty. But Lil Garfield also acknowledged that a gang is a substitute family in "some ways." I asked him if he felt it was worth banging if he was going to lose friends and have a false sense of loyalties. He responded:

No, but some people just got caught up so bad they don't know what to do. When you are in the gang and it
in your heart and your brain, you can’t stop. Can’t stop. Won’t stop. BK till you cash.  
(IG, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 6)

He actually started rapping the last part. I asked Lil Garfield if it was possible to be Crip in your heart but not on the street. This stirred up some emotions:

Debbie: Do you think it’s possible Crip can be in your heart, but it doesn’t have to be out in the street.

Lil Garfield: Fuck no.

Debbie: Why?

Lil Garfield: Cause I no bitch.

Debbie: What’s that mean?

Lil Garfield: It means, I ain’t fuckin be a hen house banger. Gang bangin is like a job. It’s what you... It’s what you represent. It’s who you... are gang colors. What you a represent, you and your gang colors. I could wear a hat right now LA everybody would know it stands for little apple. (IG, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 6)

For Lil Garfield being in the gang meant going out and representing the gang. Staying home meant you were weak and afraid to represent the gang. If you are not going to represent the gang, why be in the gang?

I heard the kids use the word "gangbanging" or "putting in work" in my class and felt I understood what it meant, but I decided to ask Juice and Lil Garfield what the words really meant:

Juice: You can go and put in work and stuff mob around. ..raps. It doesn’t matter, do anything that you can
whatever it takest to bring up your name to bring up you hood.

(IG, Juice, 9/97, p. 7)

Lil Garfield replied, "Being active, puttin in work, puttin in kickin back with your homies drinkin brew not being afraid to pull the trigger" (IG, Lil Gar, p.5). Gang bangin and puttin in work is hanging with the homies representing the gang. Lil Garfield opened a door which I hesitated to go through. I wanted to know how Lil Garfield felt about guns and drive-bys:

I don't really like guns. I think people who use guns are bitches... can't use their fist so they use guns. I mean you can go out and shoot anybody, go out and kill anybody, but it takes a real man to lose a fight. It doesn't take a man to pull a trigger. (IG, Lil Graf, 9/97, p. 6)

I felt this was interesting because Lil Garfield had in fact used a gun. The tension that exists between their actions and what they believe is present everyday of their lives. I asked Lil Garfield if he hurt anyone and what he felt:

Proud in a way. I'd feel proud around my homies, but I felt bad that I did it. Kind of lost" (IG, Lil Graf, 9/97, p. 6).

Once again Lil Garfield reveals that he experienced the tension of being proud but lost. I asked him about this tension and if it was worth it.

Debbie: It sounds like to me, for you at least, in the gang there are double feelings going on all the time. One minute your proud. You want to be down for it. You
wanted to represent them, and the other minute, you are not quit sure its really worth it. Is that true?

Lil Garfield: I’m saying it cost me a lot of pain.

Debbie: Does the good outweigh the pain or does the pain out weigh the good?

Lil Garfield: Pain outweighs the good.

Debbie: If the pain outweighs the good why do you stay with it?

Lil Garfield: Like I said once, it’s in your heart. You can’t stop, Won’t stop. Lil Boy Blue and Smurf got their whole life going on and they’re still bangin’. Lil Boy Blue still cripfen it. Everytime I see Lil Boy Blue he’s still wearing his blue. (IG, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 12)

Lil Garfield belonged to something and that was important to him; that is what outweighed the pain. Even though Lil Garfield didn’t see Lil Boy Blue and Smurf that much, when they got together they could still identify each other. They belonged to something that ties them together. This is evident in Lil Garfield’s response to my question of why he joined the gang:

I wanted a place to go. I wanted to feel like I was loved maybe and was the thugs was the money saw the bitches Dam I get jumped in to manzanita that shoe would all be mine.

Debbie: In a ten-year-old’s eyes that was more than what he had.

Lil Garfield: I didn’t have shit. My mom was locked up. She was gettin kicked out of the family by family members. (IG, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 12)
At a time when everything seemed so mixed up, the gang was a place to give Lil Garfield love, friends and a place to hang out. But being part of this world also meant a lot of pain. Like Lil Boy Blue and Smurf, Juice and Lil Garfield are aware of the pain associated with gangs. But something seems to keep them there.

Debbie: When you think about some of the things you went through as a kid growing up, do you think the gang was kind of a place to go to that made it a little bit easier for you?

Lil Garfield: Yea, get wasted get faded.

Debbie: Helped you forget?

Lil Garfield: Yea, some ways it did.

Debbie: Some people say that a gang is like a substitute family. Do you think that’s true?

Lil Garfield: Yea.

(IG, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 12)

Lil Garfield choose not to explain what he meant. But he explains that the thing that keeps kids in the gang is the need to belong to something, a place to hang out.

Being in a gang brought many new experiences to the lives of Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield. In class I heard many stories that involved the police or sheriff harassing the kids. They claimed they would be stopped as they walked home or to the park. Kristina told me of a specific time when Lil Boy Blue and Smurf were walking
with their friends. The sheriff stopped them all. They were being padded down [checking pockets or body for anything hidden]. Felipe came on to the scene and he introduced himself to the officers as the father of two of the boys. He wasn’t allowed to talk to the boys, and the officer wouldn’t tell him what was going on. Eventually the boys were allowed to walk home. (FN, 3/30/1996, p. 110).

The boys reported how they could be walking home from the park or a friend’s home and be stopped by the police. The police would ask them to give up their belts, shoe strings and shirt. And then they were told to go home. The belt, shoe strings, and shirt were blue and to the police represented gang association which represented trouble.

The police keep files on kids whom they feel are in gangs. When a crime was committed the police would go to the homes of kids on this list. Kristina shared with me an incident where the police came to the home and were ready to take Smurf away. She was in the house and Smurf came in and told her the police wanted to take him downtown. She went outside to discover that there were two police in her front yard searching the boys who were out there talking. The police informed her they were going to take Smurf downtown for questioning, but he wasn’t going to be arrested.
Kristina told me she was scared because the last time they took Smurf she didn’t get to see him for four days. She wasn’t going to allow that to happen again. She stood her ground and would not allow the police to take Smurf. She said she would take him down. The police said never mind they would check with their supervisor. The police never came back.

Being in a gang for Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield meant being with friends and representing the place they grew up. I asked Lil Boy Blue why being in a gang or Crip is so important to him. He answered, “It’s not like we wanted it to happen the way everything happened. We just always wanted to stick together you know what I mean, look after each other” (IG LBB 9\97, p. 2).

The Gang: Brothers to Brothers

Despite the heartache the feel, as members of the community, Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice and Lil Garfield remain in the gang community. But something keeps them in the gang. The newspapers report death and criminal activity daily associated with the world of gangs. But what isn’t reported is the strong sense of support and protection fellow gang members have for each other. This loyalty seems to keep them in the gang. I asked Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice
and Lil Garfield to talk more about this side of the gang community.

Debbie: Why does it [the gang] stay valuable to you? Why is it, "Once a Crip always a Crip?"

LBB: Yea, but it's like [pause] not like we wanted it to happen the way everything happen. We just always wanted to stick together. You know what I mean. Look after each other.

Debbie: So it's more of the friendship aspect of it.

LBB: Yea, like you know friends forever I guess.

Debbie: Did you see Juice and everybody Saturday? Were you excited because they're just part of who you were growing up?

LBB: Yea, bring up a lot of memories. Juice and I were talking a lot, like, how before in the neighborhood, at the rock house, or something and now everybody works and they have kids and it's hard to get all the homies together.

(IG LBB, 9/97, p. 6)

For Lil Boy Blue getting together and helping each other were simply a part of life. During a free write at school Lil Boy Blue (see Figure 6.3) described a true homie. He writes that homies are "true friends." The characteristic of a homie according to Lil Boy Blue, "down for eachther [sic]. Homies willing to die for us", and "who give much love." Lil Boy Blue puts it powerfully,
Figure 6.3. Lil Boy Blue Writes about Homies.

"brothers to brothers." The love Lil Boy Blue has for his homie continues even after they die.

This loyalty was always part of my class. Within the first couple of weeks, I was very much aware of the
community that already existed among my students (Smith, 1996, p. 126). While teaching at Nuestra Casa. I decided to take the class on a trip to Phoenix. During this trip, I discovered Snoopy, another one of my students who was a gang member, had marijuana. His action jeopardized the students who were on probation and me as the teacher. I decided the risk was too high and he would not be welcomed back to school. I met with his parents and told them my decision. The next day I arrived at school and was greeted by some very upset students. I explained why I made the decision. But the students said he didn’t have marijuana and I was wrong. We discussed this for about a day. The students defended Snoopy’s behavior. They kept insisting that Snoopy didn’t have marijuana (FN 5/21/95, p. 64). Sometime later the kids told me he did have marijuana and I was right. At the time the event occurred the other students were being loyal to Snoopy, because that was part of the gang code.

During class when the kids told stories, they told of their loyalty toward the older members of the gang who took care of them. I recorded their talk in my field notes:

The older ones take care of them [peewee young members in the gang]. They talked of a deep respect and honor for Kilo, he started their gang. Smurf shared that when they have a party and a barbecue, and Smurf couldn’t go because of probation, Kilo brought him food. He watches out after us. (FN 2/24/95, p. 11).
In a letter (see Figure 6.4) Lil Garfield wrote to a homie in jail, telling him how much he was missed. Lil Garfield

Figure 6.4. Lil Garfield’s letter to a homie in jail.
encourages him to change and not to worry about the homies. He wrote:

. . . wish you could cee here in- person cuz, but always in thought. Wen-u-get out I hope you change a lil its time for-u-mane. Don’t worry about wut people will think or say. Your “real homies” will understand and be glad and happy to cee a homie turn to a brighter note.

During a talk session with Lil Boy Blue and Smurf, Lil Boy Blue started to brag. He said in the hood “everyone knows everyone (FN 3/6/95, p. 17). According to my students, this loyalty motivates the behavior and actions that are often illegal.

Many activities a gang member may take part in are illegal. I don’t support this behavior. However, as I came to understand my students and their gang community, I started to see what motivated their behavior and that these actions make sense in this world.

Soon after Lil Boy Blue’s baby was born, Plucy did what the boys called a “diaper run” [stole diapers and ran]. Lil Boy Blue didn’t have a job and the baby needed diapers. Plucy decided to help his homie by stealing some diapers for his baby. Though the act is illegal the motivation to help and take care of a homie is somewhat understandable (FN 2/20/95, p. 10). I also witnessed this deep loyalty when Plucy died. My students were very much aware of the fact
that Plucy’s family would not have the money to bury their son. As a gang, they got together and organized a car wash to help raise money. In my personal journal, I wrote about the boys and my feelings:

I watched my kids file in and visit with Plucy’s family. Boys who society looks at as bad--gang members. Boys--young boys who must say goodbye to a friend. They are boys young boys who laugh and play who worry about Plucy’s family. Who held a car wash to raise money to help the family with expenses. (Personal journal 10/27/95)

They came together early Saturday morning and stayed all day and washed cars. No one griped or complained. At the car wash they played and shared good times. They raised over $800.00 and gave the complete sum to Plucy’s family.

I witnessed this same loyalty and support when Guero, a homie and one of my students, was killed in a car accident. Guero had decided to move to a town away from Tucson to go to college. All the homies were proud of him. After visiting his great grandma on her one hundredth birthday, he drove back to college with a friend late at night. They hit a black cow that was on the road and Guero was instantly killed. This death had a great effect on the rest of the homies. We were no longer in a class in school so coming together as a group was hard. We checked to see if the family needed any help with the funeral. They had insurance,
but the kids decided to have a car wash anyway. They planned it within two days. The car wash became a place where they could gather and share memories. They spent all day washing cars; friends came and left. They talked and cried. The money was used to buy everyone a shirt that had "Guero rest in peace" on the back. They also bought blue carnations for everyone to put in the grave (FN 9/30/97, p. 132). It was their loyalty and concern for each other that brought them together.

At Nuestra Casa, Smurf and Juice often shared stories about the homies and the respect they had for each other. As I listened to their stories, I was impressed by this loyalty. But I also questioned if it was part of the gang or something my students had because they grew up together.

**Literacy in the Gang**

Dealing with the heartache and the meaning of experiences associated with the gang, my participants learned new forms of representing those experiences. The literacy most recognized as gang is graffiti or what my students called tagging. However, literacy in the gang involves not only the written language, but also oral language. In addition, the gang's literacy also included hand signs and other forms of representation.
Tagging: Written Language in the Gang

Tags can be found in many of the cities around the country. During a conversation at school I asked my students how they know where to tag. According to my students, the most important criteria is visibility. A tag is place where people can see it. But tags can be found on any surface. My students tag on their notebooks, book covers, paper, and on furniture. I always knew when something seemed to bother Lil Boy Blue, because he would start tagging. It would preoccupy him and the majority of my students also seemed to use tagging as a way to make sense of their world.

Getting Started with Tagging. During an interview, I asked Lil Boy Blue when he started tagging and how he learned to tag:

Debbie: When did you start tagging?

LBB: I was still young twelve, thirteen. I remember when I first started tagging. I didn't know how to tag. Then you learn later on from other people about tagging and stuff how to tag better.

Debbie: How do you think you learned to tag?

LBB: You pick it up. Everybody picks it up from each other. (IG, LBB, 9/97, p. 7)

Lil Boy Blue stated he learned to tag from other people. As he became part of this new community, he learned the
language of that community.

Smurf started tagging in third grade a lot younger than Lil Boy Blue. He said he got in trouble a lot in school for tagging even though it wasn’t "gang shit." He stated, "I never wrote Crip or nothing like that. It was just gangster style" (IG Smurf 9/97, p. 3). Juice and Lil Garfield also became literate in the gang community. Juice claims he started tagging when he was thirteen. Lil Garfield doesn't remember when he actually started tagging. For Lil Garfield, tagging was part of being a peewee. He stated that not everybody is good at it and that it takes time to learn.

Features of a Tag. As a teacher, I observed many students tagging. I knew there was certain information found in a tag, so I asked Lil Boy Blue what he put in his tags.

Debbie: What are the most important things to put in a tag?

LBB: The name of the neighborhood that's more important than putting Crip something like that.

Debbie: Let's say you are driving down the road with somebody and you see some tags, how would you explain to that person what the tags are.

LBB: I'd just tell him they are gang tags tell him they are territory marks.

Debbie: How would I know this [pointing to a tag I had] is a Crip tag or a Blood tag.
LBB: The color, the b's crossed out, you cross out the
b's to be disrespect the bloods and vice versa.
(IG, LBB, 9/97, p.12)

Figure 6.5 is a tag written by Lil Boy Blue in the
classroom. Notice he has included the name of the
neighborhood (Manzanita) and the street (3100) he lives on.

He has also placed an X over the letter B. At the bottom of
the tag, he disrespects the rival gang by writing "bk" which
means "blood killer" and he drives the disrespect home by ending the tag with "fuc slobs." In the interview, Smurf shared what he felt should be in a tag.

Debbie: What do you put in a tag?

Smurf: Crip, westside Manzanita 3100 blocc BK Smurf

Debbie: Those are the important things to tag?

Smurf: Yea or an X on what ever I’m crossing out. (IG, Smurf, 9/97, p. 8)

Figure 6.6 is one of many tags Smurf wrote in my classroom. Notice his tag contains all the needed information. He tells people where he is from and who he represents. In the right corner he disrespects the enemy. Smurf also pays tribute to a homie (Oso) who was shot in a drive by. In the left corner, Smurf does what is known as a roll call, the listing of other gang members. Both Lil Boy Blue and Smurf agreed on what should be found in a tag. I next asked Lil Garfield and Juice what they felt should be included in a tag.

Debbie: What elements do you include in a tag?

Lil Garfield: I tag the set WS MLMC CRIP BKERS LIL GARFIELD. It matters how much time you got if you got a lot of time you can put almost anything. You got no time you put, like, CRIP WS WESTSIDE. (IG, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 7)
Figure 6.6. Smurf’s tag written in the classroom.

Figure 6.7 is one of Lil Garfield’s tags. He told me that he is still learning to tag. Notice the different elements he has included in his tag and the different styles.

Juice provided more detail. He compared “tagger” (Taggers are a crew made up of people who like to write) tags with “gangster” tags.

Debbie: There’s a lot of different forms of tagging. For me there are Tagger’s tags and Gangster’s tags. Do you think there’s a difference between the two?
Figure 6.7. Lil Garfield's tag written in his journal.

Juice: A tagger's tag you can't read. Tagger's tag got their own languages. Gangster's tag they just put there hood their barrio whatever. You can tell the difference between a tagger's tag and a gangster's tag. It depends on how a person tags. Everybody's got their own style. Nobody tags the same. I don't know tagger's tags its more connected most of the time words letters are connected sometimes it starts smaller and goes bigger (uses hand to illustrate what he means). They put like SNR or something. You see a tag that says 'le sleepy pro vesta' or something that's a gangster tag cause vista is a gang. Taggers got their own language. Spelling and stuff you know what I mean. I mean certain taggers have their own spelling. They can spell cane KANE they can spell what ever they want. Gangster they just have their one like they quote C's. Crips don't use CK.
Debbie: What type of letters do they use?

Juice: If it's a slob then he'll probably use 'CK' a lot, probably quotation around B, probably use a lot of Bs He probably wont put C's in his words. He'll probably use K or c-rap. Then a Crip he'll use probably all C's. He probably wont use K probably, and will cross out all his b's probably will quotation around his c's. (IG, Juice, 9/97, p. 5)

Juice states a tagger's tag is hard to read and they have their own language. During a class discussion, I learned that there are certain rules that are followed when you tag. These rules cover punctuation, spelling, and word choice. I recorded the discussion in my field notes:

We looked closely at the words. The kids pointed out they spell things different. Remember the kids are Crips. CK means Crip killer. My kids do not use CK. For example the word Black is blacc, kick is kicc. When they use the letter B they cross it out by placing an X on the B. The B is in the words Blood a rival gang. All B are crossed out or eliminated. For example "kick back" would be "Kicc Cacc." They also will substitute b with c such as c-cause. Any letter that represents the rival gang or organization is crossed out-s for slob a name the Crips use when referring to bloods, p for posse a gang name for bloods or police, r for red the color of bloods. (FN 2/22/95, p. 10)

When a Crip does a tag, they follow these rules. The rival gang Bloods have the same types of rules just different letters are crossed out or omitted. In the tags found in this chapter you can find letters that are crossed out as well as punctuation marks. Notice the periods or dots between the letters. This punctuation is placed between
letters and words for separation.

While observing Smurf write a tag, I noticed a process as the tag evolved. I recorded what I was observing in my field notes:

Smurf writes, reads and writes more. He moves the paper around as if he is looking for the right spot. He would write and them look again. It wasn't random. It is like he has a plan—a place for everything. (FN 4/15/95, p. 41,42).

There are characteristics and rules that govern the way the kids tag. The next question is what role does tagging play in the gang community?

**Function and Purpose.** As I observed my students tagging in my classroom I started to question the role or function tagging had in the gang community. At first I believed it was a style of doodling, but as I observed and talked with my students I quickly learned there is a function, a purpose for tagging. According to Lil Boy Blue, a tag communicates to others who you are and that you are there. A tag can also disrespect the rival gang by crossing out (placing an X on a letter or the name).

Debbie: What do you communicate? When you tag, when you go into different neighborhoods and you put your tag up, what are you communicating?

LBB: Like what telling them we were there.

Debbie: Just telling them you were there and who you are.
LBB: Yea kind of disrespecting them and everything having Crip tagged up in a Blood area.
(IG, LBB, 9/97, p. 5)

Lil Boy Blue points out that tagging also serves as a way to mark ownership. In the neighborhood there is a rock house (an old building falling apart) the gang has claimed as theirs. Figure 6.8 pictures the rock house and the different tags made by members in the gang. The walls are 

![Image of the Rock House](image-url)

Figure 6.8. The Rock House.
tagger tag to a gangster tag. He stated a tagger tag only destroys property and you can’t read them, but a gangster tag represents the neighborhood, a function that Lil Boy Blue acknowledged.
Debbie: What function does tagging have?

Smurf: I don't like the way taggers do it. Gangster I love'em because they never going to change. Taggers got all these new shit. Can't even read. I think its pretty ugly. I think they ruin our city.

Debbie: So what would you say is the difference between a tagger's and a gangster's tag?

Smurf: Gangster is to like represent your neighborhood. Taggers just bring down the property.

Debbie: So you see gangster's tags have a real purpose? (IG, Smurf, 9/97, p.1)

Smurf doesn't like tagger tags because he saw no purpose in them and he couldn't read them. He also claimed he tagged because he was bored. But he does state that if he sees a "Slob shit or something. I'll cross it out of course and put some of mine up" (IG, Smurf, 9/97, p.1). It is important for Smurf to cross out the enemy's tag and put up his own tag. Even though Smurf would not acknowledge that tags have meaning or a purpose, he doesn't want the enemy tag to be present so he crosses it out and put his own up. Meaning seemed to be evident when we talked about the change that occurred in his tags. Over the three years I have know Smurf, his tag changed. In Figure 6.6 Smurf, put the letter "I" upside down. Figure 6.9 is a tag written by Smurf one year later. Smurf replace the upside "I" with a number one. I asked Smurf about the change.
Figure 6.9. Smurf's tag with 1 used for the letter i.

Debbie: Were you aware of the fact that something change in your tag over the time I knew you?

Smurf: Oh yea I knew it changed the whole time it was changing every day.

Debbie: Yea but you never, when I first met you, when you tagged with an upside down "I".

Smurf: Upside down with the dot on the bottom.

Debbie: By the next year you were doing number one.

Smurf: You know why I was stopping doing that?

Debbie: No.
Smurf: Guero talking shit, he told me it looked stupid. He made fun of my tag. He told me to find a new way so alright I'll find a new way. I started writing CRIP trying to figure how to do... you know with CRIP. I put a one. I thought CRIP with a one. Next thing I thought, CRIP's number 1 you know CRIP's number 1, so I just started putting number one in everything. Specially with CRIP. I liked the way it looked 4 life. Life is number one. I guess I'm saying yea. I don't know. Everything has a meaning to it kind of, but lot of it doesn't.

(IG Smurf 9/97, p.3)

Smurf changed his tag because a homie, Guero said his tag was weak. In searching for a stronger way to do his tag he was influenced by meaning. Smurf chose the number one because being Crip is important—it is number one. It is like life which is also number one. Smurf decides to put the number one in for "I." It was the expression of meaning that resulted in using the number one. When I talked with Smurf, he seemed to think that tagging had no function or meaning. Yet the change in his tag does illustrate that he was thinking of meaning when he made the changes. Another incident that led me to believe that Smurf does believe there is meaning in a tag came when his girlfriend, Dea, was reading the tag found in figure 6.6 allowed to me. Dea started to read the tag. There was no problem until she got to the lower right corner. She read Crip Oso. Smurf interrupted her.

Smurf: See right there it doesn't say Crip OG Oso. The
C is little. It's RIP Oso but I put the C to keep it Crip. That's why the C is small.

Smurf, as the author of this tag, had a specific meaning in mind when he wrote the tag. When Dea wasn't picking that meaning up, he interrupted her to make sure she gets the correct meaning. When Smurf writes a tag, he writes what is on his mind.

Debbie: When I first met you, your tags had Oso in them. Smurf, if it was just something to do, just doing it to mess around, why was it always important that you put Oso on it?

Smurf: I don't know, it's like the hardest time of my life when Oso died. I just can never forget that.

Debbie: Tagging is like keeping him alive. His memories at least.

Smurf: I always have his memories. I don't know, I just wrote it. I just wrote what was on my mind. I don't know why I did that, I just did it. Whatever comes in my mind. (IG Smurf, 10/97, p. 8)

Smurf at first wouldn't recognize the fact that there is a function and meaning to tagging. He discovered it as he talked about his tags.

I asked Juice what function or role tagging played for him as a member in the gang community.

Juice: People cruise down the street, see your name on the wall. It's a new name in a gang THAT'S JUICE FROM MLMC. You are just trying to bring up your name. You want people to know who you are, and where you are from, and that there's a Juice from Manzanita, or there are whatever from Manzanita. You know what I mean, that you just want everybody to know you. And you are from
Manzanita.

Debbie: The function tagging plays is to get people to know who you are?

Juice: And then if somebody crosses out your name, and he’s from a different hood, and he puts his tag, you guys got shit. Because he crossed you out. That’s how you start out.

Debbie: Another function of tagging it plays for you is it helps give you respect?

Juice: If you hit up everywhere you get some sort of respect. (IG, Juice, 9/97, p. 9)

Juice stressed over and over that tagging helps get you known and your gang known. This is important. The more the other gangs know you and your gang, the more respect you get.

According to Lil Garfield you are representing. This is what he felt was the main function of tagging.

Debbie: What function or role does tagging play in the gang?

Lil Garfield: Representation of the hood.

Tagging can also be a way to disrespect the opposing gang. I talked with Lil Garfield on how a tag can be disrespectful.

Debbie: What does a tag communicate to another gangster?

Lil Garfield: Disrespect. If a blood was walking down the street and he sees MLMC Bkers and it was in his hood, “what the fuck disrespect me” or if someone crosses you out it’s disrespect. . . fuck you.

(IG Lil Garf 9/97, p.7)
In the Gang Community a tag has several functions: representing or getting one’s name and the name of the hood known, and gaining respect and the disrespecting of the rival gangs.

Tagging can also be a way to express personal emotions associated with the gang communities. Figure 6.10 is a tag created by Lil Boy Blue after Plucy died. The left hand
by "we live to die and die to live." The right side of the character is a list of the homies who have died.

After Lil Garfield's grandmother died, he made the following tag (see figure 6.11). He was representing his grandmother.

Figure 6.11. Lil Garfield's Tag about his Grandma.

While talking with Lil Garfield, I asked him why he tags on his notebooks at school and is that important. He replied, "Yes, so if any one looks at my notebook they know
that I'm a Crip" (IG Lil Garf, 9/97, p. 11). Tagging on the notebook know this is Lil Garfield's notebook. Not all gangsters can tag or are good at tagging. As I talked with juice I discovered that he felt he had a bad tag. He said, "I got a sorry tag. My tag has always been sorry" (IG Juice, 9/97, p. 8).

While teaching at Nuestra Casa, I would put the day's schedule on a big piece of paper using the gangster style of writing and then on the wall. As the kids came in they would comment that my tags were better than some of the kids in the gang and that I should be in the gang. Tagging is a part of this world. A member either tags or attempts to tag, but they can all read them.

Written language isn't the only type of literacy in the gang. The oral language carries many of the same characteristics.

Oral Language

The literacy in the gang community is not just found in written form, but also in oral form. In the oral language, it is impossible to cross out letters that represent the opposing gang. In the oral language, a gangster uses substitutions instead of crossing out the letters that represent the opposing gang.
Smurf was sitting in the classroom telling us how he and his family went to "Dead Lobster" for dinner. At first I am startled. Then I remember that "red" is the color of the opposing gang so the kids eliminate that from their language by using substitutions. Smurf substitutes the word red with dead. I record this incident and several other examples of substitutions in my field notes:

Smurf is telling us about going out to dinner at a restaurant called "Dead Lobster." There was no hesitation—no second thought. Smurf said dead as natural as if it truly was the name of the restaurant. This is not the only time I have heard them substitute words. When they answer multiple choice questions they will not say B they say fe or fle. I have never heard them say blood, instead they say flood or slob which is the nickname for the gang Bloods. They will substitute c's for b's—cacc is back, c-cuz for because. They can tell what a rapper represents by the words he uses.

(FN, 4/29/95, p.76)

Figure 6.12 is a list of words my students generated in the classroom. These word are not just used by gangsters, but also by adolescents. Many of the words are associated with the adolescent culture. This language became a part of my classroom. I realized just how much when Smurf asked me if they were going to get an assignment cacc [back]. At first I thought I was misunderstanding, but then the light bulb went off.

Oral language is also manifested in music known as Rap or more specifically Gangster Rap. Not all gang members can
rap. Smurf and Lil Garfield are the rappers in the group. To be a famous rapper from Tucson is one of their dreams.

Figure 6.12. Word list generated in the classroom.

During the time Smurf was at Nuestra Casa, he wrote over 50 raps. His mom said he sits in the room and writes raps for hours. Figure 6.13 is one of the raps he wrote in the style of gangster rap. During an interview with Smurf, he talked about his raps:

Smurf: I sit down to write a rap. I write about, like, what I feel, you know, like what I feel about, what’s going on, like some of them are, like kind of . . . Like some of my raps are like there’s that hidden message,
but you can’t really tell like what I’m trying to say cause I don’t really want you to know. But I’m just saying it because that’s what I feel I don’t know.

Debbie: Makes you feel better?

Smurf: Yea kind of, not really. . . makes me feel better, but I don’t know feel, yea, I guess I feel good rappin about it.

Debbie: I wonder if a rap is like the way I write in my journal.

Smurf: I think a rap is a lot like a poem. I mean it like almost the exactly same thing as a poem, but as it's written except mostly well . . . see like a lot of raps these days don't have meaning to them, but every rap, every single rap I ever made had meaning to'em. You know and the killin and the other stuff that I add to it, you know, that's just so people want to hear it so let them hear it (laughs).

(IG, Smurf, 9/97, p. 4)

Figure 6.13. Smurf’s rap written in gangster style.
Writing raps help Smurf deal with his feelings. He is also aware of an audience and what he feels they want to hear. Figure 6.14 is a rap Smurf wrote after the death of another homie. Figure 6.14 is a rap written by Smurf after the death of a home. don’t hear the hard core gangsta’ rap. All you hear is Smurf trying to understand his life. While I was writing this dissertation Smurf had the opportunity to go to a studio and record some of his raps. I asked him how he writes the raps he used in the studio and he told me he doesn’t write them any more.

**Figure 6.14.** A rap written by Smurf after the death of a homie.
Lil Garfield does what is referred to as a free rap. After several of the interviews, he used the tape up and rapped off the top of his head. He also writes key words in his note book (see figure 6.15). The key words are then used in a rap. On one occasion when Lil Garfield was at my home

![Figure 6.15. Copy of Lil Garfield's notebook.](image)

he asked if he could write a rap on the computer. Of course I said yes. He pulled a little note book out of his back pocket. As I watched him work, I recorded it in my field notes:

It is amazing to watch him write the rap. He has this notebook with a list of words written on it. He refers to this while he is writing. He writes a while and then raps out loud. He then will go back and revise until it is just right. I asked him how does this list of words help him. He said he groups together words that rhythm
and he does the rap one way and say you can’t do it that way. Then he reads following the numbers. And raps the song another way

(FN, 9/11/97, p. 196).

Figure 6.16 is a copy of the rap Lil Garfield wrote on the computer as it went out on the Internet. On the way home I asked Lil Garfield if he had any other notebooks with raps written in them, and he stated he doesn’t really write his raps. I asked him about his writing process for the raps. He gave me an example I recorded it in my field notes.

Figure 6.16. Lil Garfield’s rap.

It was amazing to listen to Lil Garfield’s explanation of how he learns to rap. He sat in my car and said, "I
pick words off of street signs." He picked the gas station sign ‘Shell.’ "I rap. I add to it by picking other words I see." He gave me an illustration. He picked several words from signs we could see from the car. He was so comfortable. He moved smoothly from one word to the next, and it was making a story. He claimed he does this all the time. (FN, 2/97, p.134)

For both Smurf and Lil Garfield rapping is a way to express their feelings and a way to share them when they choose to share. Tagging and oral language are just two types of literacy found in the gang community.

Hand Signs

Another form of literacy in the gang is hand signs. All gang members throw up (show) hand signs to each other that carry meaning. These hand signs are used to communicate to rival gangs as well as friendly gangs. Figure 6.17 shows a special hand shake used by gang members in the Manzanita gang. They start out making a "W" which stands for westside. Then by moving the hands downward and they form an "M" which stands for Manzanita. Figure 6.18 is a "W." This is used to greet other westside gangs and to let people know they are from the west side. They are representing their side of town. Figure 6.19 is a combination of a W and M representing west side Manzanita. I took pictures of the different hand signs used by the Manzanita Lynch Mob Crips.
Figure 6.20 is a picture showing two hands spell Crip. My informants are both westside and Crip. Figure 6.21 the hand sign makes a WC-westside Crip. With this hand sign they communicate both who they are and where they are from. Another hand sign that is used by my students and by all Crip gang members is the hand sign BK (see Figure 6.22) which shows disrespect to the rival gang. BK stands for blood killer and lets others know Crips members are not intimidated or afraid of the rival gang. While we were all

Figure 6.17. Hand shake used by west side Manzanita gang members.
at Nuestra Casa, I often sent a camera home with students to take pictures of their world. Many times these pictures were full of their homies. In each picture, hand signs are being thrown as if these students are telling the world who they are.

6.18. Hand Signs for westside

Figure 6.19. Hands sign for westside manzanita.
Figure 6.20. Hand sign using two hands to spell CRIP.

Figure 6.21. Hand sign showing WC for westside Crip
This system is elaborate. I took a pictures of Smurf showing me the individual letters used for Mazanita (see figure 6.23).

Hand signs are used to greet fellow gang members, to identify who you are and where you are from, and to
disrespect the opposing gang. Writing and oral language and hand signs are only three forms of representation used by gang members. They have several other ways to communicate who they are.

Other Forms of Representation

Members of the gang community always look for ways to represent their hood—their gang. My students always wore blue clothes. Blue represents Crips and people—people who are insiders to this knowledge—know they are Crip. Often their shirts, hats, and belts have the letters C (Crip), W, (westside), or LA (little apple which is what Manzanita means). A Crip member will also carry a blue rag or flag (see Figure 6.24).

Figure 6.24. A picture of the blue rag with the hand sign bk.
I will never forget my first visit to the neighborhood. We stopped at the park and the first thing they told me was to look up at the mountains—they form the shape of a W. Figure 6.25 is a picture of the mountain. These were their mountains standing above their hood. It seems to say it is home were it is safe.

Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield are in their terms, "gangsta." The forms of representations associated with the gang are all part of their ways of knowing. During class time I asked Smurf a question about the gang, his answer was interesting. He couldn’t understand why I didn’t know the answer because it was so much a part of them that they figured it was something they always knew and everyone else knew too. Yet they also seemed to know when it was appropriate and when not appropriate. During a class assignment my students were asked to write letters to the mayor about Nuestra and the need for a new building. The kids reminded each other not to put their "gang shit" in the letter because no one would take them seriously. As we prepared to do a presentation at the university, we always talked about the language they would use and how they were going to dress. The goal was what did they want the audience to know, hear and see. The last year at Nuestra Casa the
kids made a yearbook. We had a discussion about the style of writing and the gang symbols they were putting in the book. We talked about audience and who they were making the book. This was their criteria for when to use gang literacy. They understood that gang literacy belonged with the gang world and with people who understood.

Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice and Lil Garfield are "gangsta" in their terms. As they moved outside of the gang world into other worlds, their "gangsta" personification went with them. Like the family community, the gang community often collided with the formal education community. In Chapter Seven, I will share their stories as
community. In Chapter Seven, I will share their stories as they become participants in the world of formal education and the juvenile courts.
CHAPTER SEVEN

STRANGERS IN A STRANGE WORLD:

FORMAL EDUCATION AND JUVENILE COURT

Formal Education Community

Today is something else. I try to get into school and I did. They said that I still got a chance in school to graduate with my class I don’t want to mess up in school so I’m going to try to stay up and do well. (Juice’s Journal, 12/20/96)

As I think back to December 1996, the day I took Juice to register for school, I remember a young man excited but also very nervous. Juice was 17 years old. The first day of school he was scared, but he would never have admitted to that. In Juice’s journal entry we hear the voice of a young man who wants to be back in school and doesn’t want to “mess up.” He wants to stay caught up in his work and to “do good.” He is excited to “graduate with his class.” This journal entry represents the voices of many students who want to be in school and to graduate with their class.

As I write this dissertation, Juice and Lil Garfield have carefully calculated their graduation dates. Smurf toys
with the idea of going back to school, finish his requirements and receive his diploma, but he doesn’t believe it is possible. Both boys want the high school diploma, because for them, this diploma seems to carry some hidden power. Why, then, is it so hard for them to be successful in the formal education community if this is what they want? In this chapter I share Lil Boy Blue’s, Smurf’s, Juice’s, and Lil Garfield’s experiences in early education, high school, and alternative education. I then recount my experience trying to advocate for my participants. I also discuss how the juvenile courts system interferes with Smurf’s, Juice’s, and Lil Garfield’s education.

Thoughts on Elementary School Years

One might believe that adolescents who have “trouble” in high school also were in “trouble” in their elementary years, that their inability to stay in school and do their work started during their early years. As I listened to the individual stories, I learned this was not necessarily true. As I talked with parents, they told me that as elementary students the boys were average. Lil Boy Blue wanted to go to college. Juice came home and did homework before he did anything else. These were parents who couldn’t figure out what went wrong. In the following section, the early school
years of Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield are described based on interviews with the parents of each participant.

**Parents**

When Lil Boy Blue and Smurf were younger, school was not a problem. Kristina claimed that, "Lil Boy Blue never had any problems. He always wanted to go to college" (IP Espinoza, 3/96, p. 10). During an interview with Kristina, I asked questions hoping to reconstruct the time when Lil Boy Blue and Smurf started to have trouble with school:

Debbie: What was it like for them in elementary school?

Kristina: Lil Boy Blue just went along with school. Smurf didn’t like his fourth grade teacher. He wasn’t going to give in to her. And she wasn’t going to give in to him. I swear to God, I was into the principal’s office every other day. I used to dread answering the phone.

Debbie: What type of grades did they get in school?

Kristina: They all had average grades.

(YP Espinoza, 3/96, p. 5)

Kristina felt that when Lil Boy Blue and Smurf got into middle school they would start to "spread their wings, but they were still controllable" (YP Espinoza, 3/96 p. 6). In middle school, she felt it was time to "let them start taking on their own personality and do their own thing. I figured they had to be street smart" (YP, Espinoza, 3/96, p.
I asked Diane, if she could tell me about the boys when they were younger in school. She stated that they attended several different schools while they were growing up.

Diane: They were just typical grade school kids. They didn’t start to change until they went to middle school. And that’s when I went to prison.

Debbie: When they were in grade school do you remember what type of grades they got?

Diane: Average, like average kids.

Debbie: Do you remember if they liked school?

Diane: Yea they did like school. Lil Garfield always had a little problem with school, but Juice, he always liked school. Juice didn’t have any problem.

(IP Alvarez, 2/97, p. 9)

The parents of Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield remember that during earlier years of school their children went to school and were successful. There were some problems, but nothing that would have predicted the events that happened later on.

The participants also remembered that elementary school was meaningful. As they told stories in my class, I heard about classmates and teachers. They recalled the fun and adventures of early experiences.
Lil Boy Blue’s Early Years in School

For Lil Boy Blue elementary school was fun, because he was there with his friends and he thought “school was a lot easier” in elementary. He recounted one of his memories is about his sixth grade teacher:

Debbie: Do you have teachers that stand out?

LBB: Yea I had a good teacher in sixth grade. He was a Mexican if I remember right. He was a cool teacher man.

Debbie: Why was he cool?

LBB: He liked . . . he made it fun to work. You know what I mean. Because I had . . . pretty good teachers, but there was another teacher that supposed to be all mean and stuff. I never had her or anything. All my other teachers were pretty . . . they weren't all mean or anything. But he made it more interesting the work. I liked his class. (IL, LBB, 10/97, p.3)

Lil Boy Blue thought all his teachers were good teachers or at least not all mean. But the sixth grade teacher stood out, because he seemed to make learning fun. Lil Boy Blue received average grades in elementary school. Figure 7.1 is a copy of his third grade report card. Lil Boy Blue scored satisfactory and excellent grades. He earned awards in elementary school (see Figure 7.2). Kristina stated that Lil Boy Blue was always bringing awards and certificates home. However, according to Lil Boy Blue things changed in middle school. Lil Boy Blue never got in trouble in middle school.
He said he had to stay after school a couple of times, but he never got into any big trouble. His grades were "C," but he felt like things were changing.

![Image of a report card](image)

**Figure 7.1.** Lil Boy Blue's Third Grade Report Card.

Debbie: What was middle school like?

LBB: I don't remember, I don't remember too much about [middle school]. Lot of things started changing. Like
friends and stuff started hanging out with different people. Everybody started like kind of like separate to different crowds and stuff that's how I remember junior high. (IL, LBB, 10/97, p. 1,2)

During this time, one of his childhood friends moved away and according to Lil Boy Blue, everyone was separating "into different crowds." Lil Boy Blue graduated from eighth grade and was promoted to ninth grade, and attended Brighton High School. Lil Boy Blue had a hard time remembering specifics about his early years in school, but it is obvious he did seem to enjoy his early school experience. High school seemed to be the time when Lil Boy Blue was turned off of school.

Figure 7.2 One of Lil Boy Blue's Awards.

During this time, one of his childhood friends moved away and according to Lil Boy Blue, everyone was separating "into different crowds." Lil Boy Blue graduated from eighth grade and was promoted to ninth grade, and attended Brighton High School. Lil Boy Blue had a hard time remembering specifics about his early years in school, but it is obvious he did seem to enjoy his early school experience. High school seemed to be the time when Lil Boy Blue was turned off of school.
Smurf's Early Years in School

Smurf had a different experience with school. His mother remembers fourth grade being a particularly hard year. Smurf did bring home awards that he earned at school, but he doesn't really remember them (see Figure 7.3). The difference between Smurf and Lil Boy Blue is Smurf claimed he never really liked school. He only liked to socialize. I asked Smurf if he had any good or bad memories of school. At first he couldn't recall any memories, so I asked him if liked school:

Debbie: What are the memories you have of elementary school?
Smurf: I don't know.

Debbie: Did you like school?

Smurf: No, I didn't like it, but it was school. I like it cause, I liked to see my friends cause when you are young you don't really get to do a lot of things.

(ILI, LBB, 9/97, p. 2)

His answer sort of shocked me, because I had heard him talk about elementary school memories with his homies. I decided to ask him what type of student he was. He told me about a time when he was supposed to get suspended in grade school.

Smurf: I got in a lot of trouble. I was like the only person in elementary to get suspended

Debbie: What were you suspended for?

Smurf: I don't remember. It was in fifth grade, but my dad went and complained, told them, you know, I was too young to get suspended so what they did, they took me out of my class for the last two months of school. I had school in the principal's office, that was my school. I still got my lunch and recesses and everything, but my class was in the principal's office. It was me and this other, two guys. Three guys at the end the year. The principal took us, he wanted us to see his house, so we can know what an education can get you-nice things. He took us to his house. He had a nice house. They had dirt bikes, and a Jacuzzi in his house and everything. He showed us all that and he took us to eat pizza. We were the worst kids in school, and we got all this. He took us to dairy queen. He was a pretty cool principal.

Debbie: Did you do the work when you were in his office?

Smurf: Yea, he helped me more. I guess maybe, I had more attention because in the class other teachers, they would just worry about me being quiet and not making any remarks. They always had my desk in the
corner or right next to their desk. (IL, Smurf, 10/97, p. 3)

Here Smurf shares a memory of school, a time when he was in trouble, but this memory revealed a little bit more about Smurf. The principal was interested in Smurf and Smurf's learning. Therefore, Smurf became a learner. Smurf found someone who was more concerned about his learning. I then began to question if the statement of hating school was more of a learned behavior. At Nuestra Casa, Smurf shared stories of fun times in elementary, of good teachers, and of good friends. Yet Smurf stated he hates school.

In a telephone conversation with Kristina, I asked her about Smurf's experience in school. She felt that Smurf lived up to what the teachers expected of him. If they saw him as a trouble maker, that was what he became. If they saw him as a fun student, that was what he was. She shared one experience where a counselor told her that Smurf would end up in jail (FN, 3/96, p. 110). Knowing about Smurf's school experiences that Kristina shared with me, I began to wonder if Smurf's answers were in compliance to being the type of student the counselor described.

When I had Smurf in class, he did like to stir things up at times, but he also was a hard worker and very much aware that the teacher should be respected. In an incident
in my classroom, I had to discipline one of the students
Smurf helped out. I recorded the incident in my field notes.

Snoopy is acting up. I told him to leave. Smurf asked me to let him stay and then told Snoopy to treat me
with respect, "like one of the homies" (FN, 3/30/95, p. 35).

I wondered if Smurf saw himself as a trouble maker, because
that seems to be what was emphasized throughout his school
experience? By the time he got into middle school he didn’t
like school. Kristina felt she was always in the office.
Both Kristina and Felipe would attend parent conference
meetings. In these meetings, all they heard was how bad
their son was. Kristina and Felipe believed that if Smurf
could hang in until he graduated from eighth grade, they
believed things would be better for him in high school and
he would be fine. They believed Smurf could start new in
high school. They seemed to just wait for him to move on.
Smurf was promoted to ninth grade.

Juice’s Early Days in School

Juice considered himself a good student until seventh
grade. In fact he saw himself as a "school boy." He did his
homework and even played the violin. He claimed he would run
home and before he would do anything he would sit down and
do his homework. I asked Juice how his teachers in
elementary would describe him.
Debbie: If I asked your third grade teacher to describe to me the type of student you were, what do you think she would say?

Juice: I was a very good student. I was a quiet listening student. I was quiet and I would listen all the time, do my work and hand it in on time. Do every thing right. After school, I would walk home. I turned on my light. I wouldn’t do nothing. I would wave hi to my mom and do my homework. When my home work was done, I would eat. Then I would go outside. I was more responsible when I was a kid. (IL, Juice, 10/97, p. 3)

I stated earlier that trying to build Juice and Lil Garfield’s stories were difficult because of the family structure. However, Diane did find some of the awards Juice earned while in elementary. Figure 7.4 is a copy of a letter Juice received from the vice mayor while he was in first grade. Juice also had the opportunity to participate in the Young Author’s Festival and received a certificate from that experience (see figure 7.5).

Juice saw things change when he was in seventh grade. That is the time his mom went to prison. Before his mom went to prison Juice claimed, “I get like one D two C’s the rest I hardly get B’s. I mostly got A’s” (IS, Juice, 2/96, p. 13).
Figure 7.4. Letter Juice received from vice mayor of Tucson.

Figure 7.5. A certificate from Young Author Festival
Lil Garfield’s Early Years in School

Lil Garfield also enjoyed grade school. He claimed, "it was more fun back in those days, I got away with more shit in elementary" (IS, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 1). I continued to ask him about elementary school.

Debbie: In elementary what type of student would you say you were?

Lil Garfield: I was a B average maybe an A. I was on honor roll a couple of times, pretty good student. It wasn’t that easy to fuck up.

Debbie: What do you mean it wasn’t that easy?

Lil Garfield: Well, you could mess up, but it’s not like they were going to suspend you and shit. You mess up, you get detention, cool well, you learn the next time.

Debbie: Do you remember getting into a lot of trouble or a little bit of trouble in elementary?

Lil Garfield: I used to get in little trouble but a lot of times. Like cussing, class clown that was the biggest one on my report card class clown, different stuff. (IS, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 1)

Lil Garfield’s mom found some of Lil Garfield’s work from grade school. Figure 7.6 is an assignment Lil Garfield did at school on the book Stone Fox (1980) by John Gardiner Reynolds. He had to answer three questions.

Lil Boy Blue, Juice, and Lil Garfield enjoyed their elementary years and were successful. Smurf was never willing to say he had a good time in elementary, but I
believe he is reacting to some of the treatment he received. Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield remembered teachers, principal, and events that dictated their reaction to elementary school. However, in high school things changed dramatically. Smurf often felt the teachers were more worried about him sitting, being quiet and not making remarks than about his learning.

Figure 7.6. Lil Garfield’s school assignment on Stone Fox.
High School Experience: The Trouble Begins

Many things were changing for Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield. Although Lil Boy Blue completed his ninth grade year, tenth grade was the year that would change his view of school and college. For Smurf, Juice and Lil Garfield ninth grade was the year that started their trouble with school. In this section, I share their stories and the experiences they had with high school. Lil Garfield is not included in this section because he hadn’t yet entered high school.

Lil Boy Blue's High School Experiences

According to Kristina, Lil Boy Blue never really got into trouble until high school. She realized that Lil Boy Blue wasn’t perfect but he was never suspended until his sophomore year. In his ninth grade year, Lil Boy Blue was going to class and enjoyed going.

LBB: Yea it was fun . . . high school . . . freshman. We messed around a lot, so we didn't really. I mean we ditched a lot of classes.

Debbie: Did you get in trouble your ninth grade year besides ditching?

LBB: Naaah I never got suspended or anything at all.

(IS, LBB, 9/97, p. 2)

Lil Boy Blue’s sophomore year was the turning point in his educational experiences. In order to reconstruct the
timeline of his experiences. I tried to obtain his school file, but when I contacted the schools no one knew where it was located. Several times I heard that no one knew what happened to his file. I have heard the story several times. This is Lil Boy Blue’s reaction to the experience:

Debbie: Ok what happened in your sophomore year?

LBB: Sophomore year was nothing. But because you know other people, they got more into gang stuff that year. Before my freshman year, it was bad. But everybody just kind of kept to themself, you know what I mean. And sophomore year, the first day of school, everybody started going at it, dogging and talking shit. I remember Bad Boy like the first ten minutes he had already had a fight.

Debbie: Your mom told me about when you got in trouble and going to different schools and trying to do ... all the different things like that, I want your version of it.

LBB: I remember after I got caught with the gun, my dad was trying to get me back into school. I was trying to get back into school and they were giving us a hard time. I got caught with the gun the second month of school. Early in the year. They kind of like bull shit with us. It end up I could get back to school by the semester and that came by, as you know, that came by at the end of the school year too early, too late so I didn't start school until next year. They finally let me in at [another high school across town]. They said that. They lied to my dad too. My dad didn't want me going to a school that didn't have transportation and stuff. They told my dad that they would let me back to Brighton or the high school downtown or something cause they have a bus that goes by, if I did good at the other high school. I had a semester to do good. I just had to pass all my classes, I think, and I went to a new high school. I passed it, and they still didn't let me back into Brighton. (IS, LBB, 9/97, p.9)
This experience became a turning point in Lil Boy Blue's school life. The parent's account of this incident shows the hard work they did to keep their son in school:

Kristina: They pulled in both Lil Boy Blue and his friend, but Lil Boy Blue had the bag [with the gun]. Even though the bag didn't belong, to him they got Lil Boy Blue.

Felipe: Arrested him.

Debbie: When did they call you into the office?

Kristina: When this happened, they called me and told me that Lil Boy Blue was being arrested. I said why and they said possession of a gun. Everything fell apart you know.

Felipe: I didn't believe them.

Kristina: I called him [Felipe] up at work. He dropped everything. I rushed over there and he met me there [at the school] shortly after. The police helped us and everything. When we were talking, they said you know Lil Boy Blue seems like a really nice guy. It doesn't seem like it's going to be that bad.

(IP, Espinoza, 3/96, p. 5)

Kristina believed everything was going to be all right because the police officer stated that Lil Boy Blue seemed like good kid. She wasn't prepared for what the school would put them through. During our conversation, Kristina and Felipe used the word "expelled" but what they were saying made it seem like Lil Boy Blue was suspended. The confusion comes from what expulsion means in this district. According to the student handbook, expulsion is defined as "the
permanent withdrawal of the privilege of attending a school unless the governing board reinstates the privilege." This usually refers to all schools in the district. Yet, Lil Boy Blue was allowed to attend a high school within the district and several alternative programs.

Debbie: Originally they told you he was expelled for 30 days?

Kristina: I didn’t worry too much, because I knew he could make that time up. Summer school or whatever. Then when we went back, they prolonged it another 30 more days.

Debbie: What was their reason for prolonging it?

Felipe: The reason was for me, it [gang activity] was happening more and more.

Debbie: So you really understood that after the thirty days Lil Boy Blue would be back in school.

Kristina: I took him back to school. When we went back to school, they [school officials] said no another thirty days.

Felipe: I took him to school. When we got there to enrolling again, the principal came out and said oh no no you’re not allowed here. You have to leave and I said why? Well because . . . because you are going in for a hearing now for expelling him. I said how long is that. The principal said probably 60 days.

(IP, Espinoza, 2/97, p.97)

According to the district handbook, as the result of a hearing a student can be suspended no less than 10 days and no more than 60 days. This is where the story gets even more confusing. I could tell that Felipe was also frustrated. I
asked him if the hearing was in 60 days and he said they
gave them a day which was about a month ahead. Lil Boy Blue
had another 30 days out of school. During this time,
Kristina would pick up Little Boy Blue's work from the
teacher. The teachers and the parents seemed to think Lil
Boy Blue was coming back to school. At the hearing there
seemed to be more confusion concerning Lil Boy Blue being
suspended or expelled. Felipe shared what the hearing was
like:

Felipe: We went up against the board, five members, two
teachers and the principal. I presented that I felt
that I should have Lil Boy Blue go back to school to
get back into getting on with his education. They
looked at me and said we'll let you know. I had to
leave the room. I came back in. They said no.

Debbie: Did they give a reason?

Felipe: Yea, they said they were following guidelines
for this kind of behavior. They couldn't tolerate this
kind of behavior. (IP, Espinoza, 2/97, p.97)

The result of the hearing was that Lil Boy Blue was
suspended/expelled for one semester. Felipe and Kristina
were also told that if Lil Boy Blue attended another high
school for a semester and passed all his classes, he could
return to Brighton High school, the next semester. Felipe
contacted the vice principal of a high school across town
within the same school district. The vice principal at the
new high school was a former teacher of Felipe's.
Arrangements were made and Lil Boy Blue was back in school. He attended all classes and passed all his classes. Felipe took Lil Boy Blue to Brighton High School to register for the upcoming semester. The parents were previously told that if Lil Boy Blue attended another school for one semester and stayed out of trouble and passed all his classes, he would be allowed to attend Brighton. However, to his parents' surprise once again Lil Boy Blue was denied access to the school and they were finally told that the school officials never planned to let Lil Boy Blue back into school. The parents were frustrated. Felipe decided he was going to the district superintendent.

Felipe: So I said I'm going right to the top. I don't want to talk to the teachers. I don't want to talk to principals. I wanted to talk to the superintendent. I went down to 1010. I would go on my lunch hour and they would tell me he would be back about 11:30. They would ask could someone else help you. No. I went to see the superintendent. He's not back but he will be back. I will wait. He never showed up.

Debbie: How many times did you go?

Felipe: Oh I went 15 to 20 times. Every time I went in there, they tell me he's coming. He'll be back.

(IP, Espinoza, 2/97, p.3)

Felipe told me that he had talked to four different assistants, but Felipe never got to see the superintendent. Felipe would sit in the receptionist area waiting and the superintendent never showed up. He figured there must of
been a back door, because the superintendent never came through the receptionist’s area. At one time Felipe and Kristina decided to talk to the school board. They went to a board meeting, but were never given permission to speak and present their story. During the process Lil Boy Blue’s parents always believed Lil Boy Blue would be allowed back into school.

Kristina told me that during this time, Lil Boy Blue was very discouraged. He had given up on school. In an interview I asked him about the different schools he attended:

Debbie: What did you think about Kino Alternative School?

LBB: It was all right. It was like regular school. They let you get away with a lot of stuff, but they didn't care how you dress like a regular school. They were pretty good, but I don't know.

Debbie: What about Ace [first alternative program Lil Boy Blue attended]?

LBB: I think Ace was the school I went to before Harris High School, but I didn't stay there that long.

Debbie: You didn't pass any?

LBB: No, because it was kind of sorry [not good]. All they did was put you on a computer, and you worked on the computer the whole time. They let the computer do all the explaining. If you had question you would ask them [instructors] but they wouldn't really tell ya. This kind of sucked.

Debbie: Why did you leave Kino Alternative High School?
LBB: At Kino you had to have a good grade point average in order to stay. My first quarter I think I didn't pass one of my classes, so they didn't let me stay. If I didn't stay in school, mom and dad would be pissed off. So this other dude at Kino . . . he was talking about Nuestra Casa so we went over there. And I went and I started talking to them. I brought everybody else.  (IP, Espinoza, 2/97, p. 3,4)

Lil Boy Blue’s last school was Kino Alternative High School. Lil Boy Blue went down and talked with the people in charge of the program at Nuestra Casa. He decided to attend and to bring his little brother Smurf who was starting to have problems at Brighton High School.

**Smurf’s High School Experiences**

Smurf’s experience with traditional high school is limited. His freshman year, he entered Brighton High School. While he was attending Brighton, his middle school would call home and say he was absent. Kristina told me they had a battle over Smurf and where he was going to go to school. At the end of eighth grade Smurf was told if he passed summer school he could go to high school. He passed summer school and was allowed to register at Brighton. However, during that first month of school, both Brighton and the middle school debated where Smurf would be allowed to attend school. Finally it was decided he could stay at Brighton. Smurf didn’t get a good start at Brighton. Smurf told me that he was called to the office almost everyday and he
would be padded down. Smurf’s older brother, Lil Boy Blue, was aware of the struggle Smurf was having. When Lil Boy Blue decided to attend Nuestra Casa, he asked his mom if Smurf could come. Smurf spent a little more than one month at a traditional high school before he started his career in an alternative program.

**Juice’s High School Experiences**

As I gathered information from Juice about schooling, I was aware that he had attended several traditional and alternative high school programs. My goal was to discover how this picture came together. Juice began his high school experience at Brighton High School.

The first nine weeks at Brighton High School, Juice was suspended for fighting and he failed all his classes. He decided he was tired of failing. He had heard about Nuestra Casa, and he decided to go there (FN 6/98, p. 245). He was one of their first students. I started teaching him in February of 1995. He was only with us for about a two or three weeks before he decided to transfer back to Brighton. This was also the same time his mother was released from prison. I remember long talks trying to convince him to stay at Nuestra Casa. He could build his credits. I told him he could lose credits in the process. But his girl friend was
at Brighton so he made the transfer. After he transferred back to Brighton, I would see him when he came to visit the class. During those times I would ask him why he wasn't in school. He always responded "I’m suspended." He never completed that semester and he eventually quit going to Brighton.

Along with his homie Plucy, Juice decided to attend Brighton fall 1995. Both he and Plucy came to visit my classroom near the end of September. They informed me they were both suspended. I never saw him again until Plucy's funeral. At that time I discovered he was dropped from school and was placed in his second alternative program. At the beginning of the spring semester, Juice registered for his second traditional high school, but he lasted only one week there. He then ended up at a third alternative school.

**Alternative School: Nuestra Casa**

Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, and Juice along with Plucy and three other students were attending Nuestra Casa when I started teaching at there. Lil Boy Blue attended two traditional high schools and Nuestra Casa was his third alternative program. Smurf spent about one month in traditional high school before he made his move to Nuestra Casa. Juice attended Brighton for one quarter of a semester
when he decided to attend Nuestra Casa. When they entered my classroom, both Smurf and Juice were in ninth grade, the beginning of their high school experiences; Lil Boy Blue should have been graduating from high school that year.

When I took over the class, the official curriculum consisted of packets of worksheets, originally designed for migrant workers in California. As the students completed a packet, they took a test, which was 50% true and false, 50% multiple choice. They needed to score 75% to pass. If the students didn't pass, they could take the test over until they scored high enough to pass. Some of the students would take the test without ever completing the packet and fail, knowing they could retake as many times as needed. The class was organized so that each student worked individually on their own assignments. If they had any questions or problems, they would ask the teacher. The kids came and went as they pleased.

The Beginnings of My Teaching at Nuestra Casa

When I became the teacher about 12 names were on the role, but only about six students showed up regularly. Smurf and Juice greeted me that first day and a couple of days later Lil Boy Blue came back to class. I spent about one week observing and soon realized there was no structure in
the classroom. Kids came and went and did school work when they wanted. This lack of structure and discipline was one reason why Lil Boy Blue wasn’t there when I first started teaching. My first step was to develop structure and some continuity that the students could depend on. I knew it was important to establish a reading course which would be an elective. This would bring the class together. The reading course included individual reading, group reading and responding to what they read. My first step was to bring in books. Lil Boy Blue was not present the first time I brought in the books. Smurf, Juice and the others students’ reactions to the books startled me. I recorded the incident in my field notes:

I placed books out on the table. They handled every book, looking at the front and the back. I felt like I was watching kids handle a strange object. Getting them to read was another project. They would skim and turn pages and skim some more. Some of the students just handled the books. They never refused to read. It was more like they weren’t sure what to do. (FN 2/9/95, p. 1)

They didn’t at first object, but their reaction was more of the curiosity. I thought maybe the problem was the types of books I brought to classes so the next time I brought in books and magazines on topics I had heard them talk about (Smith, 1996). I was seeing small changes take place. "Today
during reading time they actually sat quietly for twenty minutes. Not everyone read, but they either read or drew. Smurf read for the first time” (FN, 2/14/95, p. 5).

I only had Juice as a student for a short time at Nuestra, but he was like the other students when it came to reading. However, he was in my class long enough for me to watch him take the risk and read. On February 22, 1995, I wrote in my field notes, “For the first time Juice read. For a long time he sat and tagged but today he read.” Soon after that experience Juice transferred back to Brighton High School.

Lil Boy Blue’s baby was born the first of February 1995. He was not in attendance for about a month. When he did come, his mind wasn’t on doing school. As I struggled to establish a learning environment with my other students’ Lil Boy Blue wasn’t there.

Smurf was my regular. He was there every day. I have learned that school attendance was mandatory on his probation. This doesn’t guarantee an adolescent will show up, but for Smurf it worked. He seemed to struggle and fight doing anything that seemed like school work. I wrote about his reaction several times in my field notes:

• Smurf hates math. In fact, Smurf struggles with school in general. After math, we had another reading time
scheduled. Smurf sat and went through the *Lowrider* magazine. (FN 2/25/1995, p. 13)

- I have gotten very little from Smurf. Basically speaking, he has done nothing. (FN 3/6/95, p.19)

- Smurf took the article and let me know he doesn’t want to read. He sits down and puts his head down. The other students followed. (FN 4/4/95, p. 38)

- Smurf reminded me that “I don’t read. Miss we don’t do this here. Miss if I wanted to read I would have stayed in school.” (FN 4/10/95, p.43)

On several occasions Smurf would lead the group and remind me this was their school, and they would say when and what they were going to do, and they hated reading. Smurf had strong feelings toward school. He often expressed them in his writing (see Figure 7.7). Yet the only time I remember Smurf missing school was when his life was threatened. Smurf did his work on most occasions. I recorded one particular time when Smurf was refusing to work:

I told him [Smurf] it was an easy day for him. I needed the “I Am poem.” He kept saying no way. Then all of a sudden he writes. I am just sitting next to him. It was like that made a difference. Time is a very important concept for him. My pushing seems to have no effect on his time schedule. In fact my non-pushing does affect it. My sitting and listening seems to have something to do with it also. I think. (FN 3/25/96, p. 110)

I was very much aware of Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s gang affiliation, but I wasn’t aware of how much it was part of their lives. As a class assignment, I handed out some
poems written about gangs in the barrio. The students were first asked to read the poems to themselves and then together as a class. Smurf volunteered to read aloud. He read with no problem. However, while reading one of the poems, he made what I thought was a miscue that changed the meaning and he never self-corrected. I wrote about that experience in my field notes:

While reading one of the poems, Smurf came to the word "blood" and read "flood." He did this with no
hesitation. It was as if this was natural. By now I knew that the gang Bloods was the "enemy." I asked Smurf about the word and why he didn’t say it. He confirmed my suspicions by stating he doesn’t say that word. I asked him to tell me what the poem was about. He could talk about the poem. Switching the word didn’t change any meaning. In this poem the word "flood" meant "blood." (FN 2/25/95, p. 13)

That same day I also learned something important that has changed my teaching. I picked these poems because I thought they would be able to relate to them and because I wanted them to see the negative aspects of gang life. I was going to be the teacher who got them out of the gang. After reading the poems Smurf stated “Miss we don’t like things that tell us gangs are bad.” He continued by saying, "We are in a gang" (FN 2/25/95, p. 14). He then walked out the door. I was left with my thoughts. I realized that Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice and the other students are, in fact, in a gang or at least they associate themselves with a gang. Gangs are a part of who they are. I needed to respect these students and accept them. I needed to learn from them about gangs. I began with a idea that I could somehow “fix” whatever was broken; I realized I was wrong.

Their gang life became a part of my classroom. Often as we worked on stories, worksheets, and projects, I saw them tag over the stories and worksheets. They used tag style of writing to answer questions. They would cross the “B” out of
multiple choice questions. Projects they completed were on gangs and graffiti. Posters made about the projects were written in tag style of writing.

By now Lil Boy Blue had become a regular member of the class. I still struggled and they would still fight any aspect that was school to them. As a result, I experienced times in my classroom where nothing seemed to work as well as times when everything clicked. One specific time I recorded in my field notes:

Guero [a homie form the hood] was with us as a visitor today. I handed out a small packet of collections of writing by other teens. They read them. One student said the author is black. I asked how do you know. He said the words and the names. Smurf read the first poem out loud. Guero stated he thought this poem was stupid because girls can change easier than boys. The other boys agree. I asked Smiley (a girl) if she agreed and she said no. It depends on the girl and how involved she is with the gang. Smurf moved on and read the article on violence. This is where things started to change. Smurf read the first page and there was an immediate reaction from Lil Boy Blue. He stated “blacks” don’t have it as bad as before. And they bring it onto themselves. Lil Boy Blue was talking and logically thinking through how the blacks were slaves and how they got their freedom. After a discussion, Smurf continued reading the rest of the article. Smurf’s reading was simply going through the motion until he started to read about homies dying and shootings. Everyone settled down. They were listening. After the reading they talked about how close the hood is and how they stay by each other. The room took on a whole new feeling. (FN 2/24/95. P. 234)

These short poems led my students into a class discussion.
They shared stories of their own gang and challenged what the writers were saying. They struggled with their own prejudice and ideas about "others." When the day was over, I took a deep breath. This was an important moment.

As a class, we were destined to have more good times and times during which we would struggle. I continued my routine of reading time, but I was careful to pick readings that I felt would engage their interests. I often brought in such magazines as *The Source*, *Vibe*, *Rap Page*, and *Rap Sheet*. On one occasion, I decided we would read an article out of *Rap Sheet*. This day began as a day we would struggle through. Smurf and the other students were not ready to read. Lil Boy Blue became the leader in this time:

Lil Boy Blue got the magazine [*Rap Sheet*] and started reading it. He was interested. He started talking to the other kids, and they got interested and started to read. He shared some quotes and the kids asked questions and talked. They were reading and discussing what they read. They even looked through other articles. (FN 4/4/95, p. 38)

On that day, I was observed my students resisting reading. Yet I also watched Lil Boy Blue bring the group together in the reading activity.

I kept asking myself why they refused to complete some assignments on some occasions yet would work hard on others. I concluded that if the assignment seemed like a "school"
assignment, they would resist it. I was seeing strong
resistance to any work that reminded them of "school." In an
article, I wrote about my classroom I stated "I believe the
behavior my students exhibited first—their resistance to
reading and responding—was actually related to their
negative conception of 'school' and 'school learning'"
(Smith, 1996, p. 24). I believed they were resisting school
because school had resisted them. It wasn't a lack of
ability.

Lil Boy Blue, Smurf and the rest of the kids grew to
trust me, and I learned a lot from them. One learning
experience for me came from Smurf. He asked if I would take
the students to a movie during school. My response was that
I would but they had to earn that right by doing all their
work for the week. I will never forget Smurf's response,
"Miss, why is it that we always have to prove ourselves but
the teachers never have to?" He walked out the door. I
thought about that statement a lot. From that point on my
students and I did things together as a class because we
wanted to be together not because we were trying to prove
something. They did things for me such as making formal
presentations in my graduate class and at a graduate
colloquy on a Saturday.
I discovered just how much was changing when I visited Lil Boy Blue and Smurf's home. Kristina, their mom, told me that when they were looking for another female player for the softball team, Lil Boy Blue told them I would play. Kristina remembered being shocked that a teacher would take interest in students inside the classroom much less outside the classroom.

Lil Boy Blue was always quiet in my classroom. But I noticed that when the students were just talking or telling stories he was an active participant. As I observed closely, I realized the whole class was actively participating in the classroom talk and storytelling activities. They seemed to relive memories as they talked. I was allowed to listen:

Everyone is talking--telling stories. I decided to sit back and listen and watch. They were talking, recalling memories and sharing memories. At one time Smurf and Icy Blue look at each other and get excited, shake hands and laugh "Don't talk shit [tough talk] on pager X-man needs a hood." Story telling and talking were very important to them. (FN 2/27/95. P. 16)

During the storytelling Smurf and Icy Blue recalled a memory they shared. They simply looked at each other and remembered. This made them laugh. I became more aware of the value of talk when I handed out copies of Lowrider, a magazine the kids like to read.

The magazine came today. They went crazy. They sat and went through the magazine cover to cover. Dialogue took
place around the magazine. They talked about cars, ads, girls, and parts of cars. They would go back to the magazine and look through it and talk more. Stories would get started up. (FN 3/26/ 95, p. 24)

I decided to included talk in all aspects of the curriculum. Lil Boy Blue seemed to thrive during this time. I was required to use some of the packets and we would sit around the table and work together on the worksheets. Everyone talked and shared stories and asked questions. All assignments and projects were completed collaborating in groups of two or more. In the schedule, I had to allow for the talk. This meant it would take longer to complete assignments. With this procedure and other changes, I started to observe small changes. One particular time was while we were talking about the United States government.

As I shared information, Lil Boy Blue sat with his eyes glued to me. He would listen and ask questions. The other kids where ready to move on but Lil Boy Blue had more questions.

While studying the solar system, the students were asked to form groups and build a model of the solar system. I placed a collection of material on the table and instructed them to go to work. Lil Boy Blue joined a group of two other students and Smurf was in a different group. They worked and didn’t stop until the project was completely done. Each group worked on there own interpretation of the solar
system. During the work time, students gave advice and helped each other. Once again I observed my students enjoying school, taking risks and learning.

Writing for my students was like reading; they hated to write. During an interview with one of the kids, we started laughing as they told me they knew no matter what happened they had to write about it or talk about it in class. They complained and refused to write. Often they sat and tagged during any writing time. During their storytelling they would refer to a Rock House. This was their place to hang out. They wanted me to see it and I decided it would be a great place to go and write. We decided to take a trip to the Rock House and write, and afterwards we would go and get pizza. For the first time they sat and wrote:

The day proceeded with the kids moving out and writing for about ten minutes. I wanted to have them sit alone but they wanted to sit together more or less. After the ten minutes, we came back together to share. Yes share and the kids did share. Milkweed wrote a poem and shared it. Boy was that a shock. He is talented in this area. The kids applauded. Smurf also shared a rap. I think it is one of his best; the hardness was missing. They went out to write a second ten minutes. I watched five of them work. Their pencils moving. Thoughts flying. We shared again. (FN 4/4/95, p. 40)

Another way I got them to read and write was with computers. I had three computers locked up in my classroom. One morning I got the key and unlocked the cabinets. My
students arrived and moved straight to the computers. We spent almost the whole morning learning three different programs: a word processor, Wheel of Fortune, and a banner program. Smurf learned to operate the computer with ease. He was the one the other students turned to for help. One morning I came in and Smurf and Sad Boy were at the computer writing a story:

Smurf and Sad Boy have been writing. They are excited about their story. They read the story to the class. All of the students are involved. Everyone is making suggestions. Then Smurf said, “No we want it real life.” Sad Boy thinks maybe there should be more “bang” [gang activity]. They wanted Oso to be in the story, but they wanted it to be real. Sad Boy and Smurf talk about writing a book. They gave me the disk to save—

(FN 5/3/95, p. 60)

They worked several days on the story. It turned out to be the longest piece of writing they did. They didn’t want to be interrupted during their writing. The other students gave suggestions. They would take time to talk and then go back to write. But like reading, we still had days when they didn’t want to write.

During a free write Lil Boy Blue would often write about how much he hates to write. But as he gained trust in the school and me, he took risks and wrote more. Not every day was a “good” day. As a class, we struggled. I had some success with my students, but this often changed quickly. At
times I felt like I was drowning. We were learning together. While interviewing Lil Boy Blue and Smurf for this study, I asked them to reflect upon their experience at Nuestra Casa:

Debbie: What do you think about Nuestra Casa now that it is done and over?

LBB: It was bad. It was easy to do the work.

Debbie: What made it easy?

LBB: The environment not worrying about the strict rules. (IS, LBB, 9/97, p. 4)

For Lil Boy Blue, environment organized to accept him and not hassle him made it possible for him to graduate from high school. It wasn’t hassle free, because I would often get on his back about his work. But I also knew Lil Boy Blue was working full time and wanted to graduate:

Smurf and Lil Boy Blue are not in school today again. This worries me. There are two weeks of school left. We need to bring closure to this semester. Lil Boy Blue has too much pressure—work and school. I need to help him get back into school. He has one semester left. (FN 12/3/95, p. 9).

Lil Boy Blue and I worked together to make graduating a possibility. He graduated in May 1996. He wasn’t allowed to graduate at Brighton High School where two of my students, his fellow students, were graduating. I picked up his diploma and took it to him. The hurt he experienced in traditional high school is still a part of him. He still struggles with going beyond high school; he wants to go but
taking that step is hard.

Smurf's response to the question about Nuestra Casa was similar to his brother's. Smurf was a younger student, so I asked him what was the difference in Nuestra Casa and the other schools:

Smurf: There we didn't get treated like we did everywhere else. It's just the way they treated me. I didn't have to ditch there [Nuestra Casa]. I guess, I mean, it's only four hours and not even that sometimes. I don't know, it was just ... it was nothing you had to ditch. You know what I mean, like you didn't have to be there. Well, you know, we had a special time to be there, but you didn't get sent to lock out if you weren't there.

(IS, Smurf, 9/97, p. 5)

Smurf felt he was treated better at Nuestra Casa, than in the other schools. For both Lil Boy Blue and Smurf, the way they are treated is important. At Nuestra Casa, they felt accepted. They could take the risk and learn. When Lil Boy Blue graduated, Smurf had to move back to traditional high school because he was told that it is district policy that a student can only be in a community alternative program for two years. Smurf had been with me for two years. He was now a junior.

A New Year: Advocating and Traditional High School

Because my students and I, were told a policy existed which stated that students could only attend a community based alternative program like Nuestra for two years, Smurf
and five of my other students had to go back to traditional school. My students were worried they would not make it. At that time, I decided to actively advocate for my students. I was mainly worried about Smurf because he wasn’t used to going to school all day with a strict structure of bells and moving from class to class. He was in an alternative program and only spent one month in a traditional high school. In addition Smurf didn’t want to go back. He was afraid. He knew he would just get into trouble. At the end of the 1996-97 school year, I took the students to register at Brighton High School. While visiting Brighton high school, I was made aware of an alternative program on campus. The alternative program was only four hours in the morning. I believed it could work as a transitional time for Smurf and ease him back into traditional school. He would be on campus, but in a program that was familiar to him. It took his mom and me the whole summer to convince him to go back to Brighton to the alternative program.

Smurf, Kristina, and I met with the director. We all left the meeting feeling like the alternative program was best for Smurf. The director also saw this program as a transition for Smurf to move back into regular school. The week before school started another homie, one of my students
who had just graduated, committed suicide. When school began, the kids were understandably still upset. This is how we started school:

All kids are in school. What a morning! Smurf wasn't completely registered so I had to call Felipe to come in, because they were going to drop Smurf before school started. I did get Smurf in, but it took about one and a half hours.

(FN 8/28/96, p. 118)

It took the complete morning to get him registered, but he did get to go to class for a short time. It had been a week since the death of another homie. While they were waiting to go to their classes, they started talking and sharing memories of their homie:

As I write about our first day, I want to laugh. I wanted everything to go perfect for the kids. I wanted them to start off on a good foot. But we seem to be destined for trouble. The kids were sitting and talking about their lost friend. We weren't sure where to go. So I told them to sit and I will find out. As I returned, an office manager was upset with them and my students were panicking. We did get things going. All I could do was laugh inside. (FN 8/26/96, p. 119)

As an advocate I went to the school once a week to check on all my students' progress. Smurf's teacher kept telling me, things are going good, no problems. Every Friday I picked the kids up and we went to lunch to celebrate the completion of the week. Smurf seemed to be adjusting to school. On one morning before school, I was visiting my students. Smurf told the rest of my students it is time to head for class. I
watched them head off. I believed Smurf and the other students were on the right track.

Within three days, however, everything changed. I was having problems getting district approval to advocate officially for my students. I went to the district office to talk with someone in the equity office. I was then escorted to what I believed was the superintendence's office to explain my situation; however, it turned out to be the assistant superintendent's office. The Assistant Superintendent was out; however, his secretary took notes on my problem and photocopies of the parents' permission letters that gave me permission to advocate for their children. I was told the Assistance Superintendent would contact me. I recorded the happenings of the next couple of days in my field notes:

After sharing my problem of trying to advocate for my students with Mr. Jones of the equity office, he suggested we talk with Mr. Lee an Assistant Superintendent. Mr. Lee was not in. I shared the situation with the secretary, and she took notes and photocopies of the parent permission letters giving me permission to advocate and said Mr. Lee would get back with me. On the way out I asked Mr. Jones if there would be any problems with the principal at Brighton and me going to the district office. He said there could be, but you never know and that I might want to let her know. I went to work [I was working at the Yo-yo factory at this time with Smurf and his family.]. Smurf came in notably upset. He was told that he had until Monday to get the required points or he would be dropped. At this time Smurf explains that in the Casa
program the students start out with F's and it takes
500 points to get a D and you get 10 to 15 points per
worksheet. Smurf was ready to quit. I said there is no
problem and that he could get everyone together this
weekend and I would help them get caught up. (FN,
9/15/96, p. 123).

I was worried and confused. Why would you want to start
students who have not been successful in school with zero
points? This method of running the class was never shared
with me or Smurf’s parents. I talked with Smurf and
told him we could catch up over the weekend:

Thursday Smurf came to work and was feeling better
because he and the other students had planned to get to
together with me this weekend. I was excited because
Smurf was making good decisions. (FN, 9/16/96, p. 124)

I knew things were going to work out and I felt good. Smurf
went to school Friday. As I walked through the door to work,
Kristina greeted me with, "I need to talk to you."

Friday I came to work and Kristina met me at the door
upset. Smurf was dropped from the program. He sat the
complete morning being told everything that was wrong
with him. He was also told we didn’t earn his credits.
They were just given to him, and that I wasn’t a real
teacher. I had to calm Kristina down. She said Smurf
was too upset and it wouldn’t do any good to talk to
him. I got on the phone and did some calling to figure
out what was going on. My hands were tied. Smurf didn’t
want me to fight and get him back in school. Wednesday,
the day I went to the district, Smurf was told he has
until Monday. Friday he was dropped. What conclusion do
I or anyone draw from that? Two days after my visit at
the assistant superintendent’s office.

(FN 9/18/96, pp. 124-25)

Not only didn’t Smurf want me to try and get him back
into school, but Felipe his father stated that he wouldn’t put another son through what his oldest son went through. Kristina and I decided we needed to let things settle down. Smurf didn’t even want to talk about the incidents. As I write this study, Smurf still isn’t in school and has no plans on returning to high school. I also believe this last experience with school was too much for Smurf. He was hurt. Smurf was out of school for more than one year before I learned just how much going back to Brighton meant to him. We were driving to a music studio, when Smurf shared with me how much he really wanted to go back to Brighton. He said he was excited about going back on campus, seeing old friends and going to school. He wanted it to be different this time, but it was the same old thing (FN 11/28/97, p.180). He was never going to let “school” do that to him again. However, learning is very important to Smurf. During the interview, I asked him if his family was financially taken care of would he go back to school

Smurf: Naah. I wouldn’t.

Debbie: Would you go to college? Take some music classes?

Smurf: Oh yea. Yea I would go and learn about music and stuff like that. Yea, I would love to now that I think about it I would love to go, I would love to go if I had everything to support my family. I would love to go to learn about studios, my music. But my family is my
most important thing in my life, than my music.
(IS, Smurf, 9/97, p. 5)

Smurf values learning. He would like to go back, but right now his family is his top priority.

Hooking up with Juice and Lil Garfield

During the fall semester of the school year 1996, I was once again hooked up with Juice and started working with Lil Garfield. Juice was back at Nuestra Casa and was having some hard times. Lil Garfield was a freshman at Brighton High School. Juice was struggling at Nuestra Casa. I meet with him a couple of times trying to get his credits in order and to help with the packets he was working on. Eventually Juice was dropped from Nuestra. He spent the rest of that semester at home. The goal was to get him back into Brighton in January 1997, to start the second semester of the school year 1996-97 at a traditional high school.

About two weeks into the school year, my students asked me if I would help Lil Garfield get back into school. I was aware of who Lil Garfield was because he has been a visitor to my classroom at Nuestra. There is one occasion that stands out more in my mind when I think of Lil Garfield. It was at the death of Plucy. I recorded the incident in my personal journal:

I am worried this morning. It is the first day back to
school since the shooting. I had many visitors. They got together to support one another. Everyone was sad and upset. Often the idea of revenge was talked about. The kids would sit in the classroom and hang around outside. While outside, I noticed just how much the kids supported each other. About eight of the boys were standing in a circle. Lil Garfield started to talk. He can't. He begins to cry. Smurf puts his arm around him. These tough boys are hurting. (Personal Journal, 10/26/95)

I was happy to help Lil Garfield. I stopped by his house and talked with him. I set up a time to meet with him and his mother and review the papers they were sent from the school. When I arrived there was another young man who had also been suspended and wanted to know if I would help him get back into school. I was quickly learning many students were in need of an advocate.

Lil Garfield had a ten-day suspension. At the end of the ten days, I took Lil Garfield to meet a counselor at the high school who had been helping me with my other students. She arranged a new schedule for him with new teachers she felt would be willing to work with him.

Within a month, Lil Garfield was in trouble again. He was suspended for 10 days for what was labeled as sexual harassment and participating in an illegal group, a gang. A hearing was scheduled to determine whether or not he would be suspended for up to 60 days. The hearing was scheduled for an afternoon when his mother, Deb worked. I advised her
to call and reschedule for a morning time which she did. Lil Garfield, his mom, and I went to the hearing. We were ushered into an office where we sat around a small table. Lil Garfield sat with his back against the wall. Two vice principals were present: the vice principal who suspended him and recommended long term and a vice principal from Brighton who is the hearing officer. At the beginning of the session, the vice principals took command. The hearing started with the hearing officer informing us that he had a checklist he must follow. The hearing started out as follows:

Oct. 25th 10:00 a.m. in the morning. We are convening a hearing for [Lil Garfield]. [Lil Garfield] was suspended Oct. 14th for violation of codes 11, 10, 4, 3. Present Diane (Lil Garfield’s mother), Lil Garfield, Debra Smith, advocate, Mr. P represent Brighton high school, Assistant principal and Mr. B assistant principal Brighton and hearing officer. We have a check list of things we have to go through here as a part of the papers we have to file. The purpose of the hearing is to do just that. Mr. P. will explain why he suspended your son. After he’s through then Lil Garfield will be given the opportunity to respond. All right, so at that point you have the opportunity to ask any question to add any additional information . . . present any witnesses or whatever you need to. My [assistant principal Mr. B] responsibility is to listen and to make a decision as to what can and what will happen. (tape transcription of hearing 10/96)

Lil Garfield was suspended for long term. He would lose any possibility to pass his classes for the semester. However, he would be allowed to return to classes after the
suspension but not receive credit. His mom and I decided it would be better to keep him out of the school until next semester so that he could start fresh at that time.

In order to get Juice and Lil Garfield back into school for the semester of January 1997, we all had to meet with one of the vice principals. We had no previous knowledge of this requirement. School was getting ready to close for Christmas holidays. I felt it was important to get the boys registered before the start of the second semester, because I wanted them to be able to go to class the first day. I pushed the issue to meet that day. The vice principal, Juice, Lil Garfield, and I sat around a round table. I recorded the incident in my field notes:

The VP asked the boys to give him their names. I thought how strange he doesn’t remember Lil Garfield. This vice principal was part of the hearing. He talked to both boys and he also talked to them individually while we all sat around the table. He told them such things as "If a problem comes up you (the boys) have to find a way to solve the problem so they don't interfere in school. Make the system work for you. I will assure you if you don’t the system will grind you up. It makes no difference to me. I can write you off. This is a bureaucracy. The main problem is to process paper." While talking to Lil Garfield, the vice principal told him he needed to go to the library every day. He wants Lil Garfield to promise this. I thought is this the answer to all the problems Lil Garfield deals with daily. I brought up the point that his mother works and there is no transportation. He said he could ride the bus. I talked about money. He felt Lil Garfield could figure out a way and wanted a commitment from him. He also talked with Juice, pointed to his
tear drop tattoo and suggested he needed to get it removed. I notice that Juice went along with the vice principal giving the appropriate response. I thought, Juice knows the system. (FN, 12/18/97, p.197)

The meeting lasted about 30 to 45 minutes. We then were allowed to go register. But our problems were not over. Juice was allowed to register and met with a counselor with whom I have worked closely. But Lil Garfield was told he could not register because his grandmother is the legal guardian not his mother. I told the registrar that his grandmother had passed away a year ago, and that he has been with his mother. I also reminded the school personal that he was allowed to register last semester and that Juice is his brother. Previously they had been allowed to register for school. My explanations made no difference. I called the mother. She told me they sent papers in over a year ago. What the mother and I couldn’t figure out was why Juice could register and not Lil Garfield. Eventually the vice principal gave permission for Lil Garfield to get registered, but the mom had to take care of the paper work right away or he would be dropped. Several hours later the boys were registered for the next semester. They felt good inside. This was all done in hope they would be able to start classes the first day. However, on the first day of classes their schedules were not ready. It took about two
days for the boys to get their schedules. Nevertheless, both Juice and Lil Garfield had a successful semester. They completed the semester. This was the first semester Juice completed in high school.

**Views of School: Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield**

When I first started teaching, Lil Boy Blue didn’t attend regularly, and when he did attend “school,” it wasn’t what he wanted to do. He had attended two different traditional high schools, an alternative high school and alternative program, and was attending his second alternative program. He didn’t believe in school. But Lil Boy Blue seemed to know school was important. We wrote a poem about school (see Figure 7.8). In this poem you hear three important thoughts about school: 1) school is sorry, succs, stinks, and long 2) school harasses and 3) there is opportunity in school. Somehow through the negative experiences Lil Boy Blue had at school, he still seems to believe in school. This belief held true of all the boys.
Lil Boy Blue Talks about School and Teachers

After my first couple months of teaching at Nuestra Casa I started to see changes in Lil Boy Blue. It wouldn’t matter what the topic of the conversation was—history, science, a current article in the newspaper, or a TV show—Lil Boy Blue would listen and ask questions. He wanted to know and understand. Lil Boy Blue said, "I like to learn. I
like to know about it [different things]. Sometimes I will turn on the TV to the Explorer channel. I'd just watch it to learn about different things." (IS, 10/96, LBB, p. 8). As I listened to his story, I was amazed at his strength and resilience to keep coming back to school:

Debbie: Ok Lil Boy Blue with all these different schools you went to why didn't you just finally give up on school?

LBB: I don't know, I was determined. I always said I was going to graduate. I just wanted to do it.

Debbie: Do you think graduating from school made that big of difference?

LBB: Just knowing that I did graduate, that I didn't give up through all the shit they did give me [made a difference]. (IS, LBB, 9/97, p.5)

For Lil Boy Blue, the diploma meant more than graduating from school. It meant he survived and didn't quit. A little angry Lil Boy Blue reflected on the principal who in his mind started the whole problem, "Lot of people stick out like the principal. She got on my nerves cause she didn't give a shit. Just wanted me out of school and that it she didn't give a shit about me getting back into school" (IS 10/96, LBB, p. 5). Lil Boy Blue with his diploma is now the winner. But it was also important for another reason. I asked Lil Boy Blue if his parents felt school was important him:
Yea. My dad made it really important. They made it seem when we were little, you’re going to graduate it’s something you got to do. We always thought they did [graduate]. We did find out later that neither one of them did, so that made me want to graduate even more.

Not only did graduating mean he won but it also meant he did what his parents wanted. Kristina, his mother, told me over and over that Lil Boy Blue wanted to attend college. He always talked about going when he was little. This dream stopped in high school. But Lil Boy Blue knew school was important.

During our discussion, I asked him to describe a successful student:

LBB: Somebody who stuck with school from day one, passed all their classes all through high school.

Debbie: Do you consider yourself a successful student?

LBB: I don’t know, maybe, through all the stuff I went through ... I wish I had done things different and stuck with school. Graduate with my class with my friends.

(IS, LBB, 9/97, p.5)

During this interview it was obvious that he knew school was important and that he regreted not sticking with it and graduating with his class. It is interesting that Lil Boy Blue sees himself at fault for not graduating with his class.

Smurf Looks at School and Teachers.

Smurf’s rap about school [see chapter one] expresses
his feeling toward school that still exists today. Smurf once told me, "School and I don't see eye to eye." His rap represents here his anger toward school. But even with this anger Smurf like his brother felt school was important:

Debbie: Is school important to you? Do you think school is something kids should do?

Smurf: Yea, if they have the chance I do.

Debbie: What do you mean by chance?

Smurf: I don't know why but I guess it seems like the right thing to do. I would want my daughter to go to school, but just some people. Well everybody has a chance. Well, not everybody got treated like how we got treated.

Debbie: If things were different. If you were treated differently would you have stuck it out all the way through?

Smurf: Yea like, if we would have stayed at Nuestra Casa, probably yea. Because there we didn't get treated like we did everywhere else. (IS, Smurf, 9.97, p. 4)

In many of my conversations with Smurf, the issue of how kids are treated surfaced. He felt teachers and school officials were more worried about how he dressed then about learning:

Smurf: How do they expect somebody to learn if they're pulling you [school officials] in the office worrying about your clothes more then about worrying about ya getting an education. Worrying about your haircut and your tail, earrings. They were more worried about my appearance than they were about if I was learning or not.

Debbie: How often were you pulled into the office?
Smurf: All the time.

Debbie: What did they do?

Smurf: Gimme clothes to change my shirt, change my laces tell me not to wear them again. Most the time just waiting.

Debbie: You mean like sitting around?

Smurf: Yea. Just keep lecturing us. Like this guy, "let me tell you about gangs" this and that and I said, hell what do you know about gangs you never been in one. You know what I'm saying, they thought they knew everything, the answer to everything. They weren't in the positions that we were. (IS, Smurf, 9/97, p. 5)

Smurf couldn't understand why other things were more important than his learning. He also was frustrated when school officials tried to tell him what his life was like when they didn't live his life. I wanted to know if he saw a difference between school and education. He replied, "School is more like they are forcing you to learn and education is like you want to learn" (IS, Smurf, 9/97, p. 5). I continued and asked him if he felt he was a learner.

He went so far as to say he was a teacher:

Smurf: A learner ... I consider myself a teacher in my music. Like I told you earlier, my teachers used to tell me I could never do what they did. I could never teach, and like I said, I mean, I could if I wanted to go to school and all that, but I wouldn't want. But I am a teacher, but in a different way and that's my raps. I can teach people in my raps. Like the rap I made up the other day. I've been there. I've done it and I survived by my skills. I didn't survive by luck.
It's like I think I could teach some people some stuff in my rap and my music.

(IS, Smurf, 9/97, p. 5)

I kept pushing Smurf on the point of being a learner. When he was removed from Brighton High School, he felt the officials saw him as dumb. He told his mother many times that he couldn't comprehend. Often he told me he was just going to be a "low life." I wanted to learn more about his perception of himself, his sense of self. I asked him again if he saw himself as a learner:

Smurf: Am I a learner?

Debbie: Yea, if you take school completely out of the picture, are you a learner?

Smurf: Like I said I want to go to the music thing to learn about it, to learn how they do it. I mean music is my thing. I can't go straight to what I learn about. I tried that so I am trying to go around to learn everything about music every kind of music equipment there is to learn.

(IS, Smurf, 9/97, p. 5)

I think it is interesting that Smurf can never say he is a learner but does point out that he wants to learn about music and that he can easily see himself as a teacher. His perception of himself as a learner I believe is tied closely to his idea of a successful learner:

Debbie: How would you describe a successful student?

Smurf: Ahh somebody that took a dream made it all the way. They got their dream they're doing what they always dreamed of. (IS, Smurf, 9/97, p.6)
For Smurf, this "making it all the way" didn’t have to be in school. I asked him if he felt he was a successful student. He responded, "Nah. I’m working on it. I’ll be there in the next three years . . . could be three or four years from now could be one month from now." He laughs and picks up his daughter saying, "Going to take time, huh honey? (IS, 10/96, Smurf, p. 6). For Smurf, school has never been a really good experience.

Smurf: You’re the only . . . well I liked other teachers, but you’re the only teacher . . . I don’t know that I can say actually made me think about school at all. I still don’t like school truthfully.

Debbie: What do you think is the difference between the other teachers and me?

Smurf: Some people probably say that you let us get away with everything, but I don’t think it was that. I think it was that you understood us more than anybody. That’s all it is, you understood us. You didn’t know what we were going through, but you tried to look at it from our point of view, but that’s all and you listened to what we had to say.

(IS, Smurf, 9/97, p. 4)

Smurf states he liked other teachers. In fact he has talked about a teacher in middle school who influenced him. But Smurf emphasizes that a good teacher takes the time to understand her students, to listen to them, to see the world through their eyes. During the interview with Smurf, he tried to explain the curriculum:

Smurf: The teachers were boring. I think they need to
do something with, what's it called, curriculum. I think it needs to be renewed or something because it's like too old, man. That's why everything is too boring, because, like, you didn't make us do the old curriculum. You made us do what was going on these days. We learn the same thing that everybody else learned, but we learned it differently. Because we learned it through things these days.

Debbie: Do you mean more current?

Smurf: Yea, because you ask everybody what is their most boring subject and its mostly history, and the whole curriculum is based on history. They need to change it. They're trying to get kids ready for the future, but teaching them the history. I mean, in a way, it makes sense, but in a way it doesn't.

(IS, Smurf, 9/97, p. 4)

In my classroom, we did study history, both world history and American history. So I believe Smurf wasn't talking so much about the subject history, as he was about the method of teaching. In my classes, I told stories from history and used movies and historical fiction to make history come to life. These multiple sources made it possible to dialogue about history and what was going on in our country and in the world. Everything we did was being tied directly to my students, their gang, and their worlds.

Juice's Views on School and Teachers

Juice's high school experiences weren't positive. Yet he still keeps trying to get into school and wants his diploma. In a interview I asked him about his feelings about school:
Debbie: Do you think school is important?

Juice: Some of it. I think reading and writing and learning your math skills, and I guess if you want to learn your history you should learn it, but how in the hell is that going to help you later in the future, you know what I mean. Like if you want to, you know what I mean, I think you should have a choice. What you want to be educated in high school to what your goals are and to what you want in life. To see where you want to go. Take your classes (Juice's voice gets stronger and sure of what he feels at this point). I think they should sit down with you and help you pick your classes. They just give you a sheet and say pick our your classes. They don't care, and if you're lucky, you get the classes you want.

Debbie: Have your ideas about school changed over the last couple of years?

Juice: I think school here doesn't really give us a chance. Back in the days, I thought school was very important. But now that I'm in the community, I'm growing up in, you don't really need that. You need to be street smart. You don't really need an education other people are taught, you just need it to fit into their world. (IS, Juice, 9/97, p.6)

Juice sees school as white man's education. . . school helps you fit into white man's world.

Debbie: Education helps you fit into the white man's world?

Juice: Yes. This ain't ours. This isn't our country. It's the white man's country, you know what I mean. If they tell us to jump, we ask how high do we jump, you know what I mean. To get to where we want to go, they [white man] can humiliate us. They can tell us what ever they want and stuff like that, but if you want to be successful, you're going to have to take it. You have to swallow your pride, that's the way I see that's the way I was raised, but education doesn't help me survive on the streets. Me, myself and my streets smarts I picked up over the years is what is helping me
As I have worked with Juice, the one thing that seems to stand out the most is his need to be respected. Yet in his eyes in order to be successful in school he has to give up respect and be "humiliated." During the interview, he shared with me two experiences at school where he had to sit quiet and be humiliated.

Juice: When one of us says MISS the teacher says that's a south side thing. Why is it a south side thing because that's where the Mexican's culture is.

Juice learns that the south side is different. It is the Mexican side. He believes he is not as good because he grew up on the south side, because the teacher communicated that to him.

Another incident took place when a teacher believed he smelled marijuana on Juice. Juice was sent to the office. The principal couldn't smell anything, but to be sure several of the office people were asked to "sniff" Juice to see if they could smell anything. He was expected to stand there and let them sniff him, which he did. No marijuana was detected, and he was sent back to class.

When I met Juice's grandmother, she told me that her daughter was a teacher. I asked Juice if anyone in his family ever talked to him about school and college:
Juice: My Tia and Tata. They told me I can be anything I want to be, just put my mind to it. Seriously that is the truth, but they just say anything, you can be anything you want to be and you're like damn, yes, I could.

Debbie: How many of your family have gone to college?

Juice: Actually my Tia went to college and that's the only person in the whole family that's ever graduated from college except my cousin she graduate from college.

Debbie: What about high school?

Juice: Everybody graduated from high school. (IS, Juice, 9/97, p. 5).

Graduating from high school is important to Juice. He doesn't want to be the only one without a diploma, so he keeps going back and trying. He has more failures than successes. I wanted to know how he described a successful student.

Debbie: What are the characteristics of a good student?

Juice: Characteristics of a good student is a person who shows up to class on time, stays in class for the whole period, listens to the teacher. He does his work and hands his work in on time. Doing everything right.

Debbie: Describe yourself?

Juice: Me, I'm just the type of student that goes when ever I feel like it. I try my hardest to be on time, but I get distracted really easy. That's one of my main problems. I get distracted really easy then I go into class and just talk to people, and if there's girls, I just chill. Then when I see other people do their work, I just go up to the nerd, and I just talk, say "bro. what do we have to do? Can I copy off ya." Yea, yea, they want to fit in too. You know what I mean, fool you
know your like one popular fool in the school. You know it’s cool, copy me and I just copy off them. I just hand it in, you know what I mean. That’s cool or I just read it and put it my own words shhhhiiit like that you know. What I mean it’s easy like that. School’s easy like that. That’s the lazy way.

Debbie: What do you consider good grades?

Juice: A’s and B’s and C’s I think C’s are kind of low life, but I think A’s and B’s are good grades.

Debbie: Where would you put an D?

Juice: Low life category.

Debbie: You’re still passing?

Juice: I know that. I think it’s just like averaging D. Not average. I think average and below are low life.

Debbie: Really.

Juice: Yea, cause I can do way better than that. I used to get straight A’s and B’s and stuff like that, so I know I can do it, but I’m just too lazy. (IS, Juice, 9/97, p.3)

Juice’s idea of A’s and B’s being the only acceptable grades ties into what he considers school success. He stated, “School success is when you have the piece of paper [diploma] getting straight A’s.” This is a pretty high standard for a boy who never seems to have success in school. While driving him to register at Kino Alternative School, I asked him why he seemed to struggle so much in school. Quietly he replied, “I’m afraid of being good.” We talked a little about what that meant. He seemed to think
the only thing he could do was be “bad.” Even though Juice kept saying he was lazy, I believe the fear of change as he saw it--bad to good--was scary. During our interview, I wanted to know if being a learner was different then being a student. I asked him to describe himself again as a student.

Debbie: Considering everything you have been through, describe yourself as a student.

Juice: Everything I have been through and all that shit?

Debbie: Yea think about everything you have been saying and describe yourself.

Juice: I'd describe myself as a good student, a smart student, a nice student, a cool student. I like to joke around and stuff like that, but I also listen. I can talk and listen at the same time or I just talk and not listen. I do whatever I can do to survive. (IS, Juice, 9/97, p. 6)

This time he describes himself has a good, smart, nice, cool student. During this interview Juice came to a realization:

Debbie: So, you’ve changed.

Juice: I went from DAMN . . . I went from good to shitty and picked myself slowly and slowly trying to pick myself up, but I can’t forget about the past. That’s what’s keeping me down.

I asked Juice why he can’t forget the past:

Juice: Because like I don’t know I just can’t.

Debbie: It’s part of you.

Juice: Just, I was there. Like I can remember it like yesterday, you know what I mean. I remember, it’s like it’s in front of my face. Yesterday . . . I try my
hardest not to think about it. (IS, Juice, 9/97, p. 6)

The past contains the deaths of Plucy, Murder (a homie and former student), and Guero. Juice held Plucy in his arms and watched him take his last breath. The past includes the death of his Nana. And in between the deaths are the activities with the gang. For Juice and the homies, forgetting is a form of betrayal of the homies that died for the hood. The interview continued and I asked Juice who his favorite teacher is and why:

Juice: You. (We laughed.) Since kindergarten you. YOU are my teacher, You are my favorite teacher.

Debbie: OK, how did I become your favorite teacher?

Juice: Because you try to help us. You’re like the only teacher that I ever knew that ever cared about anybody.

Debbie: What about your other teachers?

Juice: I had a lot of nice teachers, but not teachers that ever cared about how we ended up, or who we’re going to be. You know what I mean? You made sure we don’t get cheated out of our dreams and hopes. You know what I mean? You won’t let the government get our dreams and hopes and just crush them. Everybody has their goals.

Debbie: If you were in charge of teacher education. You are teaching people to become teachers. What would you teach them?

Juice: I would teach them to, if they didn’t want to be a teacher and they didn’t really want to help the kids, then don’t be a teacher. Just walk out the door. Because that’s what’s teaching is all about. I think it is when you really try to help somebody. When you take the time to sit down in the classroom to just work with
this person, I think that's a teacher. You know what I mean? A teacher cares. You know what I mean? That gets on you to hand in your homework. You know what I mean? You don't do it, your going to do it right now. I am going to see you, and I want you to read it, and everything. You know what I mean? That's, I think, that's a person who cares. I think that's a person that cares, that's a good teacher not a teacher that just says this is your assignment, this is how you do it, blah blah and so this and that, and you turn it in. Who cares if you even turn it in. It's less papers for me to grade anyway, you know what I mean. Because they're lazy all of them. I would tell them that. (IS, Juice, 9/97, p. 8).

It is evident that Juice believes in school. He has stated that an education can make a difference, but he is not convinced education can get him out of his situation.

Debbie: Do you think a high school diploma will get you out of your situation?

Juice: It could but I'll still be in Tucson. What I really think is if I join the military I'd be out of that situation. If I join the military that's like my ticket out of Tucson, out of everything.

The diploma makes it possible for him to join the service. But it is the military that provides the way out of Tucson and the gang for Juice.

Juice has attended several schools. I asked him what his thoughts are about the school he is presently attending:

Juice: Kino says they care, but they are always calling in the thugs into the office and talking shit all the time. They just be walking down the hall. They look into a classroom and they'll see one of us. They say I need to borrow what's his name or whatever so and so or that may take you to the office to make up some bull shit lie, like some stupid shit.
Debbie: Have you been called into the office.

Juice: I’ve been called in three or four times.

Debbie: You haven’t done anything. They just call you because of who you are?

Juice: That’s the way I feel. We look high, they call us in. When we walk out of the school, they’re looking at us.

Debbie: Do you think that maybe you feel that way just because of some of your other experiences. That may be the way you perceive it.

Juice: It could be because of my experiences I have had with other people. I don’t know, I just see it that way. (IS, Juice, 9/97, p. 9)

School never seems to be a place where Juice gets any form of respect. Because of what they have labeled him, he is constantly called into the office or watched. At Brighton, a monitor was stationed to watch the table where Juice and his friends sat at lunch time. At Kino, he is called out of classes and watched as he leaves school. Juice believes educators don’t want gangsters in school at all:

Juice: Actually, I feel like if you’re a gangster they really don’t want you for school, or if your pregnant they don’t want you for school, or if you’re a different culture or race sometimes they wouldn’t want you in school. Betcha if I went to [name a different school] or something they probably won’t accept me. (IS, Juice, 9/97, p. 9)

I asked Juice about the way teachers treat him or show him respect. He responded,
Teachers just say it [harass them] because they know if we talk shit to them they can just send us to the office. Of course they will take the teacher's side over the students. You know what I mean. They're going to listen to the teacher. No one listens to the student, you know what I mean. (IS, Juice, 9/97, p. 10)

**Lil Garfield's Views on School and Teachers**

Lil Garfield had a good second semester his freshman year except for the two times he got in trouble. In the first incident, he was in trouble for the graffiti on his notebook. Tagging is a part of Lil Garfield's life. During an interview, Lil Garfield shared the reason for tagging on his notebook.

Debbie: When you write MLMC or Crip on your notebook, why is that important for you to have that on there?

Lil Garfield: Yes, So if anyone looks at my notebook they know that I'm a Crip. (IS, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 4)

I was aware of the school's policies on graffiti. I talked with Lil Garfield about why he needed to follow school rules. But tagging was a way for Lil Garfield to relax. He decided to have a section in the back of his notebook where he would tag. This was his notebook and a place that was private. But a teacher saw the tags and sent him to the office. While in the office with the vice principal, the vice principal took the notebook away from Lil Garfield. He was not allowed to take the notebook home. I asked Lil
Garfield how he felt when the school administrators took his notebook:

Debbie: How do you feel when the school takes it away? Do you think they have a right?

Lil Garfield: No, I felt like they’re disrespecting me and invading my room and they, I mean you know. I don’t go and fucking take their notes. I don’t go and take their fucking grade sheet. What every . . . you know what I mean fuck . . . they have to fuck with me. (IS, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p.4)

Lil Garfield has had his ups and downs when it comes to school. But like his brother, he keeps coming back. He wants to be successful and get his diploma. I once asked him if he wants to be successful, why he skips school. We sort of laughed, but he couldn’t really answer the question except “I just keep fuckin’ up.” In the third interview we talked about school.

Debbie: When you think of school what pops into your mind?

Lil Garfield: Stereotyping, a lot of them [teachers] do.

Debbie: Do you feel that is something they have done to you?

Lil Garfield: Yea, I feel like you’re wearing your blue shoes and blue shirt. They want all you know what, try to kick me out or whatever. Oh your brother is Juice. Oh so well you’re a crip. Just cause he’s cripken. Not even giving you a chance. (IS, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 5)

I asked Lil Garfield if he had any good memories of school
or of a teacher that seems to stand out more than another teacher:

Debbie: What good teachers do you remember—what good memories do you have?

Lil Garfield: My fifth grade teacher she like paved the way for me to do good, you know what I mean.

Debbie: What’s the difference between her and your other teachers?

Lil Garfield: There’s a big difference. A lot of teachers. They don't give a fuck about you. They don't give a fuck about your education. All they give a fuck about is the check. There’s only some that are left that take time, really take time, not just go over basic shit. (IS, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 5)

Lil Garfield’s good memories are closely associated with his favorite teacher, a teacher who cared, a teacher that was willing to put up with his clowning around. We continued to talk. Because Lil Garfield has struggled with school, I wanted to know his impression of school and if he felt school would do him any good and if he saw a difference in school and education.

Debbie: What is your overall impression of school?

Lil Garfield: School’s pretty dope. Well, it matters how you kind of make it for yourself, but you know. You can go over there and fuck around, get fucked up grades, get suspended you know. Or you go and try and do good, get good grades. It matters how you make it, well.

Debbie: If you made it and you got good grades and all that stuff, what do you think school will provide for you after you get through?
Lil Garfield: Well it should, high school should provide . . . provide . . . a good education, job opening. But like you know, for like high school diploma, college, sometimes it is how you make it, but sometimes you know people stereotype you. How you dress? How you walk? What color you wear? How you look? The color of your skin, so there's lot of that.

Debbie: Is there a difference between school and education?

Lil Garfield: Yea, school is a building with rooms. Education is something that stays with you. Ain't always going to be in that same building, but if you keep on you know, you want to learn and you put your mind to it that's education that's going to be with you latter on.

Debbie: Can you get an education without going to school?

Lil Garfield: Yea, there's lot of education. There's street edu........you know, you can grow up on the street education. It just ain't by the books. There's different things. Well, life situations. (IS, Lil Garfield, 9/97, p. 7)

Lil Garfield wants to believe that school can make a difference or at least it should prepare you for a better job, but he still comes back to the problem of stereotyping he sees in school.

Lil Garfield struggled with ninth grade. According to him, in ninth grade he "had to prove something to somebody . . . that I was something that I wanted people to know that I'm gangsta'. I wanted a lot of people to know that I'm locs, ain't no bitch. . . ." (IS p.2). Lil Garfield wanted his fellow students to know that he was "down" for his homies.
The summer school after his ninth grade Lil Garfield started turning things around. He said, "Why go to school if I'm trying to get an education, get suspended for fucking somebody up when I could just do it after school" (IS p.2). Notice that he's not giving up the gangbanging. He is learning not to take it to school, but to wait until after school or off school grounds. Lil Garfield also believes school is important for several reasons:

Yea very important, cause I want my Tata to see that I'm doing good, and that's I'm what he wanted me to be. Second of all, I need an education if I want to do good. (IS, Lil Garfield, 9/97, 6)

We started to talk about students and the characteristics of a good student.

Debbie: Is education important to you?

Lil Garfield: Yea you need an education.

Debbie: Do you feel like sometimes, to be successful in school, you just have to play the system?

Lil Garfield: I don't think it's the matter of playing the system. It's the matter of doing what you got to do.

Debbie: How would you describe yourself as a student?

Lil Garfield: Pretty good depending on how I feel that day.

Debbie: What would you say are the characteristics of a successful student?

Lil Garfield: Someone that's focused, someone that's on task, does what they gotta do, does homework. They got
a question and are not afraid to ask.

Debbie: What do you consider are good grades?

Lil Garfield: A's and B's and C's

Debbie: Where would you put a D?

Lil Garfield: It's passing, but ain't way up there. Got to get at least a C average.

Debbie: Do you consider yourself a successful student today?

Lil Garfield: Well . . . with all the set backs that I had I'm just barely trying and starting learning.

Debbie: If you just look at today, do you consider yourself a successful student?

Lil Garfield: mmm...hell ya, but I fuck up too just as much as anybody else, but I am doing way better. (IS, Lil Garfield, 9/97, 6)

Lil Garfield blames himself and realizes he "fucked" up. I asked Lil Garfield what he thought was the reason he failed in ninth grade:

Lil Garfield: It was more like, I didn't give a fuck. I was side tracked by people and gangs.

Debbie: It wasn't the fact that you may not have had the ability to do the work?

Lil Garfield: No. I could do it. I'm lazy. I didn't like doing it. I'd rather smoke a joint than do homework.

Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield value learning and believe education is important. However, they have struggled to get that education. They have teachers who
stand out and are part of good memories. They have negative experiences and teachers who have hurt them. They have dealt with racism and stereotyping. Yet, they do accept the responsibility of their actions and acknowledge that they are lazy.

As I worked with my study participants and other students, I soon learned that there are many distractions in school. The biggest distraction is the world of Juvenile Court. I'm not sure one ever becomes a full participant in this world, unless of course they choose this world as their occupation. The following section describes the effect of the world of juvenile court on these students, and the role the courts play within their formal education.

Juvenile Court Community

In the world of juvenile courts, my students became participants when they allegedly broke a law. Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice and Lil Garfield have participated in this world to different degrees. The experience that brought Lil Boy Blue, Smurf and Juice into this world happened before I met them. Lil Garfield’s experiences took place in ninth grade. By the time I met Lil Boy Blue, his probation was completed. In this section, I describe a typical court session and each of my participant’s conflicts with the law.
A Court Setting

In a typical day in juvenile court, the judge is located in the front of the room behind a raised desk. Present are a stenographer, a court clerk, and a court officer. Two tables shaped in half a circle sit in front of the judge. A table to the left side of the judge is where the district attorney sits with a probation officer. The defendant and his lawyer sit on the right side of the judge. The defendant's parent sits in the middle, as if they are not part of the prosecutor's team or the defendant's team. The court officer announces the starting of the trial. The judge reads what seems to be a script of the charges. If the defendant responds that he or she is innocent, a trial date is set. If the defendant responds to a guilty plea, the judge asks the prosecuting attorney and the probation officer questions and for recommendations. Then the judge talks with the defendant and informs him/her of the sentencing. Sometimes the sentencing is scheduled for another time. In some cases, the defendant is sentenced and punished three months after the alleged act of breaking the law. This routine was typical for my participants.

My Participants Enter the World of Juvenile Courts

Lil Boy Blue became a participant in this world when he
brought a gun to school. He was arrested on campus. He was handcuffed and escorted to the police car in view of many of his fellow students. He was then taken to the Juvenile Detention Center where his parents picked him up. Lil Boy Blue was placed on probation and part of his probation included doing community services hours. He was on and off probation long before he started to have success in school. The school’s "punishment" was harder than the law.

Smurf became a member in the juvenile courts when Oso, a homie, was shot. The drive by shooting took place at 11:00 pm. The boys, Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, and three homies, rushed Oso to the hospital where they were picked up by the police and taken to the police station. They were questioned all night. Smurf’s and Lil Boy Blue’s parents were up all night, because they hadn’t heard from their sons. This day was unusual because the boys were required to call home if they were going to be late. Ten o’clock the next morning the Espinoza’s received a call from the police and were told to come and pick up their son: Smurf was locked up and Lil Boy Blue was allowed to go home. Kristina and Felipe were not allowed to see their son, Smurf, until the following Tuesday. Smurf was being charged with one count of a drive by and aggravated assault. Smurf served three months in.
juvenile detention and then was placed on a strict probation known as JIP (juvenile intense probation).

Juice was on probation when I first met him. He was found guilty of domestic violence. Lil Garfield was placed on probation after I got to know him. He was charged and found guilty of domesticated abuse. During a mother son fight, Lil Garfield's mother pressed charges. She did so because she wasn’t sure what to do. I have had the opportunity to attend court hearings with both Juice and Lil Garfield.

Several literacy events generally take place within the juvenile court community. One literacy event takes place before the actual court session. If a family can’t afford a lawyer, they must fill out a financial statement. After each court appearance the minutes taken of the court proceedings are sent to the parents of the minor. The third event is related to the probation terms and condition contract which is signed by the minor, and he receives a copy. This is a general form used also in Juice's situation. When a minor is placed on probation his or her life is changed. This probation affects the family and school. The probation report contains a section on school: "Shall attend school every day, every class, on time, with good behavior, and
demonstrate academic progress." In this agreement, there is a section directed to the parent or guardian of the minor. The parent must comply with the order or the court can "involve its Contempt Powers for failure to comply." There were three distinct occasions where the court ordered probation interfered with Smurf's, Juice's, and Lil Garfield's attempts to be successful at school.

**Smurf's Probation and School**

After being arrested for the drive-by where Oso was killed, Smurf was placed on JIPS. He was assigned a probation officer and a surveillance officer. Both his surveillance officer (SO) and the probation officer (PO) came to the school to check up on Smurf. They also have the authority to enter the family home at anytime. Smurf was ordered to go to school and to perform community service. He could go nowhere else. Once a week he turned in the plan for the week to his surveillance officer. The surveillance officer had complete access to Smurf and his home.

Often when Smurf went on a break, he would remind me not to tell his P.O." (FN 4/4/95, p. 39). I was never sure what I wasn't supposed to tell, because Smurf did what he was required to do. One day I looked at Smurf and said, "Smurf you don't need to remind me what to tell your P.O."
He smiled as he went out the door (FN 4/4/95, p. 39). Smurf never left the Nuestra Casa grounds when he took a break or did anything to break his probation. Yet he was afraid that he was going to get in trouble. Learning takes place in an environment that is safe, but Smurf was always nervous that his probation officer would come into the classroom and catch Smurf doing something wrong. As his teacher, I had to reassure him that he was safe in the classroom, but I soon learned I had no power to keep him safe.

Smurf’s fear was real. I discovered just how real when I came into the room after a break and Smurf greeted me with “Miss, my probation officer was just here and he saw me tagging.” As I observed the kids tagging, I started to keep a big piece of butcher paper on my wall for them to tag on. I believed that tagging was a part of who they were. And I wanted to know more about tagging. Tagging became a part of my classroom. I told Smurf not to worry, because I couldn’t figure out what was so wrong. Smurf informed me that part of his probation was gang condition. He wasn’t allowed to associate with students who were in a gang, dress in gang apparel, or do anything that is associated with gangs. Tagging was considered a gang activity. I told Smurf to calm down because I would talk to the probation officer and tell
him that tagging was part of my class. I was a little confused because the probation officer had approved Smurf going to Nuestra Casa, a high school program that many gang kids attended. I contacted the probation officer and explained what I was doing in my classroom:

Smurf’s P.O. [probation officer] came today. This was very interesting. I went out and met the P.O. He started to inform me that the tagging in my class was inappropriate. I explained that it is part of my curriculum and that the kids were getting ready to present at the University of Arizona to future teachers. (FN 2/24/98 p.28)

I was amazed that the probation officer felt he could tell me what is appropriate for my classroom. There was one specific time when Smurf’s probation officer came into my class while we were working on a project. This visit resulted in Smurf being placed on thirty days house arrest. The probation officer took Smurf into the hall. The kids kept going to the restroom—they were making sure Smurf was Okay. Because I felt uneasy about the visit, I decided to take the time to talk with the probation officer. In this conversation, he informed me that as a probation officer he was an advocate of the court not the adolescent. His job as a probation officer was to make sure the adolescent followed the court order. I recorded this incident in my field notes:

Smurf’s P.O. came to the school. It is frustrating because they can come into the class--disrupting the
class and remove Smurf from the room. It makes no difference what we are doing. This time we were working on a project. I decided to visit with the P.O. I learned that a P.O. is an advocate of the court. The P.O. also informed me that Smurf was wearing too much blue. I started to question him because Smurf was dressed in a blue grayish shirt, grey pants, and blue shoes. Interesting note, Smurf became very submissive, using sir and agreeing. When I asked about the too much blue the P.O. pulls at Smurf’s necklace which is a macrame blue necklace which had religious pictures on it. The P.O. never asked how Smurf was doing. (FN 3/28/95, p. 30)

After the P.O. left we had to put school aside while Smurf and the kids talked about the experience. Smurf always worried about his P.O. coming to class and getting in trouble. Smurf was put on one month of house arrest because he was wearing too much blue. Learning takes a back seat when you have to always be worried about someone coming and pulling you out of class to chastise you. I learned I couldn’t provided a safe place for Smurf. For Smurf, worrying about his probation officer coming to school, and worrying about doing everything perfect at school took priority over Smurf’s learning.

Juice’s School and Probation

During the second semester of the school year 1996-97, Juice started to see himself as a student who participated in school activities. He announced to me he wanted to play on the school baseball team. This was a big step, because he
was willing to make a new connection with the school. As an advocate and a friend, I felt I needed to make sure school stayed a safe place. Getting cut from a team is a hard blow. I was a sports coach in my earlier teaching responsibilities, so I knew it would be hard for him to make the team, because of his grades and he hadn’t played in a long time. Juice and I discussed these issues yet he still wanted to try out for the team. He shared with me stories of playing in little leagues.

My job now was to help him reach his desire and to provide a safety net in case things didn’t work out. We picked up the papers and found out when everything needed to be turned in and when tryouts began. I let him borrow my baseball glove and he was ready. I picked him up at his home the morning of tryouts and took him to school. He was nervous, but he was ready. The counselor allowed Juice to keep his equipment in her office. There were still some road blocks such as fees but we were removing those obstacles. I left school excited. For the first time, Juice was taking a step to connect himself more to school. Half way home my pager went off. It was one of the homies at school. She called and told me Juice had been arrested. I called Juice’s mother. We couldn’t figure out what was going on. Juice had
been staying out of trouble. I rushed back to school and met with the counselor. Lil Garfield was sitting in the counselor's office. The counselor was trying to find out what had happened. No one seemed to know what was going on. The two vice principals and three secretaries who are located where Juice was handcuffed claimed they didn't know. A young man was hand cuffed and hauled off the school campus and nobody knew why. Between the mother's calling and the counselor's calling we found out that Juice was arrested because he hadn't been calling his probation officer. One of the conditions of probation states, "The adolescent shall contact the probation officer by phone once a week." I learned the probation officer and the police were waiting for him. As Juice turned his papers in to the secretary so he could practice baseball, he was arrested, handcuffed taken out to the police car, and driven to the juvenile detention center. All the time there were students watching the event take place. He was humiliated.

The counselor and I called the probation officer. We tried to explain that Juice was doing excellent work at school and that this was an important day for him. The probation officer said there was nothing she could do that he was going to have to stay locked up for the night and
have a court hearing the next day. No one heard how
important this day was for Juice and his success in school

Juice’s not calling his probation officer was more
important than Juice’s success at school. Juice was having
his first successful semester at a traditional high school.
It made no difference to his probation officer that he was
doing well in school. It made no difference he was taking
another positive step. They put handcuffs on him and hauled
him off in front of several students. He was going to be
locked up for two days and these were the two days set aside
for trying out for the team. I believe Juice hadn’t called
his P.O. because he was doing well, and calling reminded him
that he was in trouble. The P.O. never made the attempt to
call him or check with the school as to what progress Juice
was making.

On February 18, 1997, I got a call early in the morning,
before school. It was Juice; he wanted to change schools and
go to an alternative school:

Juice wants to change schools. He wants to go to an
alternative school where his homie goes. This is the
first time Juice has mentioned going back to an
alternative school. He is scared. The probation officer
located on the school campus (not his probation
officer) said if he is late one more time he will be
locked up. He missed school today, says he is sick. I
believe he was afraid to go. Juice is afraid to go to
school because that is where they got him. He said next time he will run. (FN, 2/18/97, p.147).

Before Juice was arrested, he was learning to take risks at school. He wanted to be a part of school sports. He no longer saw himself just going to school; he was willing to take the risk and become part of the school community. Because he was arrested at school, he now wanted to go to an alternative school. I met with him and learned that he had missed two days of school. He said he was sick. I told him we would go and talk to the counselor and arrange a time to meet with his teachers. Juice was afraid the teachers would be mad. He was scared he would get arrested again. He told me he would never let that happen again. I hoped that by meeting with his teachers, he would see he was doing Okay. The goal was to build a safety net for him at school. During the meeting, the counselor changed Juice's first hour class. He was scheduled to be her aide. This helped Juice relax, because he trusted the counselor (FN, 2/22/97p.148).

As the semester progressed, Juice was starting to have success again, but the fear of getting locked up stayed with him. On several occasions he stressed his fear of going to school. "They can get you easier at school," he said. As a result of the arrest, Juice’s probation officer informed us that she was going to have Juice switched to the probation
officer on campus. (The high school has a probation officer who works on the campus.) Juice was petrified. I met with the probation officer and told her of Juice's fear. I explained to her how important it was for Juice to feel safe on the campus. He would not be able to learn if he was always worried about someone looking over his shoulder. The probation officer listened and continued as his probation officer.

Lil Garfield's experience was different. However, in his experience, school took a back seat to the desires of the courts.

Lil Garfield's Probation and School

Lil Garfield's schooling was placed on hold due to a court judgement. As I stated earlier, Juice and Lil Garfield started the school year 97-98 at Kino Alternative High School. Lil Garfield was having some success in his classes, passing enough to continue the next quarter. He was no longer ditching classes and wanted to go to school. The courts ordered him to attend a live-in-residency rehabilitation center for teenagers with alcohol and drug problems. This was a thirty-day live-in-residency. He had violated his probation by getting drunk the summer before school started. He was ordered to attend the center as soon
as there was an opening. Neither court officials nor his probation officer were worried about his education, even though he was having success at school and it was important to maintain that success. An opening in the center came in December 1997. Lil Garfield got permission to stay home for Christmas, but he had to enter the center December 27, during a break between the second and third quarters at school. However, since he wouldn't be able to register at school at the appropriate time, he would be dropped from the roles. All alternative schools have a waiting list, and I was concerned what he would do to get back into school? Lil Garfield’s education was placed on hold. Each quarter is nine weeks long; Lil Garfield was in the treatment center for the first four weeks. The last five weeks, Lil Garfield sat at home, because, for him, he had no school to go to.

The courts never contacted the school. Lil Garfield’s mother and I did contact the school, but the school would not give us a guarantee he would be able to attend school the following semester. At the time of his court-order residency, Lil Garfield was having success and feeling good about himself and working part time. All of this was placed on hold so he could attend the residence center. I’m not saying it was wrong to send Lil Garfield to a rehab center.
What was wrong is that his education and schooling were not considered in the decision. Lil Garfield went from not going to school, from being in trouble all the time in school to going every day and being successful. His progress was not recognized as important by the courts. And getting him back into school was left up to the parent.

A student who struggles in school needs support and help to be successful. The courts ordered my students to go to school and to have perfect attendance, yet there was no support to make this possible. Often there is no school for them to attend due to over enrollment. The fear of getting into more trouble or “messing up,” stops them from going to school. All this hampers their learning. Unfortunately, school and the courts become part of a system that is designed to hinder them, not help.

My participants have been through multiple experiences with the formal school community and the juvenile court community. Today Lil Boy Blue has graduated from high school. At times he talks about going to college, but he gets scared and decides it’s not the right time. Smurf isn’t in high school and will never return. He may, however, attend another form of school. Juice should be graduating soon. However, he still struggles. He works full time and
goes to school full time. Lil Garfield is in his sophomore year. He too, still has his ups and downs.

Even though my participants have not been successful in school, they continue to believe that school is important. They would like to be successful and earn their diplomas. Even though society says being in school is important, the courts can put schooling on hold in the name of punishment.
CHAPTER EIGHT

"SO WHAT?"

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

"I really consider myself a writer, because when I get bored or when I get mad, I can sit down and tag." Juice

"...just writing things that was on my mind." LBB

"You got to know how to read to rap." Smurf

"I don't even like to read myself." Lil Garfield

My first semester in the doctoral program, I took a course, Family Literacy, from Dr. Denny Taylor. After the completion of several literacy digs which is a process of discovering the literacy with in ones world, and an analysis of the data, Dr. Taylor asked the following question: So what? What she was asking was now that we have completed literacy digs within our communities and with families -- What can we say? What have we learned? I found myself asking that question as I wrote this dissertation. I have shared the story of four young men and I now ask--so what? What have I learned from this inquiry? And what might my inquiry mean for other educators?
To answer "so what," I journeyed back over my chapters reliving the process: collecting my participant's stories through interviews and field notes taken as I visited the homes and schools, searching the literature for information that would help me understand better what I was observing, hearing and analyzing and interpreting the data through writing. I also sought the help of my participants. I wanted to know what they thought was the important information that others would learn most about from their individual experiences. During this process, I kept returning to my original question: How do Mexican American male adolescents who are in a gang perceive their literacy experiences inside and outside of school?

In this chapter I will review the literacies found within each community in which my students live. Next, I explore sociocultural aspects of the literacies found within each community. I then look at how the participants perceive their literacy experiences and examine the implications drawn from this study. To end this study, I will share what my participants believe are solutions to improving our schools.
In Chapter Two, I stated that humans use multiple forms of representation to mediate our experiences in the world and that we construct our own meanings (Britton, 1968; Eisner, 1994; K. Goodman, 1996). This study convinced me that we need to explore definitions of literacy so they are broad, inclusive, and inherently social. The forms of representations we choose to use and how we construct our meaning differs for each individual (Britton, 1968). Taylor (1994) refers to this as a literacy configuration which is unique to each individual.

Barton (1994) states, “To understand literacy we need to examine particular events where reading and writing is used” (p.37). Scribner and Cole (1981) state, “Literacy goes beyond knowing how to read and write a particular script, but the applying of this knowledge for a specific purpose in specific contexts of use” (p. 236). Literacy doesn’t exist alone in isolation but “is essentially social. . . . It is primarily something people do. It is an activity located in the space of thought and text” (Barton, 1998, p. 3). Literacy is something people do, for they are active not passive participants. Scribner and Cole (1981) “approach
literacy as a set of socially organized practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it, [and] it requires a shared cultural knowledge" (p. 236). Barton (1994) states that literacy events are the first basic unit of analysis. Literacy events are assortments of occasions in everyday life where the written word has a role (p. 36). For example Lil Boy Blue reading to his child is a literacy event. Lil Garfield doing the assignments in his chemistry class is a literacy event. When talking about literacy events, it is important to describe how literacy is used in people's everyday lives. Barton (1998) tells us that "literacy is not the same in all contexts; rather there are different literacies" (p. 9). He continues and states that "within given cultures, there are different literacies associated with different domains of life" (p. 9).

In Chapter Two, I discussed the concepts of literacy. Traditionally literacy is defined as reading and writing; however, today researchers have attempted to broaden the definition to include computer literacy, math literacy, visual literacy, music literacy, dance literacy, to name a few. At the end of my dissertation I still find myself caught in the tension of what is literacy. Eisner (N.D.)
writes,

Although reading, particularly in the context of schooling, is regarded as the way people acquire meaning from words we not only read words, we read maps, musical notes, blueprints, numbers, gesture, and perhaps most often visual images. (p. 1)

Eisner is not claiming we read all forms the same. He claims reading is a “human activity designed to construct meaning from any of the cultural forms in which meaning has been intended” (p. 1). He continues, “It is in this sense that the term literacy can be used generically; literacy is regarded as the process of constructing meaning” (p. 1).

Today I see literacy as a process of constructing meaning in one’s world. My participants constructed meaning when they looked at the mountains located in the hood. These mountains form the shape of a “W” representing the westside and symbolized to my participants that they were home and safe.

My participants dressed in a specific style and color, walked in a specific way. This represents to the world they are Crips. In the gang community, my participants identified who was their enemy and who was their friend by the way they dressed. My participants found it easier to draw, make posters, and paint their responses to movies they saw and stories they read then to respond in writing. I began to realize that literacy was more about the process of
constructing meaning. I am always drawn back to Britton's statements that language is the key way we represent our experiences. For this reason many of the examples provided involve reading and writing. However, I also provided examples from other forms of literacy that were important to my student's lives. In the following section, I review examples of literacy found in the various communities I present in this study.

**Family Community**

Within the Family Community I have also included the workplace. Table 8.1 is a look at the literacy in the family community of the male adolescent gang members with whom I worked. It lists specific literacies and their functions they serve. Literacy is used to gain information, to pay bills, and take care of financial needs both personally and within the family. Lay-away contracts are signed for furniture, and magazines, books, and CD inserts are read. As well, reading with their daughters and nieces are forms of recreational reading in which my students engage. My participants write raps and tag. Smurf often shared with me how he would go to his room and close the door and write
Table 8.1

**Literacies in Family Community**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacies</th>
<th>Function/Environments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bills -- electricity, phone, pay checks</td>
<td>reading and writing to meet financial needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>checks written to pay bills</td>
<td>Reading and writing to meet everyday needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lay-a-way contracts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>car payments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doctors' bills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phone numbers to work place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>price tags</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>credit card applications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone numbers of friends</td>
<td>reading and writing to maintain social relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birthday cards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birthday invitations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wedding invitations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>letters to friends and family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books -- personal and children books</td>
<td>recreational/pleasure reading and writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write and draw with daughter</td>
<td>Reading and writing to gain information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD inserts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV guide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV programing station</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines - The Source, Lowrider, Play Station, Cowboys weekly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesizer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poem to girl friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>computer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drawing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work handbook</td>
<td>reading and writing to complete obligation at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>memos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work orders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shipping orders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time cards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work computers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>referral slips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>street signs</td>
<td>environmental print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bill boards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advertisements in windows</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>house numbers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
lyrics for his raps.

In Juice and Lil Garfield’s home, we find tags on paper, closet doors and on their bedroom walls. Literacy is used to maintain relations with friends and family members through letter writing and invitations to birthday parties and weddings. Smurf and Lil Garfield and Juice write in journals and notebooks about feelings and emotions. At work, all my participants are involved with such things as taking orders, fulfilling orders and checking orders. Lil Boy Blue is required to count and keep track of all outgoing shipments. Smurf and Juice are supervisors, so they check the work of employees under them. They have to report all activity during their shifts using literacy. In brief, literacies are the tools used to maintain the Family Community.

Gang Community

In moving from the Family Community into the Gang Community literacy takes on a new look. Table 8.2 is a compilation of the literacies associated with the gang. In this community, access is granted to all insiders and is often unknown by outsiders. The literacy found in the gang community has specific purposes: representing one’s gang and oneself, gaining respect, and disrespecting rival gangs.
Literacy is used to express the hurt and emotions associated with the gang. The main usage of gang literacy is to let those in the world around you know who you are. The clothes a gangsta' wears as well as the hand signs are designed to let others know or identify you.

Lil Garfield tags his notebook at school to let the people around him know that he is Crip and that he is here. At the death of a homie, Smurf sits down at the computer to write a rap telling of his sorrow and sadness. After Plucy died, Lil Boy Blue drew a big cartoon picture of Plucy.

Table 8.2

Literacies Found in the Gang Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacies</th>
<th>Function/Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tags</td>
<td>-reading to gain information about other gangs and members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-writing to represent, gain respect, to disrespect, to express hurt/emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walls, buildings, papers, notebooks, desks, tables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-shirts</td>
<td>read about other gang activities and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belt buckles</td>
<td>write about your gang activities and experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shoes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raps</td>
<td>greeting other gang members, identification, disrespect opposing gangs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self written</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand signs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clothes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In my classroom, everyone dressed in blue and greeted each other with a handshake that also identified them as belonging to westside Manzanita. They carried "rags" the color of blue in their pockets. In the gang community, a gangsta' depends on multiple signs system to accomplish his or her goal of representing their hood and themselves.

**Formal Education Community**

My participants move across the border between the gang community into the formal education community to find still another set of literacies. In the formal education community literacies differ from administrative literacy to classroom literacy. As students migrate from class to class, they have time to converse with friends using literacy associated with peers. The literacy in the formal education community is often designed for participants to show what they know and how well they follow directions. Table 8.3 is a list of literacies found in the formal education community and their functions. My participants and their parents are filling out official forms and/or responding to official letters from administrators. In the classroom, literacy becomes assignments. In this community literacy is often something being done to them.
Table 3.3

**Literacies in the Formal Educational Community.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacies</th>
<th>Function/Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>registration forms</td>
<td>formal forms used to can access to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emergency forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>admit slips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>office call slips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absent excuse notice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worksheets</td>
<td>class assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers hand out</td>
<td>reading and writing to show ones knowledge and to have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>textbooks</td>
<td>it evaluated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assignment packets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notes on boards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assignment-research papers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discipline action notice</td>
<td>reading of official actions taken by school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suspension notice and notice to return to school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing scheduling notice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notice of results of hearing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Juvenile Court Community.**

A fourth world my participants find themselves to be a part of is the Juvenile Court Community. Literacy is very specific in this community and similar to the literacy in formal education. The literacy events take the form of filling official forms on financial need and the signing of one's signature to official court documents. My participants
read documents from court sessions, verdict, and probation agreements. The literacies in this community are designed to control them. Taylor (1996), based on her research makes the following observation about the literacy of bureaucratic institutions such as juvenile courts: 1. "The needs of social institutions are in direct conflict with the needs of the members of society whom they are supposed to serve" (p. 241). The courts establish official orders that affect my participants’ schooling. 2. "Social agencies reflect dominant ideologies. Their main purpose is social containment of people suffering from politically defined pathologies" (p. 242). My participants enter the courts as gang members which assigns a certain behavior to them, not as young men with families and goals. The court passes judgement and punishment that is designed to contain the juvenile delinquent. The realities of their lives are never acknowledged. They become what the official text designates.

After examining the literacies found in these worlds, it is apparent that the participants in this study are indeed literate. Literacy is a main form of representing the experience's Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield have in their everyday lives.
Sociocultural Aspects of Literacy

Some literacies are carried out as an end in themselves. However, readings and writings are often means to some other ends and are embedded in a broader context. Barton (1994) states, "Literacy is a social activity and can best be described in terms of the literacy practices which people draw upon in literacy events" (p.36). Street (1995) "sees literacy practices as inextricably linked to cultural and power structures in a given society" (p. 161). According to Barton (1998) "Literacy practices offer a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between the activity . . . and the social strictures in which they are embedded and which they help shape" (p. 6). Barton continues stating literacy practices are not distinct components of behavior. They involve values, attitudes, feelings, and social relations (Barton, 1998).

Edelsky (1996) purposes a different lens for looking at literacy. She first points out that "literacy, reading and writing are not interchangeable terms" (p. 86). She uses the example of a person reading an eye chart. This is a literacy event but it is not reading, because it doesn't result in the creation of a text meaning for the user. Edelsky's categorizes literacy into what she calls reading/not
reading, exercise/non exercise, literate as subject/literate as object. Edelsky (1996) states the "difference between literacy as reading and literacy as not reading refers to whether or not the reader aims to make a text meaning for himself or herself" (p. 86). The third category is examining literacy as an exercise and not exercise reflects on the difference in the purpose of the literacy event. Exercises are primarily for instructional or evaluational purpose (Edelsky, 1996, p. 86). The last category in the distinction between literate as an object and literate as a subject is the "social and political, not individual." We need to look at others who are involved and how they are involved.

This involves looking at the role and power of the literate in relation to the role and power of the other and the amount of control a person has over the print-use and the conduct of the literacy event. Edelsky (1996) claims by examining literacy this way, "[it] attempts to account for both process and practice" p. 90). In the next section I return to the literacies of the participants and examine them for the values, behaviors, and social and culture knowledge needed to become participants in the literacy events located within each community.
Family Community

Within this community, my participants are expected as members to be able to function within the community. The participants used print to construct meaning for themselves. All literacies in this community are self initiated.

One literacy event that is common in the Family community is the paying of bills. In Chapter Five, I shared how excited Smurf was when he paid bills for the first time. In this literacy event the meaning is being constructed and there is a real purpose. For Smurf it was a showing of his independence. He is a man in control of his world. Even though the bill paying is initiated by a powerful company, Smurf is in control. He constructs the meaning and purpose of the events. Both Juice and Lil Boy Blue have also expressed how much they are in control because they pay bills.

A literacy event of journal writing for Juice and Lil Garfield was self initiated. At the beginning of the school year 1996, I gave all my students journals. They were very aware of my journal and how I used it. I wrote them a little note in the front of the journal. I never required them to use them. Juice and Lil Garfield used them at the time when their family community was changing such as when their
grandmother died. This event took on significant meaning. The journal was a place to express emotions about the loss of their grandma and its effect on the family. In this event Juice and Lil Garfield were the subjects because they were in control of the event. There were no other participants. They could write what they wanted to write and no one could censor them. They could write the way they wanted to, using their language.

All the participants regularly read to their daughters or nieces. The purposes of this event were the construction of a relationship with their daughters/nieces as well as a time to play. Together they constructed meaning: Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield constructed meaning as the readers and the daughters and nieces constructed meaning as they listened and looked at the pictures. Together, they constructed meaning as they interacted with each other. The fear of being evaluated is non-existent in this event. This event is a time to learn, to play, and to build relationships.

Workplace is a domain found within the family community. A literacy event that Lil Boy Blue participates in at work related to a file where instructions were left for him to read telling him what needed to be done during
his shift. Before he left work, he left directions for the next shift. This was something Lil Boy Blue was required to do. It was a literacy event that was designed by the company to provide communication between shifts. This was a responsibility the company expected Lil Boy Blue to do as a member of the company. It took on the nature of an exercise. If he didn't do this, he could be fired. But because having a job means independence to him, he took ownership of the event. He becomes a willing participant in the event and constructed meaning. The purpose was to keep his job.

In the Family Community and in the workplace Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield were equal participants with equal rights and privileges in the literacies of the community. Frank Smith (1988) refers to this as the literacy club. Even though parents and grandparents are the respected elders of the family and therefore would be perceived as the power holders, all members have a mutual knowledge acceptance in the club. Difference and similarities in interest and ability are part of the literacies found in the Family Community. A good illustration of this was when the great granddaughter age four became an equal member in making tamales. She was allowed to choose when to join the activity and when to exit. She was allowed full membership.
This was also true for me in this event. This is true in all literacy events. One may be more experienced, but everyone is given access and equal rights to participate.

The Gang Community

In Chapter Two I stated that adolescents are cultural agents who are actively forming, producing, and transmitting their culture among themselves (Wulf, 1995; Prout and James, 1990). The peer group is the key means for socialization into adolescence. The gang is a community of their peers. One of my students once told me a gang is a bunch of kids that live in the same neighborhood. This is important to understand as we talk about the Gang Community and the literacies found in this community because, these literacies help establish one’s identity. Zepeda and McCarty (1997) state that there is more to language than simple speech, but that language carries the “meanings, symbolism, shared history, and experiences of a people within a landscape” (p. 2). As an adolescent becomes a member of the gang community, he or she also becomes a user of the literacy in this community. They become a part of the history, and shared experiences. It is a way of life.

While I was teaching at Nuestra Casa, my students would walk into the classroom and shake hands with everyone using
their personal handshake with those who were part of the gang and a regular handshake with everyone else. The clothes they wear also identify them as Crip. They would greet each other with "west up cuzz." "Cuzz" is a term they used when referring to other members in the Crip gang. "West" is a substitute for the word "what" and identifies them as members of the westside. My participants wear blue which also identifies them as Crip members. In the Gang Community, a handshake, the clothes and color of their clothes all serve a purpose and a function.

Tagging, the literacy event the outside world associates with a gang, involves the writer and those who read the tag. In this world the tag is a way to get your name and the name of the gang known. It provides a way to obtain respect. The power struggle comes not in who can write a tag or who can read the tag, but in the placement of the tag. A tag in the enemy's hood is showing disrespect for the gang of that hood. Tagging also has the function of representing the gang. Tagging becomes a way to express emotions. In Smurf's tag, he always put "R.I.P. Oso" and added Plucy's name when he died. Tagging functions as a memory aid. Since the gangsta's lost friends can live on in their tags. Lil Garfield in his journal tagged "grandma." He
pays respect to his grandmother and also represents her.

Within the gang, not everyone can tag. Juice tells us not everyone has a good tag when he admits he doesn’t have a good tag. But gang members are not excluded from any gang activity because they can’t tag.

Representing who they are and where they are from are important to my participants. Oso’s (the first homie to die) family couldn’t afford burying their son. The homies in the gang got together and raised money which they gave to Oso’s parents. Yet all they could afford was to bury their son in a cemetery located on the south side. My students believed Oso wouldn’t be happy on the south side. They told me that they all got together and got buckets of dirt from the westside to put over the casket before the south side dirt was thrown in. Oso died representing the hood. He was buried with westside soil. For my participant’s, this symbolized Oso’s loyalty to the hood and their own loyalty to the homie, Oso. Finding multiple ways to represent themselves and the hood requires them to look for many different forms to represent their world.

**Formal Education Community**

The literacy associated with the Formal Education community I have located in two domains: administration and
classroom. The examples that follow relate to the secondary schools (both traditional and alternative) that my participants attended. In the administration domain, the literacy which affected my students' lives can be classified in Edlesky's (1996) term as an exercise. This literacy is used to evaluate and discipline a student. The first official print is registration, getting the child into the school as a student. Parents or guardians must come to the office and complete several forms which include proving they live in the boundaries of the school. If the forms are not filled out correctly or the participants can't prove they live within the boundaries the students will not gain entrance in the school. This process can be repeated several times.

Lil Garfield was ordered by the courts to attend a thirty-day live-in-residence program. The school officials were aware of the court order and knew Lil Garfield would be returning. In effect, Lil Garfield was required to quit school. Even though the school said he could return the following semester, the fear was that they might not have room for him. In order to return the next quarter Lil Garfield was required to go through the complete orientation process a second time. He had to complete registration forms
as if he were a new student. I sat with several parents as we filled out these forms, together. It is a mechanical activity. Meaning is not being constructed by the parents. They are simply going through the motions, something they have done several times.

Within this domain, we also find the print associated with discipline. If a student is dismissed from school, suspended for more than 10 days, a discipline hearing is scheduled. A letter sent home to the parents or guardian. This letter states the rule that the student is accused of breaking, the section from the student handbook dealing with the rules and consequences, the procedures for the hearing, and the date of the hearing. It is important to remember that the only verbal contact with a parent or guardian takes place after the decision to punish the child takes place. The parent or guardian is called to come and take the child home. The parent or guardian and the student are "literate as object," in Edelsky's terms. The power belongs to the school administration. The parents have no imput until the hearing, and they have no control over the print being used.

At the hearing, the power is in the hands of the administrator. They have a set format that will be followed. Parents or guardians have no previous knowledge on what will
take place or the procedures for the hearing. This information is not available for parents. After returning to school, Lil Garfield was suspended and a hearing was held for a long term hearing. His mother and I believed if we could explain Lil Garfield’s situation with the administrators they would support Lil Garfield. The hearing proceeded with an explanation of all policies and due process. Before we were given permission to talk, we were told what the policy said and that we were present only to determine the length of the suspension not whether they will suspend.

The parent and/or child have no input other than to tell their side of the story. However, this does no good because decisions are often made long before the hearing. The decisions are made based solely on policy and the administrator’s decision that the child is guilty of breaking the rule. The authority lies in the policy. The parents have no power or recourse as was evident in Lil Boy Blue’s story. Felipe, Lil Boy Blue’s father, was told they (administrators, governing school board) have to follow procedures--policies. His question to me was “Why do I go if what I say makes no difference?” In these hearings, I find myself thinking back to Denny Taylor’s class. While
examining the documents we brought to the class, she stated the questions we need to be asking are, "Who writes the texts? Who can read the texts?, Who can interpret the texts? Who can change the texts? Where does the power lie?" (Taylor, 1996) It was obvious that the texts with these participants' formal education community were written by the school officials. These officials were also the ones who interpreted the texts. The parents were not allowed to make any changes in the texts and the power belonged to the administrators and the official policies.

In the classroom, the literacy also takes on the form of "exercise." In Chapter Six, Lil Garfield describes a reading exercise in his attempt to talk about reading. He was assigned a passage to read and questions to answer and his responsibility was to answer the questions correctly. This literacy event is teacher-directed and teacher-controlled. Lil Garfield's purpose was to get the assignment done the easiest way possible.

I have observed where "exercise" has turned into "non-exercise," and the students become active in the literacy event. As active participants, they have ownership and establish purpose and meaning. Juice was assigned to write a research paper. The assignment was broken down to different
skills: the location of resources, taking of note cards, and the writing of the research paper. Juice was to get each step checked off. This is clearly an exercise. The goal was for the students to illustrate they could write a research paper, but the information in the paper was irrelevant. However, Juice was given permission to do his research paper on his gang. With this permission Juice could take ownership of the assignment. It was no longer an exercise for Juice. It was an opportunity to tell people about his world.

I observed the same situation in my class. I gave the class an assignment to read an article in the magazine Rap Sheet. I wanted the kids to read and discuss the reading, but the student didn’t want to do it. That is until Lil Boy Blue started reading and talking about it. Then the other boys decided to read so they could be part of Lil Boy Blue’s experience. They constructed the meaning and purpose for the reading.

When I assigned a writing assignment which was an exercise, my students would struggle with writing. However, I discovered just how important it is for the student to be able to construct the purpose when I watched Smurf sit for hours and write a story with another student. I also observed other students getting involved as Smurf shared the
story and asked for input. They were aware of the audience and getting what they believed to be the true story of their life.

In the Formal Education Community, my participants and their parents are in a position where their voice is not heard. They may be active participants in the literacy event, but the control and power are with the teacher and administrators. These school officials write the texts and interpret the texts. They decide the purpose, the function, and type of behaviors needed in the literacy event.

Juvenile Court Community

The judge and all court officials are the people of power in the juvenile courts community. My participants and their parents sit and follow directions in this community. There are forms to be completed to assess financial needs to determine how much they will pay for their court-appointed lawyer. In the court session, the judge asks questions and summarizes the charges and procedures. Meaning is constructed in relationship to the position one has in the court. For my participants the meaning was, "Let's-get this over and get out of here." The parents were worried. The meaning they constructed was, "What will happen to my son? How can I help him." They judge constructs meaning according
to due process. The minutes from the court sessions were sent to my participant homes. The minutes were written by court recorders and interpreted by court officials. The participants never had a voice in the interpretation. The probation agreement had a generic form used with all my participants. The probation agreement dictated what the defendant was allowed to do and not allowed to do, the responsibility of the parent or legal guardian, and what was required to pay the community back. The parents and the child signed the probation form. My participants and their parents did what they were told, following directions.

As I watched and listened to the judge and the administrators in the school hearings, I became aware of the power and privilege found in official texts. According to Taylor (1996) the official texts gain this power because we "believe that the official texts are factual. The fact is they are political constructions that do not represent reality" (p. 238). The official texts, school files and court files, become the texts that describe the lives of my students. Taylor claims (1996) the subtexts of society determine who lives and who dies. The school files are the subtexts that decide whether some students live or die in school. The policy about gangs says zero tolerance. My
students' literacies announce they are in gangs. When Lil Boy Blue brings a gun on campus, he is removed from school. No one takes time to talk with him. No one visits the home. Lil Boy Blue dies by the texts. Smurf finds the courage to go back to school. He wants to graduate. On paper, he is a gangster, a trouble maker. Smurf was systematically removed from school within four weeks. He will never return. Juice has a family and is working full time. On paper he is a trouble maker. He is dropped for the lack of progress. He, too, will never return to school.

Decisions are made based on policies, but real lives are rarely considered. In the official school texts, gangs are seen as bad, evil, violent. Reality is never brought into the discussion.

Gang Members' Perceptions of Their Own Literacies

It is apparent that Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield are literate. The second part of my question is how do they perceive their literacy experiences. I realized that Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield had a hard time acknowledging their own literacy. I decided to ask my participants to tell me what literacy meant. Unanimously they responded, "I don't know." I then asked them what illiterate meant and they again responded unanimously, "you
don’t read or write.” For my participants literacy then meant you could read and write. This answer may be the fact that, for them, the privileged literacy is school literacy, more specifically reading and writing as defined by the school. In the following section Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield share their perceptions of the own literacies, in particular reading and writing.

Lil Boy Blue

Lil Boy Blue and his little family came to my apartment for dinner and to use the computer. We started talking and I asked Lil Boy Blue to tell me what he read on a typical day. He thought for a while and responded, “I don’t read anything.” I was startled. In Chapter Five, I reported asking Lil Boy Blue if he considered himself a reader and he responded yes and no. He informed me he likes to read but he doesn’t read books. During the time I have known Lil Boy Blue, I knew this statement wasn’t true. While he was a student in my class, I checked out several books on Al Capone which he read. I know this because he would come to class telling me new facts about Al Capone.

When I reminded him that he also reads to his daughter, his response was, “Sometimes she wants me to read a book to her. Sometimes I make up stories with the pictures. I make
her laugh. She goes, 'That's not what is says Daddy.'" The three of us (Lil Boy Blue, Teresa, and I) sat and started to brainstorm the print found around the house such as mail advertisements, Dallas Cowboy's (pro Football team) posters/stickers on the wall, and bills and schedules stuck to the refrigerator. Lil Boy Blue quickly remembered his Dallas Cowboy's schedule on the wall. He started to acknowledge the reading he does do but to him this was seen as something besides reading.

His reaction to writing was similar to reading. He reminded me that he signs the checks. When I asked him about work he stated, "Yea that's only time I do writing. I have to leave messages to the other workers." Teresa (Lil Boy Blue's girl friend) quickly reminded him that he writes with their daughter Anna. Even though Lil Boy Blue does write in his world, he doesn't see writing in his world.

When thinking about his own literacy, Lil Boy Blue struggles to acknowledge any reading and writing in his world. This struggle that Lil Boy Blue had in acknowledging his literacy was felt by all my participants.

Smurf

In Chapter Five, Smurf pointed out that you have to read to write raps. He states you need to use different
words. When I asked him if he considered himself a reader, he immediately said "Yes." He then qualified that answer stating, "I don't consider myself a reader." What changed between those two answers was Smurf talking about reading the dictionary to get new words to rap, but admits he's not the type to sit down and read a book.

During the fourth interview session Smurf, his girlfriend and I freely talked about their experiences and what they felt would be the outcome of the dissertation. I asked Smurf about his everyday reading. Like his brother he hesitated, but then responded "computer." I then started to make suggestions to him and he then began to list things he reads. The same response happened when we talked about writing. He even claimed he doesn't write raps except in his head. Smurf was willing to acknowledge that he did write and read only after we talked about the print in his world. But he would never really say that he is a writer and reader. Somehow he does not consider the reading and writing he does every day to be "real" reading and writing.

Juice

When I asked Juice if he sees himself as a reader, he immediately responded, "I don't even like to read." In Chapter Five, I reported Juice's discussion about how he
learned to read and write; he talked about learning to read so he could learn to write and learning how to write so he could learn to read. As he talked, he took a pride in his reading and writing in elementary, but as he got older he turned off reading and writing. As I tried to get him to tell me what he read in a typical day, he informed me he doesn’t read. After the brainstorming, and my suggestions, Juice recognized that he does read. But at the end of this interview he stated, “Reading isn’t my thing.” After talking with Juice, I took some time to write in my field notes my frustration in trying to get my participants to talk about their literacies:

Why is it so hard for Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, and Juice to acknowledge their reading and writing. When we talk about a typical day and their literacy, they seem to shut down. Why? It is as if they don’t think they read or write. Yet as we talk they can name things they read and when they use writing. I ask myself is it because they see literacy only associated with school. And they have never really been successful with school. (FN 2/23/98, p. 213).

Juice seems to have a belief in his literacy that is more definite then Lil Boy Blue’s or Smurf’s. But like Lil Boy Blue and Smurf, he discounts it by saying, “I hate reading; it isn’t me.”

Lil Garfield

My interview with Lil Garfield was different. He could
easily list what he reads. Looking back at his comments in Chapter Five, what seemed to frustrate Lil Garfield was the acknowledgment of a good reader. As he tried to describe what a good reader is, I felt he was describing a school task. After I took him home that day, I reflected on his description of a good reader and recorded my thoughts:

As I listened to Lil Garfield's tape, he seems to not get as frustrated as the other boys. He responded to what he reads quicker then the other boys. Lil Garfield's definition of a good reader is really his description—what he believes is reading—of the reading process as he sees it. But what it sounds like he is describing is more of what he does with reading assignments—skimming, looking for answers to specific question. (FN 3/20/98, p. 214)

When talking about his writing, Lil Garfield claims he's not a writer because he could never write well. He broke his arm several times while growing up and he never developed good penmanship. For Lil Garfield writing was about penmanship. He writes in a journal and writes raps. We wrote several letters while he was in rehabilitation. Yet when we talked about writing, Lil Garfield remembers his broken arm and never learning to write well. Lil Garfield seems to be able to acknowledge his literacy, but like the other boys, he qualifies his literacy experiences.

The discussion that never surfaced was how they view literacy in the gang or even if they considered their
participation in literacy in the gang. Often we would talk about it in class as I explained why I was collecting all their tags. I would tell them how interesting their use of language was and how much knowledge they had of language to be able to manipulate it in the ways they did. During those times, they would get a sense of pride. The fact that they struggled with defining themselves as literate would suggest that they don’t classify their writing and reading in the gang as literacy.

School literacy seems to be the guiding experience that defined literacy for these young men. As young kids, elementary age, Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield described themselves as readers. Once in the Espinoza’s home, we started talking about books. Lil Boy Blue remembered books he read. He couldn’t recall the complete titles but talked about Ramona and a book title that had super-fudge in the title. I recorded the incident in my field notes:

It was interesting at the Espinoza’s home today. I can remember how we got on to the discussion but books surfaced. Lil Boy Blue immediately shared books he remembered read when he was in grade school. Smurf also joined in by sharing the title of books he read. The thing I remember most about the discussion was their energy in sharing books. They were excited as they talked about their books. At one time Lil Boy Blue and Smurf were excited about books and reading. I wonder how that got lost. (FN 3/12/98, p. 216)
The literacy they were excited to share is the literacy that best matches school literacy. Street (1995) asks how school literacy overpowers literacy found in communities outside of school:

Among all of the different literacy practices in the community, the home, and the workplace, how is it that the variety associated with schooling has come to be the defining type, not only to set the standard for other varieties but to marginalize them, to rule them off the agenda of literacy debate. (p. 106)

Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield are literate. However, they have not given themselves permission to view their literacy as legitimate. This may be due to the notion that the boys consider school literacy as the defining feature of what literacy looks like. School was not a place they succeeded, so they feel they must not be successful in literacy either.

**IMPLICATIONS**

What do I conclude from this study of four Mexican American male adolescents who are in gangs? The point of this study is not to generalize to all adolescents who are in gangs. However, the individual stories shared in this study provide rich detail about what many adolescents may be experiencing. By discovering what these young men’s lives are like, teachers and researchers may learn how we may better serve the students in our classrooms.
The first part of this study acknowledges that the participants are literate and documents the literacies in their individual lives. The second part of this study focuses on how they themselves perceive their literacy experiences. Not only are these four young men literate, but they come from communities where literacies are tools used to represent their experiences. However, in talking with my participants, I learned that they do not recognize or acknowledge certain aspects their own literacy.

This dissertation provides a positive view of a group of kids who are otherwise considered by some as "throw away kids" because they are in gangs or have received the label "gang". This study dispels myths that are associated with kids in gangs such as gangsters come from non-caring families or gangsters don’t care about education.

In Ray McDermott’s (1988) article, "The Acquisition of a Child by a Learning Disability," he makes clear that when a student receives the label "learning disabled," the environment reinforces the label. The child begins to act as if he does in fact have a learning disability. However, in McDermott’s study, he also notes that the learning disability doesn’t show itself outside of the school environment. In the classroom, we can find many different labels. A new
label found in the classroom today is "gang". This label conjures up fear for many teachers, administrators, students, and parents. They think of violent, disruptive, unteachable, illiterate, slow kids who spend their nights in drive-bys, gang fights, tagging, high on drugs, and/or robbing stores and houses. Many educators see gang kids as kids who don't care about education. Juice felt there was no need to do homework because the teacher never asked for his: "They think we don't want an education." The label "gang" conjures up a picture of a dysfunctional family, an absent father, a family that doesn't care, and parents who are on welfare and/or high on drugs themselves. These are generalizations the need to be re-examined critically.

As we read the stories of my participants, we obtain a view of a group of kids who do value education and whose parents and families do care. Lil Boy Blue and Smurf's mother has often walked the halls of her home worried. She wants the best for her children. I have had conversations with Juice and Lil Garfield's mother discussing ways to help her sons. As parents, these individuals have visited the schools, classrooms, and have met with teachers and administrators. Even though on the surface Juice and Lil Garfield's home may seem to be a dysfunctional, one with a
family that doesn’t care, with a mother who has survived on welfare and has served time in prison, she is nevertheless a mother who has cried herself to sleep at night worried about her sons. She wants them to be successful in school and “good citizens.” Both families come together trying to support and help each other.

A second myth associated with kids in gangs is that they are illiterate, that they don’t know how to read and write or they are below their grade level. Most people believe that kids in gangs come from homes that are absent of reading and writing. After examining the literacies in my participants’ lives, it is apparent that this is a myth. Literacies prevail in the lives of these young men. Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s mother took them to a library once a month to check out books to take home to read. She then would talk with them throughout the month about their books. She supervised them after school making sure they were doing their homework. Juice bragged about going straight home to do his homework. Lil Garfield shared how much fun learning was in elementary school. Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, Juice, and Lil Garfield talked about books they have read as students in elementary school.
The four participants in this study come from a literate home environment and have established literate environments for their children. In their world, there are many other forms of literacy. Lil Boy Blue draws with his daughter. Juice and Lil Garfield have seen their mother and grandfather read books. Smurf and Lil Garfield sit and listen to their stack of CDs and practice rapping along with the music or make up their own rap. Lil Garfield also is an expert playing games on his Play Station. Smurf sits in his room writing raps. Lil Boy Blue and Smurf have watched their Nana sitting at the kitchen table doing "seek and find" puzzles in the newspaper.

Brian Street (1995) asks an important question:

If, as we argue, there are multiple literacies, how is that one particular variety has come to be taken as the only literacy? Among all the different literacy practices in the community, the home, the workplace, how is it the variety associated with schooling has come to be the defining type. . . ." (p. 107)

In our classrooms, we need to acknowledge the literacies found outside of the walls of school. We need to bring all literacies into our classrooms. By valuing all forms of literacies, students might be able to acknowledge their own literacies.

A third myth that is associated with gang members is they don’t want an education, they don’t value an education
or that the gang gives them a bad time if they do well in school. I asked Lil Boy Blue if this was true. He said, "They [Kilo and Oso the, older members of this gang] wouldn't care if you did well in school." All four of my participants wanted their diploma. A GED meant settling for less. I also realized this was a myth when five of my students were getting ready to graduate. Everyone was proud of the students' graduating. Big celebrations were planned.

Another time when I saw the homies come together to support a homie in school was when Guero left the hood to go to college. They had a party to send him off. They were proud. I took Smurf to visit Guero at college and as we prepared to leave, Smurf put his arm around Guero and told him how proud he was that he was the first in the hood to go to college. They all understood that Guero had a dream. Lil Boy Blue, Smurf, and Juice want their daughters to go to school and be successful. They themselves have returned to school more then once in hopes of receiving their diploma. Graduating is so important to them they often would return to environments that were hostile to begin again.

This dissertation provides information for secondary teachers, counselors, developers of alternative programs to consider ways to make kids lives successful in school. It is
important that educators and people who work with adolescents not make assumptions that end up guiding the treatment of students in negative directions. We need to listen to the voices of our students. We need to be able to see their worlds through their eyes. They will tell us what they need and what we need to know to help them become successful. We need to acknowledge and value their culture—the youth culture. We can’t expect them to leave their culture at the door any more then we can leave our culture at the door.

As we become aware of the adolescents’ world, we become aware of the knowledge—their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992) they bring to the classroom, courts, or other facilities designed to help them. Moll and his colleagues state that teachers need to visit their students’ homes not as teachers but as learners. I went into the homes of these four students to learn and to understand not to judge or to impose my agenda. I discovered a vast amount of knowledge and literacy.

In Chapter Two I talked about social networks and social capital. Each family has networks available that provides the resources needed to maintain the family community. Felipe (Lil Boy Blue and Smurf’s father) calls a
friend who works on air conditioners to help him install his
new air conditioner. A friend calls Felipe to work on his
car. As these four boys grow older, they depend on and
become a part of the social network and inherit the social
capital. They also add to it. As educators I believe
teachers need to do more than just visit the homes. I found
myself being invited and participating in birthday parties,
holiday celebrations, and family gatherings. I soon was part
of the resources. When they wanted to buy a computer or
register for community college classes, I was the one they
called. As we learn more about our students' worlds and the
knowledge that exists in their worlds, we can then
incorporate that knowledge in our classroom and into
programs designed to help teenagers.

Stanton-Salazzar's (1995) research reveals that
successful minority students are depending on the "formation
of genuinely supportive relationships with institutional
agents" (p. 117). He defines an institutional agent as an
individual "who has the capacity and commitment to transmit
directly or to negotiate the transmission of institutional
resources and opportunity" (p. 117). In other words, a
second component needed is establishing advocates for the
adolescents. Stanton-Salazzar (1995) states the problems
many minority students may have in school is due to the social distance and mistrust found in the social interaction between the student and the institutional agents. He (1995) states that when the lack of access to institutional funds of knowledge is combined with the perception of discrimination, self-elimination is a likely result” (p.118). Researchers such as Fine (1991) and Lareau (1989) in discussing school failures cast the process of self elimination in terms of systematic institutional exclusion. Advocates or “institutional agents,” or what other researchers may call the “significant other” are vital for students to be successful.

A third component is the reexamining of the policies/procedures of school and courts. Is a policy that advocates zero tolerance designed to benefit the youth in schools or designed to play out as zero tolerance of a group of kids? Students are being pushed to the side in the name of policy. The policy said Lil Boy Blue had to be removed from school. The policies said Lil Garfield needed to be removed from school for more than 10 days. The policies said to remove Juice for lack of progress. Further research is needed to examine closely what such policies are really accomplishing.

This dissertation exposes the harm of stereotyping. At
the end of all my interviews, I asked my participants what advice they would give teachers, beginning teachers, and administrators. Their answer was, "Don't stereotype, or prejude your students. Take time to get to know your students not what others may say the student is like."

Juice: Basically, probably stereotyping. Cops go on TV and say you see a guy wearing this and that and that he's gang affiliated. They have their little stupid statistics. Gangsta have this kind of tatoos. We are automatically mean. We're a menaces to society. Automatically in their eyes, so like, they don't look at us like a regular people. They look at us as some mixed up dramatized kids looking for action 24/7. Not even trying to look for education, just want to be fighting everyone. (I4, 2/97, p.3)

Juice reflects on how the cops and media stereotype people who dress a certain way and are menaces to society. Teachers then don't look at them as regular people who do want an education. Juice shares:

I know I have done bad things in my life. I regret some of them. But like I'm making up for them by doing good, but I'm not going to give up like for the teachers the people that want me to hurry up to get my GED and everything. I'm not going to give up, because I feel I have something in this world to accomplish. I want to have that house I dream about. (I4, 2/97, p. 3)

Juice's dreams are not much different than any young man. Yet because he is stereotyped, he is not given the same opportunities or access in the education system to make those dreams a reality.
Lil Boy Blue’s response was not much different except he referred back to his personal experience. At first he told me he couldn’t say it, meaning the language is improper. But as he talked he shared how he couldn’t understand why the principal kicked him out of school:

Mrs. . . . . thought she knew about me. I had a gun on campus. She didn’t know who I was. I probably deserved to get kicked out. But I think they should have let me back into school sooner. It took them a year. They don’t want people dropping out, but they give me a hard time. It would have been easier for me to just give up and say forget it. (I4, LBB, 1/96, p. 2)

Lil Boy Blue recognizes the fact that he made a mistake. But what I thought was interesting in Lil Boy Blue’s comment was “she didn’t know me” as if to say if the principal knew him she would have known it was just a mistake. He also acknowledges it would have been easier to quit. But he wants his diploma. I wonder if the principal was aware of how much he really wanted to be in school, if she would have allowed him back in.

Lil Garfield also discusses what happens when a teacher stereotypes, judges their students:

. . . . don’t judge them. Don’t stereotype them. You know what I’m saying. I mean it’s just going to fu ck you up. If you’re the teacher then you’re like, I don’t want to teach this kid. Then you make it worst for you and the student. So just try and give a person an equal chance. Everyone is different. No one is the same. Just don’t be judgmental. Give a person an equal chance. Just cause they look different, don’t look like other kids.
Don’t matter the color, don’t matter where they come from. (I4, Lil Garfield, 2/96, p. 2)

Lil Garfield then went on and explained a problem he had himself in school. He talks about how hard it is for teachers to work with all their students:

... because in traditional school you can’t give a fuckin student time. You got to give the whole class. You know what I’m saying. Let’s say I got suspended for two weeks. I go back. I’ll be saying, I was doing work from two weeks ago. You can’t do the work. That’s why I think it’s good to have aides. Then you got someone to tell what we [the class] were doing last week. While the teacher is having them [the class] going on.

(I4, Lil Garfield, 2/96, p.3)

This was a problem Lil Garfield had. He would get suspended, but not all his teachers would turn his assignments into the office for his mother to pick up. But he would not know how to do the work, so he didn’t do it. His mother was not able to help either. But Lil Garfield couldn’t go on to campus to get help. He was behind and struggled to get caught up.

When I asked Smurf what he would tell teachers, he responded on an abstract level. He started talking about me as a teacher:

... You approached us at a whole other level. I mean it wasn’t really sch-. . . . It was school. We learned a lot, but it wasn’t just books and history we were learning from the present, the future. (I4, Smurf, 12/97, p.5)

He went on and talked about how I worked with other kids that were in the gang, but were not in the class. We took
time to list names. I think what Smurf was trying to say was I cared and because I cared I was able to work with them on another level. Smurf continued in a quiet voice and said,

I just wish they could look at how I was. Look at me as a student, as a person. Why couldn't they see how I was before they judged me. Why couldn't they see for themselves?  (I4, Smurf, 12/97, p. 4)

He shares that the teachers who did see him as a student, as a person, he considered them as cool. Throughout my interviews, my participants were aware of their role in getting in trouble at school. They never really blamed school. But they also felt they were unfairly judged and stereotyped.

Stereotyping and falsely judging is the results of racism. Bourgois' (1995) research with Puerto Rican crack dealers examined their early school experiences. He writes,

[T]eachers unconsciously process subliminal class and cultural messages to hierarchize their students. Tangible markers like accent and clothing combine with subtle forms of expression such as eye contact, body language, play styles, and attention span to persuade the agents of a mainstream, middle-class, dominated bureaucracy that a particular child is a disciplinary problem, emotionally disturbed, or of low intelligence. (p. 176)

Because my students dress differently, have their own language, carry themselves differently, they are automatically, in many cases, written off as students who cause trouble and not able to handle the work. My students
deal with racism on two levels: they are gangsta and they are Mexican-American. During my interview with Juice, he shared some experiences he had at school:

Juice: I think school sucks....... but you have to........

Deb: Why?

Juice: Because everybody looks down on you. Like, not everybody, some teachers are cool, but some teachers talk about racist things. Like I have two classes like for instance today we were talking ......about like we got in some discussion about man leaving, and stuff like that. Their wives at home and they run around the streets and stuff, and my teachers said well he must must of been a Mexi... must of been a Mexican from Mexico.

Deb: Is she Mexican or white?

Juice: She’s white, and I have class with him (Buda). Then one of us said ‘Miss come here’, and she said ‘Oh that's a south side thing.’ Why is it a south side thing, because that's where all the Mexican culture lives. She doesn’t know she's being racist, I guess. Everybody calls everybody miss....she always brings up the south side. She says anybody here grew up around the Wakefield area. . . . I was all like (Juice was acting like shame if he says yes). . . . I go-yea. I grew up there and she goes see what I mean. I go fuckkkkkkkkk (gets quiet). (IS, Juice, 2/97, p. 2)

My participants are confronted with this type of racism everyday they go to school. This subtle racism eventually wears a students down and they begin to believe it themselves. It is important that teachers become aware of their own prejudice feelings and the stereotyping and
Implications for Further Research

As I finish this study, I find myself with more questions. One area about which I have formed more questions and see a need for further research is the examination of old and new school policies. We need to ask the following questions: Why was this policy written? What does it accomplish? What is it designed to do? Does it target a certain group of students unfairly? As an advocate, I sat with parents in meetings listening to school officials and court officials telling us there is nothing anyone can do but follow the policy, the rules. Walking out of the meetings, I quietly thought, What recourse do we have if policies dictate what take place?

As I got to know my participants, I became more aware of the youth culture and how powerful it is in the lives of the youth. For the adolescent the language of the peer is extremely important. The values and behaviors of the peer replace the values and behavior an adolescent had as a child. Yet in many cases, when the adolescent goes to school he or she is asked to leave that culture behind. We need to do further research in the area of the youth culture. What are the concerns and issues adolescents see themselves
dealing with? How do they deal with them? What funds of knowledge exist in their worlds? And then we need to bring this culture into our classrooms. It is important that we discover the youth culture through the eyes of the kids and not through our own eyes and the way we perceive it.

Another important area in which we need further research in is the role a community plays in the learning environment. I’m often asked what made my teaching different that my students were willing to come to school and be successful there. I was never sure how to answer that question until my students moved back to a traditional school. At that time, I became aware of role our classroom community played and realized what a difference it made in the lives of everyone in the community. We had a strong community. We not only learned together but we laughed, cried, and talked together. We celebrated each other’s successes and mourned with each other. They had a voice in this community that was respected and valued. I, too, had a voice that was respected and valued. At times those voices collided and we had to work through the hard times together. We need to research the role community has on the learning process and what role a classroom or school community can play in preventing kids from dropping out.
When my students went back to traditional school they no longer had a community. When they became discouraged there was no community to draw them back in. In traditional high school settings, students move from class to class. Building a community within a class is difficult. Many high schools have tried to remedy the problem of students moving from class to class by placing students in clusters, houses that group students together for four classes with a core of teachers. But does this address the need for a community? Does grouping students in clusters automatically make them a community? Ralph Peterson’s (1992) book, *Life In a Crowded Place* discusses ways to build a learning community. He talks about ceremonies, rituals, and rites that need to exist in the classroom in order to build a community. We need a better understanding on what makes a community and we need to find ways to build up communities in schools.

The other answer I gave when asked what was the difference in my classroom was a caring atmosphere. My students often told me that the difference in my classroom was that I cared. They believed they had good teachers in the past, but I was different. I believe this was the other level Smurf talked about. Nel Noddings (1984) states, “As teacher, I am, first, one caring” (p. 176). She says it’s
not enough to say I care, but "to care requires some actions on behalf of the cared-for" (p. 10). Noddings shares an example of a teacher asking a question and receiving a response from a student. The teacher "receives not just the 'response' but the student. What he says matters, whether it is right or wrong. The student is infinitely more important than the subject matter" (p. 176). With this type of caring, racism, stereotyping, and pre-judging would be eliminated from the classroom and the school. Cummins (1996) writes:

human relationships are at the heart of schooling, The interactions that takes place between students and teachers and among students are more central to students' success than any method for teaching literacy, or science or math. When powerful relationships are established between teachers and students, these relationships frequently can transcend the economic and social disadvantage that afflict communities. . . ." (p. 1).

It is not the methods that make us successful; it is the amount we care that makes us successful.
APPENDIX A
SAMPLE OF FIELD NOTES

say TAGGING and writing are there same
yet in class communicate the kids tag.
I think this involves a very specific mark
style. I wonder if it is a form of
vandalism? We have looked closely at war
The kids pointed out they spell things
different = Remember the kids are "Cajos"
CK= means creep killer - These kids
do not use "CK." There example is the
word "FUCK" - They write Fucc or say
Fuc they never say the K. The word
"BLACK" is \&ACC (\&acc) - B with "X"—
L is blue— and two E. Jesse's necklace
is "Plucky" (Plucky) the K is omitted. For
a purpose the "K" is omitted when by "C."
They won't normally spell "C-K." By the way
BK is Blood Kill... Later I ask how did you
APPENDIX B
SAMPLE OF AUDIOTAPED TRANSCRIPTION

Dan you know why I was stopping doing that

Deb: uhh

Dan: Guero's said talking shit he talked it looked stupid he made fun of my tag he told me to find a new way so alright I'll find a new way I started writing CRIP trying to figure out you know with CRIP I put a one I thought CRIP with a one next thing I thought CRIP's number I got new CRIP's number I got I just started putting numbers in everything so specially with CRIP I liked the way it looked 4 life

Deb: uhh

Dan: life is number one I guess I'm saying you I don't know everything has a meaning to it kind of but lot of it doesn't mean

Deb: but even if when you say that does it have a lot of meaning to you

Dan: some of it I don't know you could say I never really thought of it like that you know I guess you can say it has meaning

Deb: you know another thing I notice is when Plucy died you guys did a lot of tagging at that time

Dan: I don't know

Deb: you always seem to tag when something was bothering you

Dan: I think of all the deaths Plucy and Guero's hit everybody the hardest before Guero died Plucy's hit everybody the hardest when Kilo died I guess it didn't hit everybody hard because there was no funeral I don't know it didn't really seem like he was gone or anything I don't know he was nearly nineteen years old I guess Plucy hit everybody the hardest

Deb: he was a paws

Dan: Because he was only 15 years old and and Kilo suffered you know a little bit but Plucy suffered a lot you know what I'm saying he didn't just die he suffers about half hour or 45 minutes at least a half hour you know that's a long time to suffer you know everybody knew that he fought for his life. You know fight hard he just couldn't do it you know than I guess if I was .. if you knew him well his family and everything I don't know

Deb: function to deal with tragedy
APPENDIX C
SAMPLE OF ARTIFACTS COLLECTED
REFERENCES


Press.


Goodman, Y. (1996). Kidwatching: An alternative to testing. In Wilde, S., *Notes From a Kidwatcher* (pp. 211-


University Press.


Renegotiating cultural diversity in American schools (pp. 52-88). New York: Teachers College Press.


Trueba, H. T. (1989). Rethinking dropouts: Culture and
literacy for minority student empowerment. In Trueba, H. Spindler, G., & Spindler, L. (Eds.) What do anthropologists have to say about dropouts (pp. 27-43). New York, NY: The Falmer Press.


