AN EXPLORATION OF YOUNG ENGLISH LEARNERS' READING EXPERIENCES IN
RESPONSE TO CRITICAL LITERACY READ-ALOUDS

BY

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THESIS

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AFFIDAVIT

I, Ana Karina Rodriguez Martinez, hereby declare that this master's thesis has not been previously presented as a degree requirement, either in the same style or with variations, in this or any other university (Article 92 Advanced Education Student Code, Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana)

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Abstract

This study explored young English learners' reading experiences in response to picturebook read-alouds with a critical literacy perspective. The research was conducted in order to find a possible solution to the limited in-school reading experiences of a group of young English learners. A critical literacy read-aloud (CLRA) strategy was implemented during the weekly story time sessions that took place within an early childhood classroom of a private school in Medellin, Colombia. The participants of the study ranged between the ages of 5.5 to 7 years old and were in their third to fourth year of attendance in the schools English immersion preschool program.

The qualitative nature of this study involved collecting data in the forms of student interviews, class discussions, observations and artifacts. The findings of this study confirm that the children's reading experiences opened up a space for them to develop as text critics as they responded to the CLRA strategy by becoming critically conscious of what books and reading are for, disrupting the word/world, understanding and exploring the multiple perspectives of texts, and growing a sense of empowerment leading to social action through literacy. The study concluded that the CLRA strategy expanded and enriched the students' reading experiences by opening up the space for them to develop as text critics. Most significantly, the study confirmed that age nor language proficiency should hinder engagement with critical literacy as the study demonstrated that critical literacy can be taken up in settings with young children while simultaneously learning the English language.

Key words: *critical literacy, read-aloud, picturebooks, early childhood English learners, young English learners, EL children, reading experiences, critical literacy read-aloud*

To Buju and Lu,
You inspire and motivate me to be a better aunt, teacher and person.
I dedicate my work to the both of you in the hopes that you'll never settle; question, challenge,
reimagine and transform the world around you.
May every person you meet and every place you go be touched by your presence and changed
for the better.

Love, TiTi Kari

2015-2016 school year. Thank you for proving what I already knew you were capable of doing

and for allowing *me* to learn from *you*.

Finally, I want to thank someone that helped me get past a difficult part in my journey,

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you the most. Thank you for helping me keep my sanity during the last few months of this thesis

and for reminding me to take a break once in a while for dessert.

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Chapter One

Exploring the Potential of Critical Literacy and Picturebook Read-Alouds:

Constructing CLRA

Within traditional education, literacy has been reduced to the reading and writing of the word by means of conventional classroom literacy practices stemming from decoding and encoding words and other texts. These practices fail to expose students to the realities of literacy as a means of empowerment (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 1993, 2000, 2014; Luke, 1991, 1994; Mora, 2012, 2014b; Morrell, 2005). In other words, students are sheltered from understanding the interconnected relationship between language and power. Furthermore, classroom literacy practices seem to focus on skills that foster the academically competent student (Finn, 2010). However, they fall short of cultivating more integral students willing to promote change in themselves, their country and the world, as change requires a critical awareness (Willis, Hall, Herrera, Hunter, & Montavon, 2008) to challenge what is currently in place and a critical vision to innovate our society.

Despite the acceptance and compliance of traditional education worldwide, critical pedagogues (Beck, 2005; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1987, 2001, 2015; McLaren, 1994; Morgan, 1997; Morrell, 2005; Nieto, 2010) argue that schools are not limited to serve strictly as sites of oppression, power struggle and the reproduction of inequality and injustice. Schools have the potential to be sites of empowerment where teachers encourage students to question the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and take social action.

In Colombia, more recent notions of literacy (e.g. Mora, 2014a, 2015, 2016) and critical literacy (e.g. Mora, 2014b, c) are looming on the horizon and although not generally acknowledged throughout the country, the Colombian Ministry of Education's (MEN)

Lineamientos Curriculares de Preescolar (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1998) reflected the essence of these notions. The MEN stated that "the communicative dimension in the child is directed to express knowledge and ideas about things, events and real-world phenomena's; to build possible worlds; and to establish relationships to meet needs, form emotional ties, and express emotions and feelings" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1998, Dimension Comunicativa, para. 1; own translation). This statement runs parallel to more expanded notions of literacy that surpass a traditional view of reading and writing (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Larson & Marsh, 2015; Mora, 2014d) as it requires connecting the word and the world, as well as using literacy as a way to transform the world through social action. Moreover, the MEN demands that preschools educate children for life, to form free and democratic citizens with the capacity to produce knowledge and transform their physical and social environment (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1998).

These realities led me to reflect upon the type of literacy education that my 5 to 7 year-old English learning[1] students had been receiving in their English language and literacy class. These young children were learning another language as a result of Colombian educational policies, but specifically the English language under their parents' wishes and the promise that this language would shape a path towards their acceptance into prominent universities and someday secure them positions within the same distinguished career fields as their parents. Their classroom literacy experiences were bounded by the learning and practicing of decoding and encoding words in order to be able to use the English language productively and effectively in the real world. Initially, my class of young ELs did not seem like the type of students that would benefit from a critical literacy approach as, within the Colombian context, they were

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[1] *English learner* or *EL* will be used to refer to all students learning the English language, covering the acronyms *ELL*, *ESL*, and/or *EFL*. A clarification on the difference between the Colombian EL context and the US EL context can be found in Chapter 3.

considered the opposite of marginalized and came from privileged backgrounds. Nevertheless, I saw a need for affording these affluent EL children the spaces to discover, explore and engage with the injustices around them because "hearing the voices of those oppressed is only one piece of social justice work" (Kuby, 2013, p. 19). I began to question if these were the children that would someday be in positions of power and privilege within Colombia, how a critical literacy perspective could better prepare them to take on those roles in terms of understanding themselves, the word and the world.

As I began drawing inspiration from Freire's notion of education and literacy, I began to recognize my young EL students' classroom reading experiences as harming and oppressing, rather than helpful and empowering. Children's reading experiences help shape who they are and how they understand the world (Fox, 1993; Herrera, 2000; Nodelman, 2000), yet my young EL students' in-school reading experiences were limited to books, questions, discussions and activities based on phonics, sight words, vocabulary themes and basic comprehension. Furthermore, these young ELs were not being given the chance to draw significant and meaningful connections between their reading experiences and their real world experiences. Their classroom reading experiences were producing a narrow understanding of what literacy was for and what it had the potential to do in the world, as suggested by Leland, Harste, and Smith (2005).

Further feeding into the problem of the EL children's limited reading experiences was the exposure and interaction that the children had with picturebooks[2] as they were strictly used as tools to help support the growth of their academic and social development. The picturebooks that the young ELs were exposed to were those that made up the canon of children's literature. In

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[2] The single word *picturebook* will be used throughout this text in lieu of other common spellings for the term such as *picture book* and *picture-book*. See more on page 16.

addition, the read-alouds that centered on these traditional texts were limited to basic

comprehension questions where the EL children only regurgitated the happenings of the stories,

having very little space to connect with the texts. However, when framed accordingly,

picturebooks can be used as more powerful tools as they can offer children a space to

simultaneously explore themselves and the world (Dolan, 2014; McDaniel, 2006; Wiseman,

2011); to discover and learn about their life, their identity, their people, their places, their culture,

and their society as well as gain valuable insights about other people, places, cultures and

societies. Studies have shown that when used with a critical lens, children's literature has the

potential to help students gain critical awareness of real world power relations between race,

class, and gender (Bouley & Godfrey, 2008; Leland et al., 2005; Meller, Richardson & Hatch,

2009; Simpson, 1996).

Once I understood how my young EL students' in-school reading experiences had been

limited I saw the possibility of exploring critical literacy within my classroom. These

observations, reflections, and concerns, combined with the literature I had read on critical

pedagogy and critical literacy and my contextualization of the Colombian situation, became the

foundation and motivation for this research. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the reading

experiences of young ELs in response to picturebook read-alouds when framed from a critical

literacy lens. The following research question guides this study: *How do young English learners*

experience and respond to picturebook read-alouds when framed from a critical literacy

perspective?

Defining My Study's Underpinning Concepts

In this section I describe the concepts that helped me better understand my research on picturebook read-alouds with a critical literacy perspective. In order to frame this study appropriately it was necessary to define the following key concepts: literacy, critical literacy, picturebooks, and read-alouds. I explain each concept in terms of the literature read and I describe how each concept supported and informed my research. Additionally, I describe my ideas on reading experiences, critical literacy read-alouds (CLRA) and the critical literacy dimension of picturebooks; ideas that resulted from the initial exploration of the key concepts researched and defined in this section.

Literacy and being literate. Traditional education is suffering from *narration sickness*, as described by Freire (1970). Teachers have taken on the roles of subject matter narrators and students have taken on the roles of obedient listeners who are trained to believe everything they hear, read and see within an educational setting. Within this system of education, students act as empty receptacles that are filled only when teachers pass on their knowledge. This 'banking system' (Freire, 1970) of education emphasizes an oppressive force within education which strips students from the opportunity to question, interrogate, problematize, and disrupt what is passed on as 'knowledge'. Further, it fails to foster the skills necessary to encourage students to reimagine, reconsider, reconstruct, and transform our world.

Within this traditional model of education literacy is reduced to a basic and narrow understanding of two acts: reading and writing (Edelsky, 2006; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Harste, 2003, Luke & Freebody, 1997). The common perception of reading is limited to phonics, decoding words and rudimentary comprehension. Similarly, writing is commonly identified with the spelling of words, or encoding, and grammar. Edelsky (2006) argued that this common

understanding of literacy is a form of control. Comber (2015a) maintained that it cultivates an educational environment where students are quiet and compliant.

This view of literacy trickles down into English language learning classrooms as well, where traditionally, a functional view of literacy tends to be the norm (Cheah, 2001). Functional literacy (Burnett, 2005; Gray & Staiger, 1969; UNESCO, 1979) is understood as the basic ability to read and write well enough in order to adequately participate as a productive member of society by completing common everyday living and employment tasks (Cadiero-Kaplan & Smith, 2002). In other words, functional literate beings are capable of completing tasks similar to that of reading signs and advertisements, as well as filling out employment applications and banking paperwork. An educational system that centers around functional literacy becomes the very type of system that Freire (1970) critiqued through his idea of banking education, as it perceives literacy education as two processes: (a) teachers transmitting the knowledge necessary for learners to read and write texts and (b) learners acquiring and developing the reading and writing skills necessary in order to be "productive" members of society that act as consumers and producers.

For the purpose of this study I adopted a more expanded and contemporary view of literacy, as it has significantly evolved passed its traditional view of reading and writing (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Larson & Marsh, 2015; Mora, 2014d). Central to the broader notion of literacy that I take on throughout this paper is the understanding that language and reality are interconnected (Freire & Macedo, 1987). The undeniable relationship between both results in a perspective of literacy that is intertwined with the world we live in; with its past, present and future. Freire and Macedo (1987) stated that literacy is not inclusively limited to the reading and writing of words, but rather it encompasses a reading and writing of the word and

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the world. As a result of this perspective towards literacy, we are able to use literacy for the exploration of not only print based texts but the world (Harste & Vasquez, 2011).

In taking on Freire and Macedo's (1987) notion of literacy as *reading the word and the world* it becomes necessary to understand that the exploration of the world through the word and vice-a-versa is not an individual act. The notion of literacy as a social practice (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Harste, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Luke, 1991; Street, 2014) also influenced my study. Taking on this view of literacy means understanding that our circumstances, relationships, environment, culture, and society influence and shape the way we make meaning of our reading and writing practices. This perspective of literacy, as a process that transcends a basic reading and writing of texts, supported my research from the very initial states of inquiry. My study was built upon the desire to use my newly expanded notion and understanding of literacy to create a space for critical literacy within my classroom. I envisioned a space where my EL students were encouraged to push beyond the traditionally simple reading and writing of words; more importantly, a space that inspired them to see their world in the words of the texts produced by others and in their own.

The expansion and evolution of the term literacy results in an expansion and evolution of what it means to be literate in today´s day and age. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) recognized the impact that the changing nature of everyday life itself had on the roles that people take on in today´s world. The authors proclaimed that:

> We are in the midst of a profound shift in the balance of agency, in which as workers, citizens and persons we are more and more required to be users, players, creators and discerning consumers rather than the spectators, delegates, audiences or quiescent consumers of an earlier modernity. (p. 172)

As a result of this shift, Cope and Kalantzis (2009) maintained that children sought out to play more active roles in their literacy learning processes; "actors rather than audiences, players rather than spectators, agents rather than voyeurs and users rather than readers of narrative" (p. 173). Similarly, Harste (2003) exclaimed that literacy in the 21st century is not a "spectator sport" (p. 10). Further he stressed the need for literacy learners to be able to use the reading and writing of multiple meaning making systems in order to "reposition themselves, gather information, change perspectives, re-theorize issues, and take thoughtful new social action" (p. 11).

Luke and Freebody further address the question of what it means to be literate today with their Four Resources Model of Reading (Freebody, 1992; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Luke, 2014; Luke & Freebody, 1999). Rather than attempt to describe an effective method for literacy teaching, the Four Resources Model conceptualizes what effective readers need to be able to do in order to fully, actively and critically participate in the world we live in. This repertoire of related literacy practices is made up of the following: code breaker, meaning maker, text user, and text critic (Luke & Freebody, 1999). I briefly summarize each practice below.

Code breaker. The practice of decoding and encoding written, spoken, and visual texts. This practice includes an understanding of the alphabet, letter sounds, spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structures.

Meaning maker. The practice of engaging in the construction and understanding of meaning when reading, writing and speaking. This practice involves using background knowledge and previous experience in order to make meaning of messages through reading comprehension, composing texts using different modes and mediums, and relating texts to oneself and others.

Text user. The practice of using texts purposely to convey messages. This practice involves the understanding that texts have a purpose depending on: the mode and medium of a text, the intended audience, and its cultural or social function.

Text critic. The practice of analyzing texts critically with the understanding that texts are never neutral and that they represent particular perspectives and ideologies. This practice involves knowing how texts position readers, questioning texts, considering alternatives to texts and creating these alternatives.

The Four Resources Model of Reading helped me better understand the kinds of literacy practices that the 21st century demands of my young EL students. The model led me to reflect upon which literacy practices were being promoted in my classroom and which were being inhibited. During the initial stages of my inquiry I discovered that my literacy teaching practices impeded on my students' ability to grow as text critics and this discovery helped steer the direction of my study, creating opportunities and the spaces necessary to foster critical textual practices.

Critical literacy. Researchers have argued that the term *critical literacy* has no universal or set definition (Beck, 2005; Brown & Burns, 1999; Comber, 2001; Luke, 2012; Morgan, 1997; Simpson, 1996) as it is more of a lens, a perspective, and/or a way of being/thinking rather than a prescribed method (Behrman, 2006; Comber, 2001; Comber & Simpson, 2001; Ko, 2013; Luke, 2000; McDaniel, 2006; Morgan, 1997; O´Brien, 2001).   A critical literacy approach within an educational setting never looks the same in any two given situations as it varies vastly from classroom to classroom. It needs to be adjusted in order to fit into different contexts and conditions, depending on local interests and needs (Comber, 2001; Luke, 2012; Morgan, 1997; Vasquez, 2010).

For the purpose of my study I turned to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), who, rather than define critical literacy, described it using a four-dimensional framework that they created as a result of pulling together various definitions found in research and professional literature. They categorized the commonalities within their findings and concluded that a critical literacy perspective towards texts and literacy consists of the following: disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice (p. 382). I briefly list what each dimension entails below.

- *Disrupting the commonplace*. Problematizing a text by identifying the common assumptions that it promotes and then questioning them.

- *Interrogating multiple viewpoints*. Reflecting on multiple and opposing perspectives by identifying the voices that are both heard and ignored in a text.

- *Focusing on sociopolitical issues*. Exploring the social and political issues between power and language found within a text.

- *Taking action and promoting social justice*. Reflecting on texts and using this reflection to achieve social justice by taking action towards change, no matter how small.

These four dimensions played a significant role in the way I worked critical literacy with my young ELs. The dimensions were used to guide the selection of picturebooks for the study, the creation of critical questions for the discussions that stemmed from the read-alouds and the extension activities that resulted from CLRAs. Furthermore, I used Lewison and colleagues' (2002) dimensions of critical literacy as a departure point for the categories that drove my data analysis.

As previously mentioned, there is no universal or set definition of critical literacy but the aims of critical literacy are clear. Morgan (1997) argued that critical literacy seeks to produce a *different kind* of reading and reader (p. 3); one that identifies, analyzes, interrogates, challenges and reshapes the different versions of the world that are portrayed in texts (Comber, 2015a; Luke, 2004, 2012). In order to produce this kind of reading and reader, central to critical literacy is the understanding and acceptance that language and texts are never neutral (Cheah, 2001; Harste, 2003; Luke, 1991; Luke & Freebody, 1990, 1997, 1999; McDaniel, 2006; Morgan, 1997; O'Brien, 2001; Vasquez, 2010). For the purpose of my study, I understood the biased nature of language and texts to be the result of two key notions of critical literacy: (a) the relationship between language and power; and (b) the understanding that all texts are constructed from one of many possible perspectives.

When taking on a critical literacy perspective it becomes imperative to understand to handle the interconnected relationship between language and power (Comber, 2001; Janks, 2000, 2014; Nieto, 2010, 2016; Vasquez, 2010). Language reflects social issues of race, gender and class therefore, language is a powerful tool for maintaining, reproducing, and circulating dominant ideologies (Janks, 2000). When assuming a questioning stance towards the relationship between language and power, critiquing texts becomes necessary however, just as important as the act of critiquing, is recognizing the hope and possibility for social action that lie within texts. In other words, the knowledge of the relationship between power and language should not be limited to critiquing, questioning, and disrupting texts. This knowledge should also be used in empowering ways; to understand that power not only lies in the texts that others produce but that there is also power, hope and the possibility for action within the texts that we produce.

Another key notion of critical literacy is the tenet that language is never neutral as texts are constructed from many possible perspectives (Clarke & Whitney, 2009; Dolan, 2014; Janks, 2000, 2014; Morgan, 1997; O'Brien, 2001; Simpson, 1996; Vasquez, 2010, 2014). In the process of text creation, both authors and illustrators make choices, both conscious and unconscious, as to what to include in the text and what to exclude from the text (Janks, 2000). Adopting a critical literacy perspective towards texts means that readers will question the worlds portrayed in texts, understanding that the text was created by a specific person, during a specific period of time, in a specific place and for a specific reason. Once again, I consider that questioning the construction of a text is not the end to be met. Equally important within critical literacy is the reconstruction of texts (Clarke & Whitney, 2009; Morgan, 1997; Vasquez, 2010, 2014), which empowers language users to create more socially just versions of texts that could work to contribute to change in the world.

The concept that language is never neutral (Cheah, 2001; Edelsky, 2006; Freebody, 1992; Freebody & Luke, 1990, 1999; Gee, 2015; Luke, 1991; Morgan, 1997; Pennycook, 2001; Shor, 1999) was the foundation I used to build my study. The critical literacy approach that was taken in my classroom throughout my study aimed at creating a space for my young ELs to grow into their awareness of the relationship between language and power through the deconstruction, reconstruction and construction of texts.

Critical literacy is of upmost importance within education today (Comber, 2015a; Janks, 2014). Some authors have specifically defended and proved its relevance for young learners (Clarke & Whitney, 2009; Dolan, 2014; Harste, 2000; Harste & Vasquez, 2011; Lee, 2011; Leland, Harste & Huber, 2005; Meller, Richardson & Hatch, 2009; Mellor & Patterson, 2001; Morgan, 1997; Morrell, 2012; O'Brien, 2001; Sahni, 2001; Simpson, 1996; Stribling, 2014;

Vasquez, 2010, 2014), English language learners (Brown & Burns, 1999; Comber & Nixon, 2011; Cope, n.d.; Huang, 2011; Ko, 2013; Ko & Wang, 2009, 2013; Lau, 2012; Lee, 2011; Morrell, 2005; Nieto, 2010), and even more so for Colombian English language learners (Mora, 2014b). My study was informed by what critical literacy aims to do in terms of producing readers and readings that identify, analyze, interrogate, challenge and reshape the word and the world, as well as the need for critical literacy in English learning contexts. I considered it an appropriate and necessary perspective to use within my classroom of young ELs in order for them to better understand what texts are for and what texts have the power to do.

Critical Consciousness. Freire (1970, 1979) referred to the idea of *conscientização,* which is a process where an individual shifts from a naïve awareness of the world to a more critical and true awareness of it. A critical consciousness (Mora, 2014a; Willis, et al., 2008) opens an individual's eyes to the social and political realities of the world they live in. The understanding of said realities leads people to examine how they play a role in social inequalities and injustices, culminating with action towards effectively and enduringly transforming these realities and the world (Comber, 2015a; Janks, 2000). McDaniel (2006) pointed out that developing a critical consciousness precedes an individual taking action towards transforming their world.

I understood critical consciousness as two-fold; awareness for teachers and for students and Freire's notion of *conscientização* supported my study in both ways. First, as a language teacher I became more critically aware of my literacy practices and the resources I was using within my classroom to teach the English language. More specifically I began to see how both were inhibiting my young EL students' literacy growth. Second, I wanted to shift my EL students' reading experiences into a space where they could begin to see the connection between

the word and the world, igniting their awareness to the inequalities found within texts which reflect those found within their world.

Critical conversations and questions. Crucial to a critical literacy approach towards texts are moments to explore the word/world relation through the use of critical conversations and questions. Meller, Richardson and Hatch (2009) argued that texts, in and of themselves, are not critical, rather the conversations that stem from texts are what have the potential to be critical. Critical conversations within classrooms are those that move past traditional topics (Vasquez, 2010, 2014) in order to tackle tough topics (McDaniel, 2006; Smith, 2001) such as stereotypes, racism, inequality, and distortion of reality. When encouraging these types of conversations within a classroom critique is imperative however, Smith (2001) maintained the importance of infusing critical conversations with hope and steps towards action as well.

In order to spark these "much needed new conversations" (Harste, 2003, p. 9) within classrooms, Harste (2000) proposed that teachers select books that meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. They don't make difference invisible, but rather explore what differences make a difference.

2. They enrich our understanding of history and life by giving voice to those who traditionally have been silenced or marginalized—those we call "the indignant ones."

3. They show how people can begin to take action on important social issues.

4. They explore dominant systems of meaning that operate in our society to position people and groups of people.

5. They help us question why certain groups are positioned as "others." (p. 507)

Equally important as the selection of texts is the planning of critical questions when encouraging critical conversations in the classroom. Critical questions go beyond the commonly used reading comprehension questions that teachers pose before, during and after reading texts (Brown & Burns, 1999), which are traditionally limited to answering the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why* of a text (Meller et al., 2009). These types of questions encourage readers to explore and interrogate the messages of texts and illustrations (Dolan, 2014) while positioning them to not take the story of a text as a fact. Responding to critical questions and participating in critical conversations around books helps to lay the foundation for critical literacy within a classroom (Simpson, 1996) as the practice opens up a space within the curriculum for students to begin to see the connection between the word and the world. Furthermore it helps prepare students to eventually read texts through a critical literacy lens on their own as students learn through modeling.

Critical conversations and questions became an important element during the process of my in-class research, especially since it took place in an elementary classroom setting. My young ELs had not previously read texts using a critical literacy perspective and I used the critical discussions to introduce critical literacy to my young ELs. I understood the practice of participating in critical conversations led by critical questions to be an empowering practice (Ko, 2013), one that opened up a new space in my classroom for both my students and I to explore texts by relating them to our world, in this way we discovered the injustices and inequalities in both the word and the world.

Empowerment. Giroux (1989) described empowerment as the autonomous ability to think and act critically. Access to this ability, or rather 'empowerment', does not have to be granted as the Freirian belief behind empowerment is that it is not passed on from teacher to

student rather, "the educator or adult provides the skills that will hopefully lead to the development of a sense of agency, self-sufficiency, and confident decision-making" (McDaniel, 2006, p. 21). I understood empowerment as the process of inspiring my young ELs to believe that they are capable of understanding the power behind language in texts and using that to discover and acknowledge their voices in order to transform the world they live in.

Reading Experiences. Throughout my research I use the term *reading experience* when describing the complete event that revolves around the reading of a text, recognizing that the 'reading' of a text can take one of many forms (i.e., the decoding of print-based texts, visual texts, aural texts, etc.). A reading experience is made up of what we read, how we read and what we do with what has been read, while encompassing how the texts makes the reader feel. Within a classroom setting, these events consist of the moments before, during and after the reading of a text; including the class activities and teacher/student behaviors that revolve around a text (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Harms & Lettow, 1986). Furthermore, classroom reading experiences are significant in the literacy development of children because they help shape a child's understanding of what reading is and what it is for (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986). Within my study, I explored the reading experiences of young ELs using read-alouds of children's picturebooks. Below I describe picturebooks as a tool and reading-aloud as a strategy.

Picturebooks: The tool. Picturebooks are more than books that just happen to have pictures (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007). They are complex books where words and images, or the verbal and visual, are interdependently connected, sharing equal partnership in the construction of meaning (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000; Sipe, 1998, 2012; Strasser & Seplocha, 2007; Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007). Within picturebooks, the interaction between the words and images are both crucial for full communication (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000) as one without the

other would be incomplete (Sipe, 1998). This integrated and complicated relationship between the verbal and visual dimensions of picturebooks has been described through the use of metaphors derived from the arts, science and technology (Sipe, 2012); as a musical duet, as a theatrical play, as a soundtrack that plays on during a film, and as an ecology.

I understood the relationship between the words and images found in picturebooks using Sipe's (1998, 2012) notion of "synergy", where the effect of the two forms of communication, the verbal and the visual, combined generate an understanding that is far more meaningful that if only one form of communication stood alone. Wolfenbarger and Sipe (2007) called attention to the multiple spellings of these types of books (i.e., *picturebook*, *picture-book*, *picture book*), however for the purpose of this study I used the compound word 'picturebook' as I felt that it best represented the synergic relationship (Sipe, 1998) between the pictures and words that that seamlessly work together to create meaning.

Picturebooks play a predominant role within pre-school and elementary classrooms (Dolan, 2014; Harste, 1990; Vasquez, 2010); they are a staple of childhood and their use brings a wide range of benefits upon children's literacy development (Dolan, 2014; Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker, 2008; Strasser & Seplocha, 2007). Picturebooks expose children to rich and complex vocabulary (Collins, 2010; Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker, 2008; Silverman, 2007; Silverman, Crandell & Carlis, 2013; Strasser & Seplocha, 2007). The images provide a context for the understanding of the new language, enriching children's lexis (Dolan, 2014). They introduce the structure of a story (Dolan, 2014), in other words what makes up a story (i.e., setting, characters, problem, solution). Further, the wide range of picturebooks available also allows children to come into contact with different models of writing, in turn aiding in the

development of their own writing. However beneficial picturebooks may be, their effectiveness as a teaching tool maximizes when combined with a read-aloud strategy.

Read-Aloud: The Strategy. A read-aloud is not merely a simple moment of reading a book aloud to a child or group of children; further, Kindle (2009) contended that it is an instructional event that requires advanced planning. Reading aloud to children is a common and significant practice within the pre-school and primary years of education (Barrentine, 1996; Beauchat, Blarney & Walpole, 2009; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Fisher, Flood, Lapp & Frey, 2004; Harste, 1990; Hoffman, 2011) furthermore, it has been extended into language learning classrooms as well (Hickman, Pollard-Durodola & Vaughn, 2004; Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009). Educators use read-alouds both for entertainment and instructional purposes (Barrentine, 1996; Santoro, Chard, Howard & Baker, 2008) as they provide spaces to experience the pleasures of language (Harms & Lettow, 1986) while also engaging in students' literacy development.

In 1985, a report by the United States' Commission on Reading affirmed that reading aloud to children is "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading" (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 23). The benefits of this strategy have been proven to include: vocabulary growth (Barrentine, 1996; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Fisher, et al., 2004; Hickman et al., 2004; Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer & Lowrance, 2004; Kindle, 2009; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Neugebauer & Currie-Robin, 2009; Silverman, 2007); engagement that leads to motivation for independent reading (Anderson et al., 1985; Barrentine, 1996; Kindle, 2009; Koralek, 2003; Wiseman, 2011); development of positive attitudes towards reading (Isbell et al., 2004); stimulation of oral development through the promotion of dialogue (Barrentine, 1996; Hickman et al., 2004; Isbell et al., 2004; Kindle, 2009;

Wiseman, 2011); expansion of listening and reading comprehension skills (Hickman et al., 2004; Isbell et al., 2004; Neugebauer & Currie-Robin, 2009; Wiseman, 2011); and understanding of the concepts of print (Barrentine, 1996; Fisher, 2004). Further, read-aloud events expose children to: models of fluent reading and reading strategies (Anderson, et al., 1985; Barrentine, 1996; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007); a variety of literature genres (Barrentine, 1996); challenging content (Beck & McKeown, 2001) as listening comprehension surpasses reading comprehension (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Silverman, 2007); the organization and structure of stories (Isbell et al., 2004; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Wiseman); and book handling, page turning, and the concept of reading from left to right (Harste et al., 1984; Isbell et al., 2004).

In spite of its commonality and value as a classroom practice, there is no formula, recipe or instructional how-to guide that explains the proper way to implement and carry out read-alouds in classrooms (Barrentine, 1996; Fisher et al., 2004; Kindle, 2009). However, researchers and authors have concluded that read-aloud events include essential moments before, during and after the reading of a book.

Prior to reading a book aloud to a child or group of children, teachers must select and preview books (Fisher et al., 2004; Wiseman, 2011) that meet their students' interests while making sure that the books are also socially and developmentally appropriate (Wiseman, 2011). The books chosen are typically either narrative or informational texts (Hickman et al., 2004) that are slightly above reading level (Fisher et al., 2004; Hickman et al., 2004).

The effectiveness of a read-aloud does not only solely depend on the type of book selected for the event, but even more so, it depends on the moments during and after the read-aloud. Barrentine (1996) claimed that a straight-through reading of a book, without any

interaction during the reading, reduces children to passive listeners. Further, Cambourine (1988, as cited in Barrentine, 1996) argued that children's learning is enhanced when an activity demands active engagement as opposed to when the activity calls for passive participation.   In this sense, effective read-alouds encourage students to actively contribute to the read-aloud event through questions and text-based discussions (Anderson, et al., 1985; Barrentine, 1996; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Fisher et al., 2004; Koralek, 2003; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Santoro et al., 2008; Wiseman, 2011), both during and following the reading of the book. This strategy of active participation encourages children to interact not only with the text but with their peers and teachers, which can lead to new understandings and ideas about the text. It provides an opportunity for those involved in the read-aloud experience to take part in the enhancement of meaning construction and to connect the text to their own experiences and to the world (Anderson et al., 1985; Barrentine, 1996; Koralek, 2003).

In addition to questions and discussions based on texts, another key component of effective read-alouds involves what happens after a book has been read. The benefits of read-alouds can be extended using follow-up activities that allow and encourage students to continue exploring their understandings of the texts read. These activities include retelling and/or dramatizing stories, playing with objects that represent the concepts and/or characters from stories, drawing out stories, and poetry and story composing (Harms & Lettow, 1986; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007).

The read-aloud strategy described here helped me understand the complexity of read-aloud events and helped me determine how to use picturebooks for the purpose of my study. I would like to clarify that although read-alouds are not limited to the reading aloud of

picturebooks only, my study interconnects both as they worked together while I explored my EL students' reading experiences; picturebooks are the tool and read-alouds are the strategy.

Opening Up a Space for Critical Literacy in my Classroom

During the second semester of my graduate studies, I was introduced to critical literacy and I began to imagine the possibilities that a critical literacy perspective could offer my young EL students. I began to feel that they were at a disadvantage as they had been learning the English language simply by decoding and encoding words. Furthermore, the books that they shared and the conversations and activities that revolved around those books seemed to create little space, if any at all, for my young ELs to significantly, meaningfully and powerfully connect and respond to. As a result I became concerned with a need for critical literacy within my early childhood EL classroom as I saw this type of perspective as one that could enhance my young EL students' reading experiences.

My concern grew as I noticed a lack of information on critical literacy practices within the field relevant to my specific context of young ELs. I knew that I wanted to begin weaving critical literacy practices into my classroom but I questioned myself as to how I would go about doing so. I began to conceptualize read-alouds of children's picturebooks as moments that offered a space to explore critical literacy within an early childhood EL classroom. In my initial search of critical literacy I found that my idea for a strategy of picturebook read-alouds framed from a critical literacy perspective aligned closely with what Labadie, Pole and Rogers (2013) and Meller and colleagues (2009) referred to as critical literacy read-alouds. I decided to expand on their work, as the context of my young ELs differed from the context of their studies which focused on young children learning English as their L1.

Critical Literacy Read-Alouds. The notion of critical literacy read-alouds (CLRA) merged my study's key concepts of critical literacy, reading experiences, picturebooks and read-alouds. Rather than define the strategy, Meller and colleagues (2009) described it as an "opportunity for children to critique the text and question the status quo… based on teachers' use of critical questions" (p. 77). The authors defended critical literacy read-alouds by explaining the following:

> When children practice asking critical questions about the text, they are developing reading and thinking skills that can lead to powerful insights into how texts work, how readers can become more aware of their place in the reading process, and where they fit into the social world that surrounds them. (p. 77)

Throughout this study, I refer to a critical literacy read-aloud as the classroom reading experience of a picturebook read-aloud where the teacher provokes critical conversations through the use of critical questions based on the text being shared. Within this view, these types of read-alouds become spaces to help foster a child's development of a critical literacy perspective towards texts, which can transfer over into future individual reading experiences. Furthermore, this strategy becomes a springboard for the exploration of the relationship between the word and the world; a relationship formed as texts influence and represent the world and vice-a-versa.

Picturebook Topics that Create a Possibility for Critical Literacy. The pages of children's picturebooks offer children the opportunity to learn about themselves and the world around them (Dolan, 2014; McDaniel, 2006; Wiseman, 2011). The stories that picturebooks tell, visually and textually, include, but are not limited to, themes such as friends, family, weather, and seasons. Through picturebooks, children are exposed to pictures and words that display a

specific representation of people, places, cultures and societies. However neutral or innocent these pictures and words may seem, they are not. In both implicit and explicit manners, picturebooks can convey messages concerning various topics and issues such as the following: gender roles; adult and children roles; race, class and stereotypes; family and societal values; and dominant ideologies. Dolan (2014) suggested that picturebooks not be underestimated as the stories they tell create potentially powerful images that can lead children to an infinite amount of interpretations.

Considering the countless themes, topics and issues that picturebooks cover, I consider that some picturebooks lend themselves to being read from a critical literacy perspective. Certain picturebooks provide teachers the affordance of exploring the following concepts related to critical literacy: multiple perspectives and alternate viewpoints; otherness, stereotypes and seeing beyond the bias; gender bias and gender roles; texts as constructed objects and the reconstruction of texts; agency, taking action and the power of numbers, and the power of literacy and words.

It is important to point out that although picturebooks depict misleading representations of the world, they also expose children to words and texts that nurture their imaginations. Dolan argued that this creates the "potential to encourage children to think about alternative constructions of society" (p. 9). In this way, picturebooks can be used as tools that lead children into oppression or into empowerment, as the words and pictures can foster the consciousness and creativity needed for children to reimagine and transform their world. More specifically, when read from a critical literacy perspective, picturebooks can be used as a tool for the exploration of social topics such as gender, race, class and social justice issues; unspoken mainstream ideologies; and taking action. As tools within an early childhood EL classroom, they can

provide opportunities for infusing the reading experiences of young ELs with a critical literacy

perspective; empowering them with a more critical consciousness of the world they live in while

also encouraging them to transform that world.

Chapter Two

Reviewing Related Literature

In this chapter I build upon my study's key underpinning concepts as defined in Chapter 1 by examining the research and exploring the wider literature that has already been written on critical literacy, picturebooks and read-alouds. I present commonalities among various texts as well as describe the methodologies used, data collection procedures, pertinent findings and conclusions. However, before delving into the literature on my study's key underpinning concepts, I briefly discuss English learning in Colombia and the trends that currently guide the teaching of young ELs and L2 literacy with children. I conclude the chapter with a discussion on what I learned from the literature. Furthermore, I demonstrate and discuss the need for a study that explores the possibilities that a critical literacy perspective on picturebook read-alouds can generate in an early childhood language learning classroom.

I compiled the literature for this review initially by exploring electronic databases such as EBSCO, ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, Springer Link and the academic network Academia.edu, using the keywords *critical literacy*, *picturebooks*, *read-alouds* and combinations of the three terms. I searched peer-reviewed journals which I believed would yield appropriate studies and literature for my review such as *Early Childhood Education Journal* and *The Reading Teacher*. I focused only on texts that were published from 2006 through 2016 in order to represent more current literature, although two exceptions were made for Colombian based texts (Castellanos, 2004; Valencia, 2004) as I felt that they were relevant to my review. Furthermore, I searched for literature that covered either early childhood education or L2 learning contexts, as literature with a context similar to mine was scarcely found.

Later on, I conducted a brief search on the English teaching and learning of children within Colombia. I did this in the attempts to help those unfamiliar with the Colombian context, and myself as I am not from the country, to better understand the trends that guide EL teaching and learning of children within the country's context. During this search for contextual literature, I explored the digital databases of Colombian peer-reviewed journals on language and English language teaching and learning, such as *Profile*, *Ikala*, *HOW*, and *CALJ*. I used combinations of the following key words in order find relevant literature: *children*, *reading*, *literacy*.

The Teaching and Learning of Young ELs in Colombia

In this brief section I attempt to contextualize the Colombian EL context in terms of the teaching and learning of EL children. The literature that I found described research that had been completed within the country of Colombia on effective strategies and tools to use with young EL children. The most popular trend amongst the literature was the use of read-alouds and storytelling session to more effectively reach and teach EL children. Porras Gonzalez (2010) found that reading stories aloud to EL children could help ELs better comprehend a story and increase their vocabulary development while also motivating them to participate in class discussions. Other studies with young Colombian ELs demonstrated that the use of stories could also increase oral communication (Monsalve & Correal, 2006) and writing, when combining group readings of stories with the opportunity for students to create their own stories (Ruiz, 2003). Most of the studies on the use of stories with EL children aimed at increasing the children's L2, in one way or another, however one particular study demonstrated how

storytelling in English could result in EL children reflecting upon their social values (Combariza, Chapeton, and Rincon, 2013).

Another popular trend found within the literature was the use of music and songs in early childhood EL settings within Colombia (Castro Huertas & Navarro Parra, 2014; Perez Niño, 2010). Both pieces of literature stemmed from studies conducted at an elementary level where music and songs were used to increase EL children's oral communication and production. Furthermore, both studies found that using music and songs also created the opportunity for young ELs to learn new vocabulary and reinforce previously learned vocabulary. Other strategies used within the Colombian context when working with EL children include the use of authentic communicative performances, such as role-plays and games (Guevara & Ordoñez, 2012), and the use of interest centers based on multiple intelligences (Macias, 2013). Whereas the previous studies mentioned tended to focus on the use of a tool or strategy in order to increase one or two aspects of the EL children's language, Macias (2013) was able to demonstrate that EL children could develop vocabulary, comprehension, oral skills and writing simultaneously through the use of in-class interest centers.

A great amount of the research concluded that for effective language teaching to occur, EL teachers had to consider children's interests, needs, and experiences (Camargo & Navarro, 2010; Combariza, et. al., 2013; Davila & Vela, 2011; Macias, 2013; Monsalve & Correal, 2006; Porras Gonzalez, 2010; Ruiz, 2003). Davila and Vela (2011), Macias (2013), Monsalve and Correal (2006), and Porras (2010) all suggested that children's EL teachers take into account their students' interests, needs and lived experiences when selecting and designing materials and activities for their classes. Camargo and Navarro (2010) found that the life experiences of young ELs could help them better comprehend texts when given the space to draw that personal

connection. Furthermore, Ruiz (2003) found that EL children could become authors by writing about their own life experiences in the English language.

Studies Exploring Picturebooks and Read-Alouds

In this section I combine the concepts of picturebooks and read-alouds as in my study they both worked together; picturebooks, as a tool and, read-alouds, as a strategy. I divide the literature into two themes that emerged in terms of the topics or issues addressed: 1) the uses and benefits of picturebooks and read-alouds in terms of language learning; 2) the best practices for effective and efficient uses of picturebook read-alouds.

Although most of the studies and wider literature on picturebooks and read-alouds took place in the United States, I also found studies from Taiwan, Singapore, Peru and Spain. Studies in the US mainly covered preschool and elementary English as L1 populations, although one study inquired on young dual language learners (Silverman, Crandell and Carlis, 2013) and another on ESL students (Al Tiyb, 2014). The literature from the remaining countries covered L2 learning contexts, with a particular interest in higher education (Castellanos, 2004; Lee, 2015; Valencia, 2004). One study in particular (Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009) explored the effectiveness of picturebook read-alouds on the vocabulary development of L1 Quechua speakers learning Spanish as their L2.

The methods used in these studies were split between qualitative and quantitative research designs. The qualitative studies focused mainly on examining and describing teachers' and students' experiences with and perceptions of picturebooks and read-alouds. In order to accomplish this, the researchers collected data such as interviews, observations, field notes,

research journals, surveys, questionnaires, artifacts, and recordings of class read-alouds and text-based discussions.

On the other hand, the quantitative studies focused predominantly on the positive effects of using picturebook read-alouds to stimulate vocabulary development (Collins, 2010; Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009; Silverman, 2007; Silverman et al., 2013). As a result, a majority of these studies used vocabulary tests as their main data collection instrument.

Uses and benefits of picturebooks and read-alouds in terms of language learning. Reading researchers agree that picturebooks and read-alouds provide a wide range of benefits to students' language and literacy development (Dolan, 2014; Santoro et al., 2008; Strasser & Seplocha, 2007). In the following paragraphs I describe the findings and conclusions of literature that support this claim; literature that describes the uses and benefits of picturebooks and read-alouds in terms of language learning within contexts representative to that of the context of my study.

Two studies focused on the power that picturebooks have to make learning more meaningful by providing stories that students can connect to. The studies conducted by Castellanos (2004) and Lee (2015) explored how students responded to picturebooks within two distinct EL settings. While both studies involved university level EL students, Castellanos worked with Colombian pre-service English teachers, while Lee worked with non-English major EL students in Taiwan. Both authors used children's literature within a language learning classroom, then asked participants, through interviews and surveys, to share their feelings and experiences on using picturebooks. The studies concluded that the picturebooks provided spaces for meaningful learning that connected to students' actual lives. Furthermore, the participant surveys in Lee's (2015) study showed that students felt that the picturebooks had helped them

advance in their English language skills, providing them with more confidence and motivation towards their language learning processes.

In a previous study, Lee (2010) explored the powerful potential of combining children's picturebooks and blogging within an EL high school setting in Taiwan. He found that having students reflect on their readings of children's picturebooks through the technology of blogging resulted in making both reading and writing more meaningful experiences for EL students.

The majority of the studies about the uses and benefits of picturebooks and read-alouds for literacy and language development focused on how they advanced the improvement of certain language and literacy related skills. Wiseman (2010), founded on the concept of meaning making through interaction and dialogue, studied read-alouds as spaces for simultaneously constructing knowledge and literacy. Through the use of classroom observations, student journals and interviews, Wiseman found that the read-alouds promoted dialogue which advanced children's oral development. Furthermore, the conversations that resulted from read-alouds allowed kindergarten students to individually and collaboratively construct meaning.

Both Ranker (2007) and Valencia (2004) explored the possibilities that read-alouds from different types of books could provide within EL classrooms. Valencia (2004) used the reading-aloud of children's picturebooks with beginner's English university students in Colombia whereas Ranker (2007) used comic books as read-alouds within a first-grade EL classroom in the USA. Both studies found that reading-aloud from books could help ELs better understand the structure of a story and the elements that narrative stories contain such as setting, characters, problem and solution. Additionally, through class observations and student writing samples, Valencia (2004) concluded that read-aloud activities also hold the potential of improving students' L2 speaking, pronunciation, writing, listening, grammar and vocabulary.

Hu and Commeyras (2008) and Jung and Commeyras (2012) also explored the improvement of language development through the use of picturebooks, however their studies used wordless picturebooks. Both case-studies looked into how the picturebooks could advance the biliteracy development of young ELs, in one case a six-year-old Korean boy and in another case a five-year-old Chinese boy. The picturebooks were used primarily for storytelling, concluding that the use of wordless picturebooks helped improve the children's ability to think creatively, concepts of story structure and speaking and vocabulary in both languages.

Three articles concentrated specifically on how picturebooks and read-alouds positively affect the vocabulary acquisition and development of young ELs. Collins (2010), Silverman (2007) and Silverman, Crandell, and Harris (2013) conducted studies on the effects of different types of picturebook interventions on EL preschoolers and kindergarteners. In all three studies, the authors set an intervention with participants in the experimental groups while other participants remained in control groups. Through the use of pre- and post- vocabulary assessments, Collins (2010) and Silverman (2007) explored how a rich explanation of vocabulary from picturebook read-alouds increased target vocabulary for ELs. When comparing the data collected from the EL participants and the native English participants, Silverman (2007) found that ELs could learn vocabulary from instruction as fast as or faster than their native English speaking counterparts.

Silverman and colleagues (2013) further explored the connection between vocabulary acquisition and picturebook read-alouds by looking at the possibilities within read-aloud extension activities, where target vocabulary was reviewed during classroom moments other than just that of the read-aloud. They found that that extension activities to read-alouds increased the vocabulary development of preschool ELs, more so than the two cases stated above.

Important to language learners today in the 21st century is the understanding of the multimodal nature of language and texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009) and picturebooks hold the potential to illustrate this concept to children as they are multimodal in and of themselves (Dolan, 2014). Martens, Martens, Doyle, Loomis, and Aghalarov (2012) supported this very claim after their year-long study following a first-grade class into their Language Arts and Art classrooms. Their study explored students' experiences around picturebooks concluding that children learned to read and understand the books multimodally. Through the use of picturebooks, the students began to write in a multimodal nature as well.

Best practices for effective and efficient uses of picturebooks and read-alouds.

Although picturebooks and read-alouds are a very common and powerful pair within early childhood and elementary education (Barrentine, 1996; Beauchat, Blarney & Walpole, 2009; Beck & McKeown, 2001; Fisher, Flood, Lapp & Frey, 2004; Harste, 1990; Hoffman, 2011), there is no prescribed method for classroom implementation (Barrentine, 1996; Fisher et al., 2004; Kindle, 2009). In an attempt to shed some light onto the best ways of using read-alouds, I reviewed literature on studies looking into the best practices for their effective and efficient uses within classrooms. While some of the literature focuses on read-aloud practices aimed at developing vocabulary (Giroir, Grimaldo, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2015; Gomez, 2015; Kindle, 2009; McGee, 2007; Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009; Santoro, 2008) and comprehension (Al Tiyb, 2014; McGee, 2007; Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009; Santoro, 2008; Shegar & Renandya, 2009), others focus on how to use read-alouds as spaces to further advance students' writing (Paquette, 2007) and oral language skills (Louie & Sierschynski, 2015).

Giroir, Grimaldo, Vaugh, and Roberts (2015), Kindle (2009) and Neugebauer and Currie-Rubin (2009) all explored how to conduct read-alouds with the purpose of enhancing

vocabulary development in young children. The studies by Giroir and colleagues (2015) and Kindle (2009) took place within the USA; the former with K-3 ELs, the latter with native English speakers from grades K-2. Although each study approached read-alouds slightly differently, both concluded that certain instructional strategies were essential to the success of a read-aloud aimed at enhancing vocabulary development. The strategies are: introducing target vocabulary prior to the book introduction; defining the target vocabulary using a teacher given definition, synonyms and student definitions; and extending students' understanding of the vocabulary during and after the read-aloud.

In a similar study on read-alouds aimed at vocabulary development, Neugebauer and Currie-Rubin (2009) evaluated the effectiveness of read-aloud program used with first-grade bilingual students in a rural village outside of Calca, Perú who spoke both Quechua and Spanish. Not only did the study examine how effective the read-aloud program was in terms of enhancing vocabulary but it also examined its effectiveness of advancing students' comprehension skills. With the use of experimental and control groups, the study was able to conclude that read-alouds implicitly help increase students' vocabulary however, explicitly using strategies that activate the use of students' previous knowledge and promote discussions can further enhance students' vocabulary development and comprehension skills.

Al Tiyb (2014) also researched efficient strategies to use during read-alouds with the purpose of increasing students' reading comprehension. He observed two 5th grade classrooms in an Arabic bilingual school in the US and concluded that the following strategies were most commonly used to develop students' comprehension skills during read-alouds: having students predict the events of the story and make inferences; stopping to question students during the

read-aloud; having students summarize the story; encouraging students to make text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world connections; and allowing students to evaluate the story.

Studies Exploring Critical Literacy within the Classroom

In this section I describe the studies and wider literature on the use of critical literacy perspectives within classrooms. I delve into the findings and conclusions of the studies and literature, organized into two themes that emerged: (a) the accounts and practices of teachers using critical literacy within their classrooms; and (b) students' and teachers' beliefs on the use of a critical literacy perspective within their classrooms.

The studies and wider literature on critical literacy within classrooms that I explored for this review covered a wide range of contexts as I did not find literature that covered my studies' particular early childhood EL context. The research that I considered relevant had been conducted mainly in the USA, Canada and Taiwan. Within the USA and Canada the literature either focused on English L1 elementary aged children (Silvers, Shorey & Crafton, 2010; Striblings, 2014; Vasquez, 2010, 2014; Vasquez & Felderman, 2012) or children within ESL programs (Lau, 2013). The literature from Taiwan and other non-native English speaking countries offered EFL contexts however, at the university level involving participants such as EFL university professors (Ko, 2013; Ko & Wang, 2009), pre-service English teachers (Gutierrez, 2015; Park, 2011), and English majors (Izadinia & Abedina, 2010) and non- English majors (Huang, 2009, 2011; Kuo, 2013; Ko, 2013b; Ko & Wang, 2013) in reading and writing courses.

The studies used in this section were all conducted under qualitative measures as the researchers were investigating and exploring classroom practices that led to moments of critical

literacy and teachers' and student' beliefs on critical literacy. The designs of the studies included case studies (Gutierrez, 2015; Ko, 2013, 2013b; Ko & Wang, 2013; Striblings, 2014), action research (Huang, 2009; Lau, 2012, 2013; Park, 2011) and teacher research (Huang, 2011), or the "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993, pp. 23-24). Data for these studies included qualitative collection methods such as class observations, recordings and transcriptions of class lessons and discussions, teacher and/or student interviews, field notes, anecdotal observations, questionnaires with open- ended questions, artifacts including students' work, students' reflective written pieces, photographs and lesson plans.

Accounts and practices of teachers using critical literacy within their classrooms. As a novice critical literacy pedagogue, the review of the literature on critical literacy practices within classrooms was crucial not only to this chapter but to my entire study. This review allowed me to benefit from the experiences of other teachers who had already engaged with critical literacy in their classrooms. I began researching the critical literacy practices of teachers and students with Behrman's (2006) literature review on classroom practices that support critical literacy. In his review he categorized the most commonly documented activities or tasks that support critical literacy within classrooms: (1) reading supplementary texts; (2) reading multiple texts; (3) reading from a resistant perspective; (4) producing countertexts; (5) conducting student choice research projects; (6) taking social action. In this section I review literature on critical literacy classroom practices which significantly reflect Behrman's findings.

During the review of the literature I found that a common practice used by teachers to foster critical literacy within their classrooms is the use of inquiry into historical events. James and McVay (2009) and Silvers and colleagues (2010) documented how historical investigations

supported the development of critical literacy within early childhood and primary classrooms. In James and McVay's (2009) study the teacher broke away from traditionally prescribed textbook-based history lessons by encouraging students to pose their own questions about the first Thanksgiving. Still more powerful, in Silvers and colleagues (2010) the students not only posed their own questions but rather they initiated their own research group, based on personal inquiries, where they raised critical questions about Hurricane Katrina, explored alternative perspectives about the event, and took social action towards the injustices they discovered.

In both studies, the teachers supported the students' inquiries on what the first Thanksgiving and Hurricane Katrina were really like by providing multiple types of texts on the historical events such as books, websites, pictures, news articles, magazines and videos. The researchers found that involving children in meaningful inquiry using various resources offers them the opportunity to think critically about texts and events. Furthermore, Silvers and colleagues (2010) concluded that students learning could exceed the preset curricular goals when they were given the space and support to explore their personal inquiries within the classroom.

Another common practice used by teachers to foster critical literacy within classrooms is the use of student-related topics which are those that connect to students' experiences and lives. Lau (2012) used texts and discussions on the topic of bullying with a group of middle school EL students in order to engage with critical literacy. The researcher claimed that bullying was a meaningful topic to use with this population as they themselves were often targets of bullying because they were seen as different by their peers. At the university level, Kuo (2013) used self-discovery texts as a means of encouraging students to enhance their self-awareness. These studies found that providing students with opportunities to engage with texts and participate in discussions based on their experiences and lives opened up a space for critical literacy and

meaningful critical discussions in class. Additionally, Lau (2012) concluded that students' engagement with critical literacy in class increased their confidence towards English learning and helped them steadily improve their language skills, as observed through their participation and class assignments.

Among the literature, posing critical questions that led to critical discussions was another practice that teachers used within classrooms in order to engage with critical literacy with their students. Ko (2013) analyzed the experience of a college professor teaching critical literacy to English majors in a Taiwan university. The researcher concluded that students could learn to read beyond the literal meaning of texts and identify ideologies found within texts when exposed to a questioning stance towards texts and critical questions and dialogue around texts such as books and magazines.

Although much of the literature on critical literacy focused on and highlighted certain *practices* and/or *strategies* for fostering critical literacy within classrooms, Stribling (2014) argued against the idea of critical literacy practices. In her study, Stribling observed a kindergarten classroom that regularly explored issues of social justice in order to better understand how the class engaged with critical literacy. The researcher found that the teacher did more than simply implement sporadic moments of critical literacy practices within her lessons, rather the teacher created a critical literacy atmosphere, environment or milieu. This critical literacy milieu was built modeling, using and encouraging constant critique of texts, reflection and inquiry which resulted in meaningful literacy experiences not only during literacy classes but throughout the students' school days.

Vasquez (2010, 2014) corroborated Stribling's (2014) concept of creating an overall classroom environment of critical literacy as opposed to containing it strictly within the literacy

curriculum. In her work she shared her classroom experiences, and those of her colleagues, with preschool and elementary students engaging in critical literacy across the curriculum. She found that texts, including the everyday texts that surrounded her students' school, community and personal interests, could be used for more than just pleasure and enjoyment; these texts could be used "for creating spaces to understand how language works to construct people, for using language to critique the word and the world, and for changing social practices that give an advantage to some people over others" (Vasquez, 2010, p. 126). Furthermore, Vasquez (2014) found that the negotiated curriculum created with her students, when using a critical literacy perspective across content areas, led her students to surpass the required learning objectives set forth by the mandated curriculum.

Pandya (2012) warned against the mandating of teaching critical literacy skills, arguing that as critical literacy becomes a mandated part of the curriculum, that it will be standardized into a step-by-step and prescribed method to be followed. Furthermore, she advised that adding critical literacy to the curriculum would hinder students' true inquiries which are very much a necessary element that fosters critical literacy within the classroom, as it is these inquires that lead to meaningful learning experiences for children.

Students' and teachers' beliefs on the use of a critical literacy perspective within their classrooms. During my review process, I looked into studies and literature on the perceptions that students and teachers had towards the use of critical literacy in order to better understand the possibilities that a critical literacy perspective could offer both my students and me as a teacher. The literature focused strictly on the perceptions of university level ELs and in two specific cases on the perceptions of pre-service EL teachers and EL teachers pursuing doctoral degrees.

Through the use of student journals and reflective essays, the authors collected data in order to understand the perceptions that EL students at the university level had towards their reading and writing courses which had critical literacy approaches (Huang, 2009, 2011; Izadinia & Abednia, 2010). In general, the studies found that students expressed an affirmative attitude towards their critical literacy learning experiences and that they recognized the importance of critical literacy. The students felt that critical literacy approaches were enjoyable and stimulating (Huang, 2009). Furthermore, students expressed that critical literacy approaches within the classroom helped create a unique, friendly and comfortable learning environment which helped increase their self-confidence as English language learners (Izadinia & Abednia, 2010).

More importantly, students expressed that critical literacy approaches helped them progress in their English reading and writing processes. In terms of reading, students felt that their critical literacy learning experiences influenced them as they learned to question texts (Huang, 2009) and not simply take the words of others as facts (Ko & Wang, 2013). Students also voiced that critical literacy approaches improved their reading comprehension (Izadinia & Abednia, 2010; Huang, 2011). In terms of writing, students considered that critical literacy motivated them as writers as it gave them a reason to write (Huang, 2011) and it encouraged them to find their voice (Izadinia & Abednia, 2010). This not only led to the improvement of their English writing skills but it pushed them to continue improving their writing skills (Huang, 2011).

Ko (2013b) and Ko and Wang (2013) explored whether and how students' English proficiency levels impacted their critical literacy practices. The researchers found that proficiency levels did not hinder students' ability to engage with critical literacy but that it did impact their views towards critical literacy itself. The advanced students tended to have a more

enthusiastic attitude towards the use of critical literacy within the classroom as they expressed that it was important to be more aware and critical of texts. Likewise, low-proficiency students expressed that they understood the importance of critical literacy however, they questioned if it could actually support their language learning in terms of international English proficiency exams.

Two of the studies reviewed focused on the perceptions that future and experienced teachers had on critical literacy within the classroom and the feasibility of such approaches within the field of English teaching. Ko and Wang (2009) explored the perspectives of experienced Taiwanese EL teachers who were doctoral students in the US. The participants expressed that they each understood critical literacy differently but that they all considered it feasible and important in EL teaching, agreeing that students' proficiency needed to be taken into consideration when designing these types of lessons. In order to foster critical literacy within their classrooms, they considered it effective and efficient to use critical questioning and problem posing and alternative perspective activities.

Within the context of Colombia, one study explored the beliefs and attitudes of EL pre-service teachers towards critical literacy in the classroom (Gutierrez, 2015). The study found that all three participants had different perceptions on critical literacy within the classroom as some found it feasible while others did not: only one of the participants thought a critical literacy approach was feasible and two of the participants were skeptical towards attempting a critical literacy approach with their beginner-level students. However different the three participants felt about the feasibility of critical literacy within their future classrooms, they all collectively expressed that a more critical approach to education was relevant and necessary in Colombia in order to transform the country's realities through more critical ways of thinking.

Studies Combing Picturebook Read-Alouds and Critical Literacy

In this final section I describe the studies and wider literature that combined picturebook read-alouds with a critical literacy approach within classrooms. I describe the types of picturebooks used in the studies and the strategies that were used in order to engage with critical literacy through the use of picturebook read-alouds. Then I discuss the findings and conclusions of the studies and literature in terms of the possibilities that a critical literacy approach towards read-alouds can offer students.

While reviewing the already limited literature on studies combining picturebook read-alouds and critical literacy I once again found a gap in the literature in terms of literature matching the particular context of my study. During my search I found three pieces of literature that came close to my EL early childhood context; one took place in a predominantly EL kindergarten classroom (Labadie et al., 2013), another in an EL first grade classroom (Ranker, 2007) and the last in a bilingual Korean/English preschool classroom (Kim, 2014) all within the US. In order to better understand the literature focused on critical literacy approaches to picturebook read-alouds I expanded the search to include literature that came from either English L1 early childhood or elementary contexts (Bourke, 2008; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015; So Jung, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2009) and high school (Chun, 2009) or university (Kuo, 2009 & 2015) EL contexts. The greater majority of the studies came from the US, with two from Taiwan and one from South Korea.

All of the studies in this final section of my review are qualitative studies with methods ranging from case studies (Kim, 2014; Kuo, 2009; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015; So Jung, 2016) to action research (Labadie et al., 2013; Souto-Manning, 2009). The researchers collected

data using qualitative instruments such as class observations and audio/video recordings of the read-aloud moments and discussions, field notes, teacher and student interviews, and student artifacts. The artifacts consisted of variety of texts such as photographs, students' drawings and their written pieces.

Types of picturebooks used in the studies. Within the majority of the literature that I reviewed the researchers and authors described the types of picturebooks used in their studies on engaging with critical literacy through read-alouds. In the following paragraphs I describe the types of picturebooks used within the studies, which I did not only for the purpose of this review but more importantly as a guide for myself which I considered when selecting the literature used in my own in-class research.

In general, the studies reported using multicultural picturebooks to help facilitate critical literacy readings and discussions within classrooms (Kim, 2014; Labadie et al., 2013; So Jung, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2009). These books share stories about real-world characters of varying genders, races and cultures. Furthermore they take place in diverse settings and communities. Picturebooks on social issues were also used within the studies (Kuo, 2009; Labadie, Pole and Rogers, 2013). More specifically, Labadie and colleagues (2013) used picturebooks that illustrated themes of poverty, hunger, job loss, saving money, and material needs/wants.

The literature also revealed the value of using text sets that provide students the opportunity to examine alternative and multiple perspectives (Bourke, 2008; Kim, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2009). The studies used different versions of classics such as *The Three Little Pigs* (Souto-Manning, 2009; Kim, 2014) and *Little Red Riding Hood* (Bourke, 2008) to explore dominant perspectives of wolves. Kim (2014) used the classic fairytales of *Snow White* and

Cinderella along with the two Korean versions when working with a group of bilingual Korean-American preschoolers who explored the multiple interpretations of the traditional stories.

Although my study focuses on the use of children's picturebooks, as a result of my review I began to understand the potential of expanding critical literacy read-alouds to other types of texts. Peterson and Chamberlain (2015) explored critical literacy approaches towards the reading aloud of non-fiction texts such as memoirs and newspaper articles with elementary students. Chun (2009) and Ranker (2007) shared their experiences of using other types of texts from the fiction genre; graphic novels and comic books. Both authors found that these texts provided a space for students to explore critical topics such as historical events (Chun, 2009) and gender representations (Ranker, 2007) in a highly interesting and motivating manner for their ELs.

Strategies used to engage with critical literacy during and after read-alouds. The literature used for this section of my review not only included descriptions of the types of picturebooks used but also detailed descriptions of the strategies that the researchers and/or teachers used within the classrooms when opening up spaces for critical literacy.

The literature revealed that the most common strategy used amongst researchers and/or teachers was personalizing the texts. In the studies the researchers and/or teachers encouraged students to connect the texts to their previous knowledge (Labadie et al., 2013) as well as their lives and personal experiences (Kuo, 2009 & 2015; Labadie et al., 2013; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015; Souto-Manning, 2009). Examples of this strategy were shared in the studies through vignettes. The students in Souto-Manning's (2009) study connected the inequalities they discovered between the pigs and wolves in *The Three Little Pigs* to the inequalities they saw in their schools' pull-out programs for gifted and special needs students. In another study,

students were able to better understand and relate to their Mexican-American classmate through read-alouds of picturebooks that represented his Mexican heritage, culture and background (Peterson and Chamberlain, 2015). Another example was found in Labadie and colleagues (2013) where students were encouraged to share stories and their feelings about financially tough times that their families may have passed through.

Another trend found within the literature had to do with the types of interactions that students had with the picturebook read-alouds. The researchers and/or teachers encouraged students to interact with texts through constant discussion and reflection facilitated by the use of questions that could lead to critical moments (Bourke, 2008; Kim, 2014; Labadie et al., 2013; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015; So Jung, 2016). The critical questions that arose in the studies were open-ended questions used to urge students to think about alternative perspectives of the stories and the characters found within the stories (Kim, 2014; So Jung, 2016). These types of questions prod students out of their comfort zones (Bourke, 2008) encouraging them to question behaviors, roles and the status quo (Kim, 2014).

Within the studies students were encouraged to respond to the read-alouds in written or drawn form. A common strategy used by the researchers and/or teachers consisted of writing alternative texts of or endings to the texts read-aloud (Bourke, 2008; Kim, 2014; Kuo, 2015; So Jung, 2016). In Bourke (2008), first grade students wrote alternative versions of the *Three Billy Goats Gruff* where they shifted the evil/good roles between the goats and trolls.

Although Bourke's strategy was the more commonly found within the literature, So Jung (2016) discussed a different approach to writing alternative texts by exploring the idea of alternative texts based on cultures rather than specific stories. The author described how students engaged in read-alouds of multicultural African picturebooks which prompted them to

begin thinking about the African culture differently, as they previously had a more superficial

understanding of the culture. Students then responded to the read-alouds by creating their own

alternative texts illustrating their new and more realistic awareness of the African culture. On

the other hand, Kuo (2009) explored students responding to texts using prepared dialogues,

weblogs, and reflection papers.

Possibilities of using picturebook read-alouds with a critical literacy perspective.
The literature combining critical literacy approaches and picturebook read-alouds concluded with

overall positive findings, although each had their share of challenges and limitations which I

address in the following section. The researchers and authors found that the common classroom

practice of picturebook read alouds could be used as a springboard towards fostering critical

literacy perspectives and practices with language learners across all ages (Kim, 2014; Kuo, 2009;

Labadie et al., 2013; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015; So Jung, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2009).

Within a diverse range of early childhood classrooms, researchers established that a

young age did not prevent nor limit the capacity for language learners to discover and explore

critical literacy (Kim, 2014; Labadie et al., 2013; So Jung, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2009). One

study found that taking a critical literacy approach towards read-alouds provided young bilingual

children the space to interrogate different voices, consider multiple perspectives and challenge

gender ideologies in texts (Kim, 2014). Two other studies, which took place in first grade

classrooms on opposite sides of the world, found that through critical literacy read-alouds

children developed a better understanding of social class (Labadie et al., 2013) and cultural and

racial diversity and equality (So Jung. 2016). Furthermore, So Jung (2016) concluded that by

offering moments for students to respond to critical literacy read-alouds, young learners

discovered that their ideas, knowledge and voices mattered.

Perhaps the most powerful findings came from Souto-Manning's (2009) study where critical literacy read-alouds led to first graders exploring and investigating racial and socioeconomic segregation. The picturebook read-alouds initiated the students' inquiries into this topic but their inquiries transformed into problem solving and action as they realized that their own school participated in what they saw as segregation through the gifted and special needs pull-out programs. The author concluded that critical literacy picturebook read-alouds not only ignited students' awareness to social inequalities but also prodded students towards problem solving and taking action, especially when the social inequalities connected to their lives and experiences.

Learning from the Literature

I used the process of compiling my literature review as a means to gain insights as to what qualitative research looks like and how it can be conducted in educational settings. I learned that qualitative research has its limitations as it often takes the shape of small scale and particular studies however this does not imply that the study is insignificant or that it cannot be replicated or adapted in other contexts. The literature reviewed helped shed light onto how my data could be collected and analyzed, furthermore, the literature closest to my study helped me begin anticipating possible findings stemming from Lewison and colleagues (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy.

Within the findings of the literature on critical literacy I found that there is great potential for critical literacy across levels of language proficiency as the studies covered various English language courses and levels. Although these studies predominantly involved university students it led me to believe that my young ELs would be just as much able as university ELs to explore

critical literacy. The lack of studies on critical literacy with young ELs opens the space for my study to make an impact on the field of early childhood education and language learning, especially within the Colombian context where the literature that I found centered on tools and strategies to with EL children, none which explored critical literacy as a possibility.

Finally, reviewing the literature also helped give my study more relevance. The literature on picturebook read-alouds focused mainly on the use of this strategy as a way to increase vocabulary and language, however my study using CLRA's offers a different possibility to the field. Looking at the literature, in particular the two studies I described as "most powerful," was enlightening because it was evident that critical literacy helps students develop a stronger connection to the injustices they discovered in texts. They created genuine and meaningful inquires which resulted in real social action (i.e. creation of the Hurricane group and arguing against school pull out programs for both special needs and gifted students). My study intends on looking past vocabulary development, rather focusing on the development of critical literacy skills and perspectives of young ELs. With my study, I hope to expand the ideas of what picturebook read-alouds can be used for and how they can be used within an early childhood EL classroom.

While reviewing the literature I became highly concerned with the lack of literature on critical literacy within the Colombian context, even more so as its importance and relevance within the field of language learning has been discussed (Mora, 2014b). I found three texts written in Colombia on critical literacy within the classroom each exploring different aspects. One piece explored the attitudes and beliefs that three pre-service EL teachers had towards critical literacy in the classroom (Gutierrez, 2015), while two master's theses explored the development of critical literacy using two different outlets, art (Gutiérrez Arismendy, 2016) and

multimodal texts (Isaza Velásquez, 2016). My study will add to this small but growing body of literature within Colombia as it covers a different population, early childhood ELs. A study on the development of critical literacy with young English language learners could be beneficial as language learning becomes more of a priority within Colombia.

Chapter Three

Designing a Study on CLRA

In this chapter I discuss the methodological paradigm that underpinned my study on the experiences and responses of young ELs to the use of picturebook read-alouds framed with a critical literacy lens. The chapter restates the research question and describes the context of the study and the participants involved. Essential to this study is an understanding of the critical literacy read-aloud (CLRA) strategy used, as a result I describe how the read-alouds were prepared and implemented within the classroom under study. Furthermore, I describe how the data were collected and analyzed. I conclude this chapter clarifying the trustworthiness of my investigation, as well as the relevant ethical issues involved.

Research Design

I began investigating possible designs and methodologies to help give my study a solid foundation on which to build upon. After initially reviewing pieces of literature on educational research (Hatch, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003) and actual studies that took place within educational settings (Ko, 2013; Ko & Wang, 2009, 1013; McDaniel, 2006; Valencia, 2004) it was evident that qualitative inquiry was of the most commonly used types of research within the field of education (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2011). Qualitative research is generally defined as an exploration that seeks to understand a phenomenon from the perspectives of those involved (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Richards, 2003; Stake, 2010), using multiple sources of data (Bui, 2014; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Richards, 2003; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2011). This study, therefore, was designed as a result of the very nature of qualitative research and its commonality within educational research.

Qualitative research is characterized by being interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic (Stake, 2010). These four characteristics were present in the design of my study. *Interpretation* played a key role in my qualitative study as I, the teacher-researcher, interpreted the multiple forms of data collected (i.e*.,* interviews, class discussions, observations and the examination of artifacts) and findings. My study was *experiential* as it was person-centered, it observed participants in their natural school setting and it attempted to understand their perspectives and experiences. The participants chosen, and the study itself, did not attempt to represent a larger population nor generalize the phenomenon being studied. Rather, my study took into consideration the uniqueness of the participants and their contexts making the study situational. Finally, this study was *personalistic* in the sense that the research emerged from my own personal desire to improve how things work within my classroom. This resulted in me, the teacher-researcher, becoming an instrument in the data collection and interpretation processes themselves. Furthermore, the study was also personalistic for my young EL students, who took on the roles of student-participants, as it was their points of view, perspectives and experiences which the study seeked out to explore and understand.

Research Question

The following research question guided my study: *How do young English learners experience and respond to picturebook read-alouds when framed from a critical literacy perspective?*

The Colombian EL Context

It is important to highlight how ELs in the Colombian context differ from ELs in the US context. Within Colombia, the acquisition of an additional language to Spanish is a goal at the local, state, and national level and English is predominantly the 'other' language of choice, although not official by any law. In other words, English is viewed as a tool in addition to Spanish within Colombia, whereas in the US English is viewed as a necessity and those who do not communicate in English must assimilate. Within Colombia, ELs are not considered to come from language minority communities, unlike ELs in the US context whom come from language minority communities and therefore have been historically marginalized.

School Context

I conducted the study within a bilingual private school located about 20 km from downtown Medellin, Colombia. The majority of the school's student population is made up of native Spanish-speaking Colombians, although there is a small percentage of international students, predominantly from North American and European countries. The EL children whom attend this school are considered to come from affluent families, which may seem as a context that runs counter to critical literacy however, I saw this context as one in need of a critical literacy perspective (Kuby, 2013). I consider that fostering a critical literacy perspective within these students, who will someday be in positions of power, can help them realize and understand how they oppress others. If this does not occur, then the oppression of marginalized communities will continue.

The school has adopted an international curriculum comprising of three sections: Immersion, Primary, and Secondary. The study was completed in Stage 1, which is equivalent to

the Colombian *transición* level of schooling. Here, the students receive 24 hours of classes in the English language per cycle (each cycle refers to six days of classes); 9 hours of *Language and Literacy* (English), 6 hours of *Numeracy* (mathematics), 6 hours of *Discovery of the World* (science) and 6 hours of *Social and Emotional Development* (a combination of religion and social studies). The remaining subjects are taught in Spanish. This high exposure to the English language is key to the school's pedagogical approach as it connects the language being studied to a variety of subjects and moments throughout the day, rather than teaching the language in isolation.

Stage 1B: the classroom studied. The study took place in my classroom which was one of the three Stage 1, or *transicion*, classes. The class was made up of fifteen students and two teachers. Spanish was the native language of all of the students except for one, whose native language was Dutch. The study was conducted throughout the fourth, and last, term of the year, which meant that the students and I had already spent seven months together as a class.

I collected most of the data during the story time moments of *Language and Literacy* class. Story time usually took place once per cycle during a 40-minute class session. During this time I sat with my students in a circle while I read aloud a children's picturebook that I had selected ahead of time. I collected other, smaller pieces of data during random class moments that reflected critical literacy events and it was documented in my research journal.

Participants

I selected eight participants for the study from my homeroom class. All of my students would participate in the study, as the study was embedded into regular class hours. However, data would be analyzed only from those chosen. At the time, these English learning children

were between the ages of 5.5 to 7 years old and in their third to fourth year (depending on the year they entered the program) of the preschool English language immersion program. I decided to select the participants for my study using what Yin (2011) and Bui (2014) referred to as a "purposive sample", in other words I deliberately chose the students who would participate in my study. The purpose behind this calculated selection, as stated by Yin (2011), is to "yield the most relevant and plentiful data, given your topic of study" (p. 88).

The sample selection process. As suggested by Bui (2014), certain criteria were set for the selection of my sample. I selected the student-participants based on the following criteria. First, students could not be part of the speech therapy and/or occupational therapy program as these students were often pulled out of class during story time. Second, students regularly showed an interest in the picturebooks that had previously been read aloud throughout the school year. Last, students had to demonstrate motivation to share their thoughts and opinions during the group discussions that resulted from the picturebook read-alouds. The last two criterions were set in place in order to yield the most amount of data possible.

The first criterion helped make it clear to me as to who would be excluded from the research sample, either a student participated in the pull-out programs or not. I chose the other two criteria by observing students during the picturebook read-aloud moments prior to beginning my in-class research. There was an assistant who also helped me perform this task. After I determined which students could be possible participants for my study the sample size was still too large.

To continue the sample selection process, I spoke to the principal and preschool coordinators in order to explain my research proposal using an informed consent letter[3] (Brenner, 2012; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Yin, 2011) which contained the purpose and nature of the

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[3] See Appendix A for copies of consent letters used.

study (Yin, 2011). The necessary parties signed the letter authorizing me, the teacher-researcher, to conduct the study within the school, more specifically within my classroom.

Coincidentally, the school hosted one of its parent-teacher meetings a few days later. I used the event as an opportunity to explain the research to the parents/guardians of my students in person. This proved to be a very useful strategy as it gave parents/guardians the chance to ask questions about the research and it gave me the chance to answer the questions on site, instantly calming their nerves and clarifying any doubts they had about their child's participation in the study. Those who were interested in having their child participate in the study signed the informed consent letter on their child's behalf (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

I cross-referenced the fifteen letters to my initial purposive sample pool to further narrow down the sample. From there I decided that I wanted to have an equal amount of boys and girls in case we touched upon the topic of gender, as it could come up during the critical literacy read-alouds of the picturebooks. Finally, I decided on eight students that would make up the purposive sample for my qualitative study.

Critical Literacy Read-Alouds (CLRA)

I refer to critical literacy read-alouds as the type of read-aloud strategy that I used to engage with critical literacy in my early childhood EL classroom. I implemented the CLRA strategy in my classroom over the course of 11 weeks, during which I worked on one picturebook at a time. The amount of time spent focusing on each book varied depending on students' engagement and interest. In the following paragraphs I provide a detailed description of the strategy which includes the picturebook selection process, the dynamics of the read-aloud sessions, and the types of questions asked to encourage critical conversations.

Designing the strategy. In order to engage with critical literacy in my classroom I used critical literacy read-alouds of children's picturebooks (Meller et al., 2009). I planned this strategy prior to executing it in the classroom, drawing from and rethinking Meller et al.'s recommended steps for the planning and implementation of CLRA in K-3 classrooms. Their approach to using this strategy with young children involved 6 steps: (a) selecting a book, (b) previewing the book, (c) developing critical questions to use during the read-aloud, (d) activating children's prior knowledge, (e) doing a picture walk, and (f) reading the book aloud to students while stopping to discuss the predetermined questions. The approach that I took towards planning and implementing a CLRA strategy in my classroom, while based on their ideas, had some modifications (in the spirit of critical literacy) in order to fit my context, interests and needs.

Book selection. Central to my study is the use of children's picturebooks. I decided to use books that promoted the notion of perspective and the relationship between language and power, rather than use those that focused directly on social issues. This decision was made for two reasons: On the one hand, I, as a teacher-researcher, was a novice critical literacy pedagogue and advocate and I did not feel comfortable delving into such delicate topics with my young EL students at the time. On the other hand, critical literacy was a new concept for the school administrators and it needed to be presented to them slowly and in a more sensitive manner. Once I determined the general topics of the books, I selected the four books used in this study (see Table 3.1) using my personal and professional experiences with picturebooks, a list of books that I kept track of which were used in similar studies (Bouley & Godfrey, 2008; Clarke & Whitney, 2009; Dolan, 2014; McDaniel, 2004, 2006), and an exploration of the texts that were

easily available to me. The picturebooks used for the study contained print in the English language.

Preview to generate possible critical questions and extension activities. After selecting the books to be used for the study I read each book on my own numerous times, each time with a different perspective.   I read the book once as I would have read it a year ago, as a teacher without any knowledge of critical literacy, once as myself, a teacher with an interest and novice understanding of critical literacy, and then several times, each as if I were a different one of my EL students. Throughout these readings I identified words or phrases that my young EL students could have trouble understanding. These words would be introduced to students and defined prior to reading the story aloud in class.

Next, I considered the possible topics that could be explored through each picturebook using a critical literacy perspective, as seen in Table 3.1. Identifying the possible topics helped me generate the critical questions that would eventually guide our critical conversations that centered on the picturebooks[4]. I turned to Lewison and colleagues (2002) to help me in this process as well by categorizing my critical questions into their four dimensions of critical literacy, as seen in Table 3.2. I did this to assure that I was prepared with a concrete list of questions that could be considered critical. As a final step in the preview process I considered potential extension or follow-up activities for each picturebook, once again referring to Lewison and colleagues (2002) dimensions of critical literacy. These extension activities involved drawing, role-playing, investigating and writing. They were planned with the objective of helping the students and I further explore the topics of each picturebook and the connections between the words of the books and our worlds.

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[4] See Appendix B for a full list of the predetermined critical questions used in the study.

Table 3.1

Children's Picturebooks Used

Book Title	Author/ Illustrator	Synopsis	Topics Explored from a Critical Literacy Perspective
Seven Blind Mice	Ed Young	Seven mice come across a large object. The first six mice look at the object from one particular perspective, each claiming to see six different objects. The 7th mouse explores what it sees in its entirety and discovers that the large object is an elephant.	• multiple perspectives
The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs	Jon Scieszka Lane Smith	Alexander T. Wolf recounts the events of the classic *3 Little Pigs* story but from his perspective. The wolf argues that the he was framed by the pig cops and media and made out to look big and bad after he accidentally killed the three little pigs.	• alternate viewpoints • multiple perspectives • seeing beyond the bias • texts as constructed objects, can be reconstructed • writer's purpose
Click, Clack, Moo, Cows That Type	Doreen Cronin Betsy Lewin	The cows on Farmer Brown's farm work together to demand electric blankets. Farmer Brown and the cows negotiate a deal when the cows go on strike.	• agency • multiple perspectives • power in numbers • power of literacy • power of words • social action
The Day the Crayons Quit	Drew Daywalt Oliver Jeffers	Duncan wants to color but he finds that his crayons have gone on strike. The crayons are tired of being used "traditionally" so they write Duncan letters letting him know how they feel.	• action • gender bias and roles • multiple perspectives • power in numbers • power of literacy

The new vocabulary terms, possible critical questions and potential extension activities were ultimately placed on the lesson plans that I created for each CLRA. I used the lesson plans more as a guide rather than a strict plan that had to be adhered to as I was prepared to negotiate

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the story time sessions with my young ELs, allowing them to take the lead at any point during

the CLRA sessions.

Table 3.2

Sample of Critical Questions by Dimension

Dimensions of Critical Literacy (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002)	Critical Questions Used for *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*
Disrupting the commonplace	o Is this version of the story different from other versions of the 3 little pigs that you have read before? o In this story, is Alexander T. Wolf really *big* and *bad*?
Interrogating multiple viewpoints	o Who is talking in this story? Whose perspective is given? o Who is not talking in this story?
Focusing on sociopolitical issues	o Is anybody else in the story like Al? Is this why no one else likes him in the story?
Taking action and promoting social justice	o What did we learn from the book, '*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*'? Is this important? How could we share this with others who don't know this? o Who do you think gave Alexander T. Wolf the name of the *Big Bad Wolf*? Why was this name given to him? Is this a fair name for him? What can we change his name to?

Activating students' prior knowledge and taking a picture walk. I began each read-

aloud session by asking questions to help tap into the prior knowledge that the students had on

the book being used. I saw this as an essential element of the CLRA as this moment opened up

the space for the young ELs to begin connecting the book to the world. A picture walk of the

book followed where the EL children and I focused on the content of the cover page. The picture

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walk also entailed skimming through the illustrations of the book. Using both the cover page and the book's illustrations, students made predictions about the characters of the story, what the story was about, where it took place, etc. After the picture walk I encouraged students to discuss any connections that the book seemed to have to the worlds. I also used these moments before delving into the reading of the book, to present the vocabulary I had previously identified as new for my young ELs.

The read-aloud experience. We read each picturebook aloud twice in English and followed the read-alouds by discussions and extension activities using students' L2, English. It is important to point out, however, that the EL children and I often code-switched between English and Spanish for clarification and elaboration purposes. During the initial read-aloud, we read the story straight through. However, when the previously identified new vocabulary terms appeared, I stopped to check for students' understanding. After the first reading, I asked students low-level reading comprehension questions (refer to Table 3.3 for examples), which were the very types of questions that I commonly used during story time. I encouraged students to pose their own questions, both during and after each read-aloud session. The actual CLRA took place during the second reading of each picturebook. The second reading was very similar to the first; what changed were the types of questions asked, as can be seen in Table 3.3. It was during and after this second reading where critical conversations sparked as a result of the critical questions asked by the teacher. Once again, the EL children were permitted and encouraged to pose their own questions.

Table 3.3

Comparing Types of Read-Aloud Questions

Low-level Questions	Sample of Critical Questions Used for *Click, Clack, Moo, Cows That Type*
o What happens in the beginning, middle and end of the story? o Who are the characters in this story? o What is the setting? o What problem do the characters face in the story? o How is the problem resolved at the end of the story?	o Does this book have a message? What is it? (What is this book/author telling you?) o Who talks the most in this story? The animals or the farmer? o Is there a 'bad guy' in this story? Why do you think ---- is the 'bad guy'? Think about ---'s perspective. o Does the 'bad guy' talk more or less in the story? Why? o Does the 'good guy' talk more or less in the story? Why? o If the animals did not know how to type (write) would they have been able to fight for themselves? Is there power in words? o Do you think that the farmer would have given the cows and the hens the blankets if only one animal would have written the letter? Do you think one person or a group of people have more power? o What does the author want us to think of the animals? The farmer? o What did this story help us learn about ourselves? About the world? o Can animals ask for what they want or fight for their rights in the real world? Who has to speak and act for them? o Do your words have power?

The CLRA experience did not end after a picturebook had been shut. As mentioned, when I had previewed each picturebook I created a lesson plan that listed potential extension activities. However, as the study developed in the classroom, the critical questions and conversations that the EL children engaged in often led to moments of inquiry in which they ended up generating their own meaningful extension activities that differed from those I had originally planned.

Data Collection

In order to collect the data needed to answer my research question, I used three different methods that are common of qualitative research (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2011); observing, interviewing and collecting artifacts. In this section I describe each method as well as why and how each was used throughout the data collection stage of the study.

Observations in my research journal and audio-recordings of CLRAs. In my study I wanted to observe participants in order to see how they responded to reading picturebooks with a critical literacy perspective. The classroom observations were informal and unstructured as I did not schedule the observations nor was I looking to observe a specific action or behavior. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) argued that this type of observation method, unstructured as it may be, must be systematic in nature. I systematized my observations by looking for moments of critical literacy within my class that could have resulted from the change in our ways of reading picturebooks. I looked for these moments during the CLRAs, during the conversations that followed the read-alouds, and sporadically when a participant's words or actions resembled a moment of critical literacy. I recorded these observations using a combination of field notes and post facto notes which I kept in my research journal. I also took notes during the focus group interviews. At the end of each school day I read through the notes and observations I had made on that day in my research journal and I immediately copied them into a digital format to help me later on during the data analysis, as suggested by Lankshear and Knobel (2004).

I audio-recorded the picturebook read-alouds and the conversations that followed those readings in order to go back to them later on and to better understand what happened in those moments. As the teacher-researcher of this study, there were times when the two roles I was

playing interfered with one another. As a researcher I often missed a pertinent observation as I was caught up in my role as a teacher with the lesson, read-aloud or class discussion. The audio-recordings helped me complete my observations and notes after these moments had passed.

      Interviews. I chose to collect data by interviewing the participants[5] in the study because I was concerned with gathering information from them rather than about them. Lankshear & Knobel (2004) stated that interviews are "the best available means for accessing study participant's opinions, beliefs, values and situated accounts of events at a particular point in time" (p. 199). Due to the nature of my study, I was interested in gaining insights as to how the participants perceived their reading experiences before and after experiencing picturebooks through CLRAs. As a result, I interviewed the participants once to initiate the study in my class and again at the end of the study. Both times the same interview protocol was used. I audio-recorded the interviews using my smartphone and I jotted down notes, onto the hard-copy of the interview protocol, of key phrases that the participants used that could later be pertinent in the analysis of the data.

      Interview design. I designed a semi-structured focus group interview to apply with the participants. I designed this type of interview in order to make the interview process feel more like a conversation between the interviewees and the interviewer. The open-ended nature of the interview questions allowed the participants to delve into their responses, sharing their opinions on and experiences with reading (Brenner, 2012; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).   The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed me, the teacher-researcher to keep a level of control over the interview, either by focusing the participants' attention when they got off topic or by asking follow-up questions to build on certain responses (Brenner, 2012) or for clarification purposes.

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[5] See Appendix C for the interview questions.

The interviews were designed to take place in a focus group setting for a variety of reasons, one being to maximize the amount of data collected in a shorter amount of time (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Another lead reason for designing the interviews in small groups was to help generate more discussion (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) in response to the interview questions, further the authors argued that "group interviewing also maximizes possibilities for unanticipated but highly pertinent matters being raised as respondents 'bounce off' of each other's comments and claims" (p. 208). The interviewing process can be one of tension between the interviewee and the interviewer, and more so when the interviewee is a child and the interviewer is an adult. Conducting the interviews in a group setting offered the young participants a space to feel more comfortable (Shaw, Brady & Davey, 2011) as they had their 'equals' by their side, essentially easing the imbalance of power between the children interviewees and adult interviewer.

Interview process. I began conducting the initial set of student interviews before starting the CLRAs, once I had received the signed informed consent letters from the school's administrators and from the parents. I scheduled the interviews during students' free time within the school schedule. I conducted the interviews in small groups that were made up of the teacher-researcher and three students at a time, as recommended by Lankshear & Knobel (2004) and Yin (2011). During the interviews I asked the young EL students about their reading experiences. This involved asking questions that looked into why and what they enjoyed reading, what it meant to read, and what they felt after reading, among others (see Appendix C for the full interview protocol).

Since I was conducting the research in my own classroom, I held interviews with all of my students, even with those who were not part of my data sample. I piloted the set of interview

questions with the groups of students that were not a part of my sample in order to have the chance to modify questions if necessary before starting the data collection for my study as suggested by Stake (2010) and Yin (2011). During the initial pilot interviews, I ran into some difficulties which I cleared up before initiating the focus group interviews where I would actually collect data.

During the pilot interviews I noticed that some students struggled with the question, "Think about the books that we have read this year. Which are some of your favorite books? Why?" They seemed to have forgotten the numerous books we had read and most of the students recalled only the books that had been read recently. As a result, I decided to create a file with all of the book covers of the books we had read in the year. I returned to this projective method (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) during the actual interviews as a visual aid to help students reflect upon all of the books that had been shared that year with the objective of them being able to more accurately answer the question. While conducting the pilot interviews I also saw the need for the participants and myself to be able to resort to the participants L1, Spanish, for clarification and elaboration. Therefore, there were instances of code-switching on behalf of the participants and myself.

To conclude the study, I conducted the second and last set of student interviews once the participants had worked with CLRAs for 11 weeks in class. As previously mentioned, the interviews were designed to demonstrate how a critical literacy perspective on picturebook read-alouds effected participants' reading experiences. Therefore, the same interview protocol was used.

Artifacts. I decided to collect and examine artifacts in my study as it was an opportunity to compliment the other data collection methods. Lankshear & Knobel (2014) stated that using

artifacts as data "adds important contextual details to the data available for analysis" (p. 235).

Furthermore, this method was the most pertinent way to collect data for one of the four

categories that I set for my data analysis. I collected artifacts in the forms of students' drawings

and writings that represented how they reacted to reading picturebooks with a critical literacy

perspective. Throughout the research process, my young ELs and I created an audit trail (Harste

& Vasquez, 1998; Vasquez, 2010, 2014) that we used regularly to document the events that

resulted from the CLRA of each picturebook in the study. I did this with the intent of providing

the EL children the opportunity to revisit these eventful moments after they had passed. The

audit trail posed as another type of artifact as it was made up of photographs, drawings, and

anecdotes from students' conversations that represented moments of critical literacy.

Data Analysis: The Guiding Categories

The process of analyzing data was driven by three categories that I developed which took

into account my research question, conceptual framework and similar studies discussed in the

literature review. The initial categories that guided my interpretation departed from Lewison and

colleagues' (2002) four dimensions of critical literacy which I modified for my particular study.

During the analysis process I reformed the three categories to better answer my research

question. I defined the categories in the following terms:

EL children developing critical consciousness and disrupting the common

word/world. For this category I analyzed how the participants understood what books and

reading were for, how they connected the words of picturebooks to their world, and how they

identified and questioned the word/worlds portrayed in picturebooks. For the most part, this was

accomplished using the audio recordings of the CLRAs and follow-up discussions, although data

from all of the data collection methods helped further support this category. I used verbatim quotes from the discussions that generated during the CLRAs and interviews which demonstrated how the participants problematized the picturebooks. Furthermore, I included in this category moments that showed how disrupting the word led to the participants disrupting the world.

        EL children understanding and exploring multiple perspectives of texts. This category is related to how the participants understood the notion of perspective and how they began exploring multiple, opposing, similar and alternate perspectives. For this category I used data gathered from the CLRAs which exhibited moments where the participants put themselves in someone else's shoes and/or where they identified the voices that were silenced and heard. Data collected from the interviews and artifacts also helped support this category.

        EL children's growing sense of empowerment leading to social action through literacy. The final category has to do with how children perceive the power of their words and what they do with those words. The majority of the information used in order to develop and support this category came from what the participants actually produced, as a result the artifacts played an important role in this category. The participants' drawings and writings were analyzed to demonstrate not only how they understood the picturebooks but more importantly how the participants reacted to the picturebooks. I also used verbatim quotes from the interviews and CLRAs to further add sustenance to this category.

Data Analysis: The Analysis Process

        The various forms of data collected for my study resulted in a vast amount of information to help answer my research question, however this information needed to be narrowed down and

systematically organized. I initiated the analysis process after all of the data had been collected. I started this process by analyzing the audio recordings of the interviews and CLRAs first, using a method of multimodal audio analysis (Mora, Giraldo, López-Ladino, Pulgarín, Rodríguez, & Castaño, 2016) we are developing at the Literacies in Second Languages Project (Mora, 2015), which I describe below. I began in this order as I felt that these two data collection methods would yield the most information to help begin answering my research question. I followed with the analysis of the notebook in which I had recorded class observations and finally with the participants' artifacts.

Our model for multimodal audio analysis. I relied on our audio analysis model to analyze all of the audio-recordings collected throughout my research. This methodology allowed me to go beyond the participants' voices, as spoken words are not the only element that convey meaning during conversations and interviews (Mora, et al., 2016). Through the use of our model, I was able to include not only what the participants said but also *how* they said it, taking into account the meaning behind each and every emotion, tone, cadence, intonation and other features that arise on audio recordings. Rather than read and analyze the participants' words I read their voices which provided richer descriptions for my narratives and more accurate findings. Based on this description, it is important to recognize that our multimodal audio analysis model and other analytical approaches, such as multimodal discourse analysis and microethnographic discourse analysis, might seem to relate to one another as they all involve an analysis of language that extends beyond the surface-level meaning of language. However, below, I briefly describe how the multimodal audio analysis model sets itself apart from these similar analytical analysis approaches.

Multimodal discourse analysis, MDA, attempts to study language in combination with other semiotic resources (or modes; i.e., language, image, music, gesture, etc.) which integrate across sensory modalities (i.e., visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic) to create meaning in multimodal texts, discourses and events (O'Halloran, 2011). Our multimodal audio analysis method differs from MDA as it is strictly an audio analysis and does not attempt to analyze language in combination with other sensory modalities other than auditory. In an analysis of a news broadcast, our method would only take into account the audio of the reporters, whereas a MDA approach might consider all of the interactions between the reporters spoken language, kinetic features (including gaze, body posture and gesture) and cinematography effects (including camera angle and frame size).

Microethnographic discourse analysis is an approach to the discourse analysis of classroom language and literacy events which pays attention to social, cultural, and political processes (Bloome, et al., 2005). Similarly to our method, a microethnographic approach to discourse analysis takes into account features of voice such as volume shifts, stress, pausing however, the later approach takes into account other contextualization tools such as kinesics (gesture, eye gaze, posture, etc.), proxemics (distancing, postural configurations), verbal (register shifts, syntactical shifts). Furthermore, microenthongraphic discourse analysis four other elements of classroom language and literacy events which include boundary-making, turn-taking, the negotiation of thematic coherence and intertextuality.

Step-by-step. The approach I took towards analyzing the audio-recordings involved a 3-step process; the initial listening of the audio, a second round of listening and a third. Each audio is listened to and analyzed one at a time before beginning the next. Prior to delving into the description of our audio analysis method, it is important to mention the following two

considerations. First, this type of analysis requires that the researcher/analyzer be familiar with the participants' voices, behaviors and background knowledge beforehand. Secondly, the teacher/researcher can dismiss parts of the audio that are irrelevant to their study.

I used the initial listening of each audio as a moment to begin familiarizing myself with the sounds heard in the audio, without ever stopping the recording. I listened for clarity and identified the voices of the participants. This first listening was an opportunity for me as the researcher/analyzer to start comprehending the dialogue but in a simple 2-dimensional manner, simply listening to the words that I heard.

During the second round of listening I allowed myself to pause and rewind the audio when necessary. I listened to the audio focusing on the categories that I had developed to help me answer my research question. I choose and transcribed significant quotes and/or vignettes from the audios that caught my attention, making sure to also include the time stamp in order for me to go back to these specific moments later on. I plugged the significant quotes and vignettes into a chart that had been divided into the research studies four categories, depending on which category it supported, as seen in figure 1.

The third round of audio analysis involved a more aesthetic and multimodal approach. During this last listening I focused only on the specific quotes and vignettes identified in the second round of listening, once again pausing and rewinding when necessary. I then added an aesthetic and multimodal interpretation into the category chart (See figure 2) next to each quote/vignette that had been previously transcribed. This aesthetic and multimodal interpretation took the form of a rich description complied by what I, as the teacher/researcher/analyzer, *read* by interpreting not only the participant's words in each quote/vignette but also their emotions, tone, and other features.

Reducing the data to charts. Prior to beginning the data analysis, I created a chart in which to plug pertinent data into. The chart was divided into three categories which I labeled with each one of the categories that I had developed to help answer my research question (See figure 1).

Coding within the categories. While I was plugging data into my category chart I began to observe themes emerging within each category. I decided to take a different approach towards the use of coding. Rather than use coding to classify and sort the data that supported the categories themselves I used color codes to highlight the different themes that I began to observe within each category (see figure 2). This eventually provided more guidance when I wrote my narratives.

	Students developing a critical consciousness and disrupting the common word/world- Problematizing a text by identifying the common assumptions that it promotes and then questioning them (seeing the "everyday" through a new lens, asking how a texts positions people).		
	Audios	Artifacts	Journal
Seven Blind Mice			
CLRA Event			
Extension Activities			
The True Story Of The Three Little Pigs			
CLRA Event			
Extension Activities			
Click Clack Moo, Cows That Type			
CLRA Event			
Extension Activities			
The Day The Crayons Quit			
CLRA Event			
Extension Activities			
Final Participant Interviews			
Random Moments			

Figure 1. Example blank data analysis chart.

CLRA Event			

MdM speaks steadily, no emphasis

SI speeds up and increases his voice, emphasizing "one person", "one part", and "all" → excited to share his understanding of perspective using SBM as an example; secure in his response
SI understands perspective as something to be seen because of his use of the word "look".

SG speaks with his regular tone and speed, but rushes to finish "because they see a thing and then another person see another thing" → emphasis?
Understands perspective as something that is seen.

42:20- SG explains that farmer Brown is the bad guy in the story, "because... because farmer brown don't give the cows the electric... eh, blankets"
SG starts with a high-pitched because, as if arguing but not sure how to sustain his argument but then he begins his defense
43:20- _____, asking why he might not want to give the cows and hens the electric blankets;
SG "because how do you say, como se mantenian todo el día escribiendo in the typewriter entonces el how do you say el granjero decidió no dar
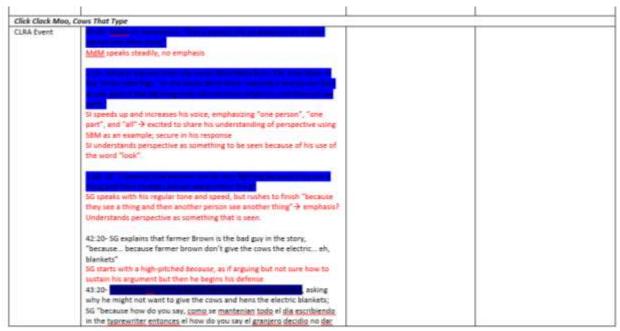
Figure 2. A sample excerpt from my data anaylsis chart with the multimodal audio analysis in red font.

Trustworthiness

As in the case of my particular study, small scale research is not representative of the general population. For this reason, the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data must be as authentic as possible in order to ensure that the study is reliable. The participants in my study were young children which made it challenging to find ways in which to reach validity. Asking them to read and review my findings in order to avoid misrepresentation of the data was not a realistic option in this case.

Throughout the data collection processes that involved the participants' voices I used clarification probes (Brenner, 2012) and I repeated important points back to the participants (Law, 2012) as member-checking strategies. The trustworthiness of the data was increased through triangulation from the audio-recorded interviews and class discussions, the observations of the CLRAs, and the artifacts produced by the participants. I used pieces of data from different

data sources to help support and back up the information found in other pieces of data (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

Ethical Considerations

As the participants in the study were children, I felt that it was crucial to take into account two pertinent ethical considerations; avoiding deception (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) and ensuring confidentiality (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004; Shaw, Brady & Davey, 2011; Yin, 2011).

I had always been honest and straightforward with my young ELs, creating an environment where they understood what they were learning, what they were doing and why. Because of the atmosphere my students were already accustomed to, I decided to share the purpose and the nature of the study with them. After I informed my students about the research that would take place in class, I asked each individual child for their own informed consent, as encouraged by Lankshear and Knobel (2004) and Shaw, Brady and Davey (2011). As per my experience, young children work more efficiently and feel more comfortable in a classroom when a teacher anticipates what they will be learning and doing. Taking this into account, I anticipated and described the research and data collection process to students when I thought that the clarification was needed. Obtaining students' informed consent and keeping them filled in during the research and data collection processes helped me avoid deceiving and misleading them throughout the study.

In order to ensure the children's confidentiality and anonymity abbreviations of their full names were used during the data collection process and pseudonyms were used in the writing of this report.

Role of a Teacher-Researcher

My understanding of the role of a teacher-researcher transformed greatly between the time of planning my study and implementing it with my classroom.   Towards the onset of the study, I struggled with the balancing act between teacher and researcher as I saw both roles as separate ones. I considered my role as the head teacher in the preschool classroom where this study developed to be my most important.   I had to continue teaching my young ELs the subject matter demanded by our school's curriculum while also fostering the social and emotional skills that young children develop during their early childhood education years. I saw my role as a researcher second to that of my role as a teacher. I understood this role as being observant and recording what unfolded in my classroom's story time during the research study. Once I began piloting the CLRAs within my actual classroom with my students, I began to see the two separate roles come together as one; teacher-researcher.

As a teacher-researcher I was actively involved in every step of the research process, from start to finish. It was my initial interest in critical literacy and picturebooks that sparked the research idea. This led me to investigate relevant literature which ultimately allowed me to design and implement the CLRA strategy in my classroom. I personally documented and analyzed the happenings of the classroom and students' responses to the CLRAs and most importantly how they experienced and responded to the CLRA. I believe that it was my genuine interest in the potential of critical literacy that helped me learn to work as a teacher and researcher simultaneously; as a teacher for my young ELs and my teaching practices and as a researcher for the young ELs and teaching practices of others.

Chapter Four

Young English Learners' Reading Experiences in Response to CLRA

The purpose of this study was to explore the reading experiences of a group of early childhood ELs in response to the implementation of critical literacy read-alouds (CLRA). In this chapter I report the significant findings that arose from the analysis of the audio recordings of participants' interviews and the critical literacy read-alouds, the observations made in my research journal, and a collection of participant artifacts. I found three salient responses towards the CLRAs; (a) EL children developing critical consciousness and disrupting the common word/world, (b) EL children understanding and exploring the multiple perspectives of texts, and (c) EL children's growing sense of empowerment leading to social action through literacy.

I include verbatim quotes taken from the interviews and the CLRAs to support my findings. It is important to mention that I chose not to italicize the Spanish language when used in quotes (Mora & Handsfield, personal communication, 01/16/2017). I only translated from Spanish to English those quotes that reached or surpassed more than one sentence and this was done strictly for the purpose of readability. I used use numerous vignettes and images of artifacts to help draw a better picture of what occurred in my classroom during this study. As I used participant quotes and dialogues, I specify which data source they came from; I used the phrase *focus group interview* when the text came from the group interviews and *audio recording* when the text came from the audio recordings of the CLRAs. Throughout the chapter I often refer to specific participants, by name, in order to enrich my narratives, therefore I introduce them in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Student Participants

Girls		Boys	
Lola	Focus Group 1	Andres	Focus Group 3
Mari Mar	Focus Group 3	Lionel	Focus Group 2
Sofia	Focus Group 2	Sammy	Focus Group 2
Valentina	Focus Group 3	Tommy	Focus Group 1

A Description of Students' Reading Experiences Prior to CLRA

Before delving into the ways in which the participants responded to the CLRAs, I find it necessary to describe what their reading experiences were like prior to taking on a critical literacy approach towards picturebook read-alouds. I composed this brief narrative using data collected during the initial participant interviews, which were held before the implementation of the CLRAs in class, as well as observations made in the research journal towards the initial stages of the CLRA implementation.

The participants initially understood reading as combining letters and sounds to make words. Lionel expressed, "read means to leer las palabras que estan en el libro… we have a words and the letters we combinar" (Focus group 2 interview, 4/1/2016). In terms of reading books, Valentina described reading as looking at words and putting them together to form a story (Focus group 3 interview, 4/1/2016). Additionally, the EL children expressed that they enjoyed reading but mostly for entertainment purposes. The participants used words such as *fun*, *good*, *interesting* and *cute* to describe story time and the books typically read aloud during that time. Sammy shared that the reason he liked listening to the picturebook read-alouds was "because that books is very funny" (Focus group 2 interview, 4/1/2016). Although most of the participants shared in Sammy's reasoning as to reading for entertainment, two students expressed that their

reasons for reading had to do with more academic purposes. I observed Lionel sharing that he liked reading because it helped him learn new vocabulary, while Andres shared that he understood how reading could help him learn and how it could help him develop as a better reader (Focus group 2 interview, 4/1/2016).

Two aspects important to a reading experience are how readers feel after reading a text and how they respond to reading a text. When asked about this, the EL children spoke frequently of happy and positive feelings. After reading picturebooks they expressed that they enjoyed retelling the stories through a variety of modes by either writing, drawing or acting.

Overall, the participants had trouble seeing a connection between the books they read and their actual world. Their attempts at drawing these connections were based on the literal story being told in the picturebooks. Most of the participants argued that the books they read had no connection to the real world as a result of the non-human characters having human-like qualities. Tommy struggled with this idea; at first he was convinced that the books he read had no connection to the real world "because in the story *Dan the Tan Man* the cookie run and the cookies no speak [in the real-world]". Later on he reconsidered, "o yes, tal vez because in the story *My Pug Has Fun* the dog put, put a thing in the, in the pit" (Focus group 1 interview, 4/1/2016). Regardless of whether the participants were able to connect what they read with their world or not, they were basing the connection or lack of on a literal and somewhat superficial level as they were not taking their reading into a deeper process of meaning making.

I realized that my young EL students' reading experiences were not exposing them to the practices and skills needed in order to be effective readers in our world today. The data demonstrated that their reading experiences covered the practices of code breaking, surface-level meaning making and text using (Luke & Freebody, 1999). However, the data did not show any

signs of the text critic practice. In the narratives that proceed I share how the EL children responded to taking on a critical literacy perspective towards picturebook read-alouds which produced the opportunity for them to develop as text critics.

EL Children Initiating the Development of Critical Consciousness and Disrupting the Common Word/World

Within the early stages of the CLRA implementation the young ELs began to demonstrate an initial spark of critical consciousness towards books. Their understanding of what books and reading were for began to grow, opening the door for them to be able to understand the word to world connection in books as well as identify and question the word and world.

Critical awareness of what books and reading are for. One of the initial manners in which the EL children responded to the CLRAs was by broadening their understanding as to what books and reading were for. They developed a critical consciousness towards books as they began to understand that the books could be read for more than just entertainment and academic purposes. During his final focus group interview Tommy shared the following as to why he enjoyed reading picturebooks:

> Because is fun to read in because we, we, nosotros aprendemos de otras cosas…   that we can take care of the animals, the thing of the animals want. That also the wolf, no all the wolf no have, no have to do, to do, to ser malos (Focus group 1 interview, 6/10/16).

Understanding the word to world connection. Their realization that books and reading surpass entertainment and academic purposes was facilitated by the new ways in which they connected the words of the picturebooks to their world. Throughout the series of CLRAs, the EL

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children began to demonstrate an understanding that the stories the picturebooks told came from the real world, including those fiction picturebooks where non-human characters had human-like abilities. After reading *Seven Blind Mice* I asked the students where the author might have gotten the idea for the story, Sammy asserted, "from the real world" (Audio recording, 4/4/2016). Valentina added to Sammy's answer, "… because the seven blind mouses see all different the things and in the real world are people that see another thing like this mouse" (Audio recording, 4/4/2016). Valentina's answer showed how she connected the blind mice seeing something different when looking at the same elephant, to how people in the real world view things differently amongst themselves.

Figure 3. Example of student connecting his words to his world.

The young ELs carried the notion of the connection between the word and the world in their minds throughout the entirety of the study. As documented in the research journal, even

during Language and Literacy classes that were not a part of the actual study, the EL children

often referred to writing sentences and stories about the world. Towards the end of the study

Andres, a male student, shared his personal struggle with his passion for gymnastics in a writing

assignment, demonstrating that he connected the word and the world (See figure 3). Although

the students generally understood and accepted the connection between the books they read and

the world, at times they continued to focus on the fictional aspects of the picturebooks making

this connection seemed blurred. Lionel expressed this during his final interview, "… some of the

books can tell us things that happen in the real life but some no" (Focus group 2 interview,

6/10/2016).

Figure 4. Students brought in texts from home that had images of wolves, then compared the amount of "bad wolf" texts (left) to "good wolf" texts (right).

Identify and question the word and world. As the EL children's critical consciousness towards books and reading grew, allowing them to connect the words of the picturebooks to the world, they began to identify and question the worlds that were portrayed in the picturebooks themselves. Through the CLRAs they discovered that picturebooks were full of prejudices, stereotypes and false realities that crossed over into their lived worlds. More importantly, they began questioning the worlds that the picturebooks often portrayed.

After reading *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, the young ELs realized that wolves are typically portrayed as the "bad-guys" in picturebooks, which positions people to have a prejudice towards all wolves. Lionel explained this prejudice towards wolves by expressing that no pig would open their house door to a wolf, "… because they think he was a bad wolf, [they think] he want to eat them" (Audio recording, 4/11/2016). The EL children came to this conclusion after the CLRA of the picturebook and after comparing it to other known stories that had wolves as characters such as *Little Red Riding Hood*. Figure 4 depicts the collection of "bad wolf" versus "good wolf" texts that students complied, further strengthening what they had already observed about the common representation of wolves in stories. Additionally, they identified other characters such as witches, bears, lions and bats that were also commonly pictured as the "bad guys" in picturebooks and they identified ponies, birds, cats and cubs as the types of characters that were typically portrayed as "good characters" (Observation, 4/12/2016).

> The teacher finishes reading pink crayon's letter which explains why it has gone on strike. She reads the last two lines on the page, "[Signed] Your unused friend, Pink Crayon". She looks up at the children and asks, "How is the pink crayon feeling?" Tommy responds, "The boy don't color with he, she, she", he shouts out, desperately correcting himself for using the word he when referring to the pink crayon. Lola adds,

"Because how do you say Duncan, how do you say pensaba, thinks that the color, that the color pink is of a girl". The children begin to argue passionately amongst each other whether the color pink is for girls, boys, or both. The teacher asks, "So why do you think Duncan is not using it [the pink crayon]?" Andres explains, "Because he, Duncan think that the pink one is only for girls". This stirs his classmates up again and they begin arguing back and forth on the topic, but he continues. "She [the pink crayon] is sad because the sister use it but she is sad because Duncan don't use it" (Audio recording, 5/25/2016).

The reading experience illustrated in the vignette above demonstrates how the EL children identified the gender stereotype that pink is for girls and blue is for boys during the CLRA of *The Day the Crayons Quit*. Later on, this class discussion led the ELs to investigate the picturebooks in the class library which solidified what they had previously discovered about gender stereotypes; adding other elements to the common portrayals of boys and girls that encompassed what each should look like, should wear and should do for leisure (See figure 5).

The CLRAs opened up the space for the EL children to not only identify the words and worlds portrayed in the picturebooks but more importantly to question and disrupt those words and worlds. The CLRA of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* allowed ELs the opportunity to interact with a good wolf character and question the common prejudice towards wolves. When asked if the wolf in *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* was really *big* and *bad*, Sammy assertively and excitedly responded "NO" (Audio recording, 4/12/2016). In a class discussion wrapping up *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* Lola enthusiastically argued, "All of the wolves not have to be bad [in books]" (Observation, 4/18/2016). These comments, and others similar in nature, demonstrate the EL children's changing perspectives towards wolves, which I

describe in more detail with the following category that is based on students exploring the

multiple perspectives of texts.

Figure 5. Students investigating gender roles in the class library picturebooks (left) and Mari Mar's list of how the books portrayed boys and girls (right).

The children are sharing what they found after looking through and investigating the way

boys and girls are portrayed in their classroom library books. The class begins by sharing

what they discovered from the images of boys first. As the children excitedly call out

their findings, the teacher adds each to the list she is compiling on the board. One child

mentions that the boys in the books wear blue t-shirts. Another child points out that she

saw the boys in the books playing soccer. Mari Mar adds to the list, "short hair". Then,

there's a brief but significant moment of dispute. "But a boy can have long hair too"

(own translation), Valentina bickers directly towards Mari Mar (Audio recording, 6/6/2016).

The CLRA of *The Day the Crayons Quit* also led the EL children to question and disrupt the gender stereotypes found not only in words but in the world. When discussing the common representation of boys and girls in the class library books, the children argued amongst themselves about what truly characterized boys and what characterized girls, often arguing that what could be for boys could be for girls and vice-a-versa, as illustrated in the vignette above. The EL children's newfound questioning stance towards gender stereotypes led them to excitedly discover two picturebooks, from the phonics reader set, in the classroom library that disrupted the common portrayal of girls (See figure 6). Lionel identified that "… in the books that we read the girls like pink and the boys like blue. But in *Sue Likes Blue* a girl likes the color blue" (Audio recording, 6/2/2016). Similarly, Sammy argued, "In the regular [books] the boys use materials but in *Jan Can* she use materials, like, like a, tools" (Audio recording, 6/2/2016).

The participants demonstrated that their ability to identify and disrupt the word and world was a practice not solely limited to the pre-planned CLRA moments. The CLRAs had such an impact on the participants that they began questioning picturebooks read in other area classes. When reading aloud two books from the habitat unit in Discovery of the World class (Science), the participants identified that the books were showing a false reality of the ocean and other habitats. They questioned why the animals looked so happy as if nothing were wrong with their homes and why the habitats looked so clean and perfect (Observations, 4/6/2016 & 5/2/2016). Valentina disputed, "It [*Walking Through the Jungle*, by Debbie Harter] shows lots of trees in the jungle but did not show people cutting the trees" (5/2/2016). During his final interview, Sammy was skeptical when asked if the books we read had any connections to the real world;

"In *Splash in the Ocean* all the animals are happy and playing but in Noticias Caracol dicen que una parte del mar estaba totalmente contaminada... Always the story that the stories not always mostr-, show us the real world" (Focus group 2 interview, 6/10/16). Sammy's analysis of *Splash in the Ocean* as presenting happy animals while the news reveals that part of the sea is contaminated gives evidence to how the EL children read, identified and questioned the word and the world. His analysis also demonstrated how he had begun to understand the the power that books and reading held as they did not always *show the real world*.

Figure 6. Two books students discovered in our classroom library that disrupted the common portrayals of girls in picturebooks. (Taken from our class audit wall.)

The power of books and reading. Overall, the EL children demonstrated that their reading experiences were changing because: 1) they were more critically aware of what books

and reading were for, 2) they had a deeper understanding of how books connected to their real worlds, and 3) they recognized that books portrayed the world in specific manners that often reflected prejudices, stereotypes and false realities. These aspects helped aid in the development of their critical consciousness towards picturebooks as they began realizing the power of books and reading. The vignette below demonstrates how the young ELs understood that books had the power to make readers feel a certain way or believe certain things about the world; even more so how books can color the way we see the world.

> The teacher is interviewing three students after the CLRA implementation. She asks the trio a question that they have already answered once before, during the first round of interviews however, this time the conversation takes a different direction.
>
> Teacher: Do you think that the books we read in class are connected to the real world?
>
> Lionel: Maybe (in a hesitant voice).
>
> Teacher: Maybe? OK, explain your answer *maybe*.
>
> Lionel: Because *Seven Blind Mice* the people can be blind and look at one part of the thing and think that is just a thing but how is very big they cannot look at the whole thing. But in *Splash in the Ocean* the animals are happy and in the ocean there is no trash. But in the real world there is trash and the boats throw like gasoline into the water. But in *Splash in the Ocean* there is nothing bad in the ocean and the author and illustrator don't want to show us the things of the real world.
>
> Teacher: *The author and illustrator don't want to show you the things of the real world?* Why? Why do you think they don't want to show you?
>
> Lionel: In some books yeah. In some books like, they want to make it happy.
>
> Teacher: Why do you think they want to make it happy?

Lionel: Because then the people can read it and then it will be fun and they will like

to read it again (Focus group 2 interview, 6/10/2016).

Lionel's observation, "… the author and illustrator don't want to show us the things of the real world" demonstrated an understanding of how books work to offer particular versions of reality that are not always based on what we see in the world around us. Furthermore, his observation showed that he was beginning to understand that texts are created by someone, somewhere, and for a particular reason. He has become critically conscious of the social construction of texts which could have been one of the factors that eventually led him to re-construct and re-design texts which is discussed later on in my findings.

EL Children Understanding and Exploring the Multiple Perspectives of Texts

The second significant response that the EL children had towards the CLRAs encompassed the multiple and alternate perspectives of texts. First this entailed students understanding what perspective was so that they could compare perspectives, identify perspectives and eventually change their own perspectives.

Defining perspective. The EL children encountered the notion of perspective within the first CLRA of the study, *Seven Blind Mice* and from that reading experience they began exploring the idea of perspective and what it meant (See figure 7). Through an analysis of various artifacts and class discussions, the EL children demonstrated their understanding of perspective as something one person sees and another person sees differently. Initially the participants associated the term with the sense of sight, but when I asked the class if perspective was only seen in images Valentina responded, "… in words too" (Audio recording, 4/11/2016).

Lionel defined it in the following terms, "Is when somebody thinks of a thing but other does not think the same" (Observation, 4/6/2016).
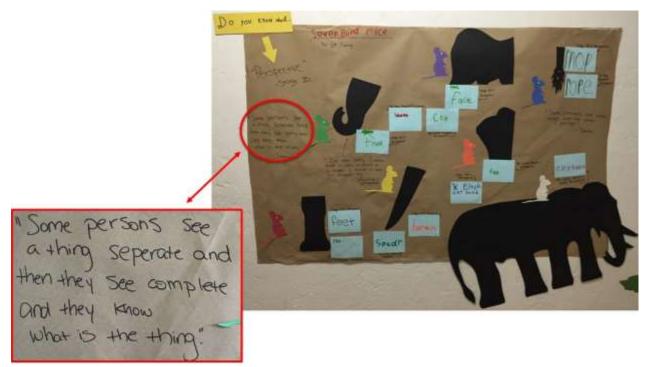

Figure 7. Seven Blind Mice class bulletin board and Sammy's definition of "perspective".

From the outset, the participants demonstrated an understanding that people had different perspectives amongst themselves however, they eventually applied this understanding to books and reading. The vignette below exhibits how Tommy understood that by reading a story he was reading the sole perspective of the person who wrote the story, which essentially showed that he understood the social construction of texts as well. Additionally, after the CLRA of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* the participants discovered that books, authors and illustrators could also have different perspectives on the same story. During a discussion, Andres described how authors wrote similar stories from different perspectives; "A author write ummmm, a story and the other another author eh do the story. But is like the same but not the same that the other story" (Audio recording, 5/23/2016).

Teacher: What does it mean to read a book?

Lola: That we read the sentences… (finds herself at a loss for words)

Tommy: (readily jumping in) … a sentences of a perspective of a person!

Teacher: Ahhh, of a perspective of a person? So when you are reading, you are not just reading words?

Lola and Tommy: No.

Teacher: So you are reading words that are the…

Tommy: (jumping in to finish the teacher's sentence) … of the author that, the author.

(Focus group 1 interview, 6/10/2016)

Comparing perspectives. With an understanding of the notion of perspective the EL children were able to compare different perspectives of similar stories, as they did with the classic tale of *The Three Little Pigs*. During the exploration of this tale the ELs realized that the perspective of a story changes a story; more specifically how authors and illustrators depict certain characters, how readers perceive those characters, and how a story unfolds. Andres made the following statement during the CLRA of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* when asked what the author wanted the readers to think of Alexander T Wolf., "That the wolf Alexander is good and the pigs is, are the bad. Not like in *The Three Little Pigs* because this is a other perspective of a other author" (Audio recording, 4/11/2016). His statement reflects his understanding of how different authors' perspectives can change the same characters of a story. Figure 8 illustrates a comparison made by the participants between the classic tale of *The Three Little Pigs* and the alternate perspective of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*. The Venn diagram created in class shows how the EL children were able to identify from whose

perspective each version of the story was told and how that specific perspective had an effect on the words and illustrations used to describe the characters in each version.

Figure 8. Venn diagram comparing *The Three Little Pigs* and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*.

Additionally, the EL children learned that time could also change the perspective of a story. In Language and Literacy class we read the phonics reader, *Jill and Bill*, which the ELs identified as similar to the classic nursery rhyme *Jack and Jill*. Although this book was not a part of my study's pre-planned book list, they compared and contrasted the two versions of the stories. The EL children discussed how *Jack and Jill* had an "older perspective" and so the characters used vinegar and brown paper as medicine to heal Jack's head (Observation, 4/7/2016). Valentina concluded that as time changed, medicine also changed and so in *Jill and Bill* they used a pill to heal Bill´s head (Observation, 4/7/2016). The students realized that the time period in which a story was written also affected the perspective of the story being told.

Additionally, this demonstrated how the EL children were beginning to use critical literacy as a framework across texts as opposed to critical literacy as a response to an activity.

Figure 9. Students' versions of Little Red Riding Hood with a "good wolf" perspective. (left- Lionel, right- Mari Mar)

The participants not only realized that the different perspectives of authors and illustrators effected stories but also that their own perspectives could affect the way a story was told. After illustrating and sharing their versions of *The Little Red Riding Hood* from a "good wolf" perspective (See figure 9) the EL children compared and contrasted the stories. They noticed that although they had all illustrated and orally told the story of *The Little Red Riding Hood* with a good wolf character that their versions of the stories differed. When I asked why, Sammy responded, "Because perspective… us, we, I perspective" (Audio recording, 4/19/2016). As the young ELs discovered critical aspects of books and reading, they applied them to their understanding of their own words and writing. The EL children's discovery of the power in their

words will later be discussed in the following category that entails taking social action through literacy.

Fifteen children are huddled up around the teacher as she reads *The Day the Crayons Quit*. A student's hand pops up into the air and the teacher calls on her. She shares the following reflection:

Valentina: That in this story Duncan words do not have power.

Teacher: Ahhh, Valentina says that in this story Duncan's words do not have power. Who agrees with Valentina?

(various hands go up and students are shaking their heads up and down)

Teacher: Hmmm, most of you. Valentina, why do you say that in this story Duncan's words don't have power?

Valentina: Because Duncan no talk (Audio recording, 5/24/2016).

Identifying voices. As the EL children explored the multiple and alternate perspectives of texts, they learned to identify the voices that were heard and those that were silenced in the picturebooks. They associated the heard voices with the characters that talked in the stories, usually the "good guys", and the silenced voices with the characters that did not talk, often the "bad guys". The vignette above illustrates that Valentina understood that silenced voices had no power. Through the CLRAs, the students concluded that the picturebooks were told in the perspective of the characters that were heard, or that talked (Audio recording, 4/12/2016). Table 4.2 depicts how the young ELs identified the characters of some of the picturebooks read throughout the study.

Table 4.2

Heard and Silenced Voices from the Picturebooks

Picturebook Title	Heard→ Good Character	Silenced→ Bad Character
The True Story of the Three Little Pigs	Alexander T. Wolf	The pigs
Click Clack Moo, Cows That Type	The cows and hens	Farmer Brown
The Day the Crayons Quit	The crayons	Duncan

The EL children's understanding of perspective allowed them to become compassionate towards silenced characters. A class discussion on the perspective in *Click Clack Moo, Cows That Type* led students to defend the character of Farmer Brown, whom they had initially identified as a "bad guy". Sammy, Lionel and Mari Mar argued that the cows and hens were the "bad guys" in the story as Farmer Brown and his family depended on the money that the milk and eggs produced (Audio recording, 5/5/2016). Sammy sided with Farmer Brown as he claimed, "The money is important because if you don't have money you don't have the house!", "And the house protects you from the rain and the sun", added Lionel (Audio recording, 5/5/2016).

Furthermore, after the CLRA of *The Day the Crayons Quit*, the young ELs immediately began labeling Duncan as the "bad guy" however, Lionel defended Duncan's character right off the bat. He claimed, "Duncan is a good guy because he *just* wanted to color with his colors" (Audio recording, 5/24/2016). Other children began to sympathize with Duncan and when asked what Duncan would say if he were given the chance to talk in the book, Valentina, Andres and Sammy said that Duncan would apologize, as he did not know how the crayons felt and that he would begin using them differently (Audio recording, 5/24/2016). The EL children were

beginning to give the silenced characters a voice, which will be discussed in more details in the

following category on social action.

The CLRAs offered the EL children the possibility of playing with and imagining

alternate perspectives of the texts we read in class. After the read-aloud on *The Day the Crayons*

Quit the young ELs imagined what the story would look like if Duncan were a girl named Dulce

Maria instead. Valentina believed that the pink crayon's letter would have been very different in

this case, "The pink crayon write a letter that said that she tired because Dulce Maria is using. Is

her favorite color and the blue crayon said you don't use me a lot" (Audio recording, 5/25/2016).

By playing with and imagining another perspective of the story, Valentina demonstrated how she

understood that the gender of a character could change how the story unfolds.

A changing perspective. Understanding the notion of perspective as well as comparing

and identifying it in the picturebooks read, eventually paved the path for the EL children to begin

changing their own perspectives not only towards books and reading, but also towards their own

world. This change in perspective was witnessed in terms of gender roles; the colors that

commonly characterized boys and girls, how they had to look, what they had to wear and how

they had to spend their time. During the final participant interviews, when I asked what they had

learned from the picturebooks read aloud, numerous students referred to their new understanding

of the ways they perceived the colors pink and blue. Andres shared, "I see that the pink is for

girls and the blue is for boys no more. I see the pink is not only for girls. Is for girls and boys"

(Focus group 3 interview, 6/8/2016). The vignette below, depicts how some of the EL children's

perspectives on gender changed far passed their conceptualizations of the colors pink and blue.

Two students are discussing what they learned from the book *Sue Likes Blue*: Tommy:

How do you say because boys don't only have to like blue? (own translation)

Lola: (interrupting) A boys can use too pink and the, the girls can no always use dresses.

Tommy: And girls can play basket (Focus group 1 interview, 6/10/2016).

Not only did the ELs perspectives towards gender roles change but their perspectives towards the roles of commonly portrayed good and bad characters began to change as well. After the CLRA of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, Lola proposed that the nickname "the bad pigs" be given to the characters of the pigs as opposed to the "big bad" character being the wolf (Audio recording, 4/12/2016). The ultimate demonstration of how much the CLRAs had changed the EL children's perspectives towards wolves came when they proposed themselves that they should write stories about good wolves to share with others. During her final interview, Lola expressed that this had been one of her favorite activities completed all year "because we can tell the people that the wolf also don't have to do the bad guys" (Focus group 1 interview, 6/10/2016).

Another demonstration of their changing perspectives of commonly good/bad characters came during a Language and Literacy class where the young ELs were reviewing the story elements of characters, setting, problem and solution. While brainstorming ideas for the stories they were assigned to write, the children began proposing twists to classic tales. Andres suggested writing a story similar to *Snow White* but with a good witch character, Lola suggested *The Little Mermaid* with a good Ursula and Sammy suggested Hansel and Gretel with a good witch as well (Observation, 4/14/2016). When Sammy noticed that Andres and himself had suggested writing stories with good witches as characters he argued that witches could be good too, like fairy godmothers (Observation, 4/14/2016).

These narratives demonstrate how the EL children's reading experiences were affected by the CLRAs as it led them to understand and explore the multiple perspectives of the picturebooks they were reading. The EL children were disrupting the common portrayals of characters which ultimately led to a change in their own perspectives. Furthermore, the narratives begin to reveal how the EL children reimagined different types of words and worlds in response to the CLRAs, which is discussed in the following category where I describe how the young ELs used literacy as an outlet to take social action.

EL Children's Growing Sense of Empowerment Leading to Social Action through Literacy

> The children are sitting in a large circle on the floor, wrapping up the closure activity for *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*. They are moaning and fussing because they understand that their time exploring the picturebook has come to an end. Sammy shares that he wishes he could read more stories with good wolves as characters. The teacher asks, "Is it going to be easy to find more books with good wolves?" The children respond in unison, "NO!" The teacher questions the children on what they can do if they want to read more books with good wolves. Sofia suggests, "We can put posters said to the people that the library get books with good wolves." Andres runs with Sofia's idea, "We can tell the como se dice la señora de la biblioteca, the librarían if we can buy some books to put in the library." Tommy wonders how the class can go about getting in touch with the librarian. A classmate suggests writing the librarian a letter and taking it to her in person in order to explain why the school needs books with good wolves. Andres and Mari Mar enthusiastically propose that the students make their own books about good wolves. Mari Mar eagerly continues, "We can do three books about the wolves can be

good!" Sofia counters Mari Mar's proposal, "We can do *more* books and *color* the

books!" Excitement begins to fill the air, as the children start shouting out various ideas

for their soon-to-be-written "good wolf" stories. Andres suggests that the books be put in

the library so other students can read them. Tommy counters by proposing that they put

them on the internet so even more people can read them. Sammy's imagination runs wild

as he shouts out, "… or on a valle in New York City!" (Observation, 4/18/2016)

The final and most significant response that the participants had towards the CLRAs

reflected their newfound sense of empowerment and desire to share what they had discovered

about the injustices found in picturebooks, which they had grown critically aware of, as seen in

the opening vignette of this section. However, before they reached this point, it was essential

that they understood and accepted the power of words. As mentioned previously in the first

category, through the CLRAs, the EL children had started to understand the power that books

and reading held as they influenced readers' feelings and beliefs. However, they also began to

understand how words could be used in powerful ways to convince, to marginalize, and to

promote change; words that came in different modes such as the words we read, write, speak,

type and sing.

The power of words. During the discussions that the CLRAs generated the EL children

often referred to the power that words had to express our own feelings, knowledge, needs and

wants, as well as those of others who couldn't speak or write for themselves. In a discussion

after the CLRA of *Click Clack Moo, Cows that Type*, Valentina and Sofia shared the following

reflections about the power of words. Valentina claimed that, "the words have power because

the words can tell another people [what] they want", "or help other people" Sofia added (Audio

recording, 5/2/2016). Furthermore, the children believed that words also had the power to

influence behaviors. During his final interview, Lionel explained how written words on posters or in books could encourage people to avoid throwing trash in the ocean (Focus group 2 interview, 6/10/2016).

Figure 10. Tommy's letter to Farmer Brown on behalf of the horses.

The participants demonstrated a sense of empowerment as they expressed that their own words also had power. A conversation between Lionel and Sammy revealed how they understood a letter writing activity that followed the CLRA of *Click Clack Moo, Cows that Type* (See figure 10). Lionel expressed that he had written his letter to take care of and help the animals (Audio recording, 5/3/2016). Sammy added, "Because if *our* animals need a thing, we *need* to take that thing to them" (Audio recording, 5/3/2016). These comments not only reflected

the understanding that their own words had the power to help animals but also that they felt they had an obligation, or social responsibility, to do so.

Using words for action. The EL children developed an intrinsic desire to share what they learned with others and take action upon the injustices that they discovered during the CLRAs. Andres described that action was when "we do a thing and then tell to a other people" (Audio recording, 5/2/2016). His statement demonstrated that the children linked action to doing *something* followed by sharing that *something* with others. They began to take action through literacy; words and images became outlets that the EL children used in order to reimagine and recreate the worlds portrayed in the picturebooks and their own worlds. During various class discussions, the children expressed that they could take action and share what they learned by: explaining their new ideas in presentations similar to their science fair presentations, creating and displaying informative posters around the school, writing letters, sharing ideas on the internet, etc., as demonstrated in the opening vignette of this section.

The most prevalent idea that the EL children had for taking action became writing and publishing storybooks of their own. I understood this to be linked to either one or both of the following: (a) the picturebooks from the CLRAs inspired them to react and take action in this form, and/or (b) we had been working up to story writing in Language and Literacy class all year long. Not only was the creation of "powerful stories", as Valentina referred to them (Observation, 5/24/2016), a way for the children to react to the CLRAs, but these moments became significant activities that they enjoyed. During the final interviews, numerous participants referred to the two instances in the study where they had created "powerful stories" of their own. When asked which activity he liked taking part in the most after the read-alouds, Tommy shared the following, "I like when we write the story of the good wolf… because we can

tell the people that the wolf also don't have to do the bad things" (Focus group 1 interview, 6/10/2016). Andres expressed that he liked, "the books we write where the girls do things the boys do and the boys do things the girls do" (Focus group 3 interview, 6/8/2016).

Disrupting and recreating the images of wolves, boys and girls in children's picturebooks. After the CLRA of *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, the young ELs expressed that wolves were portrayed unfairly and in a prejudice manner in picturebooks (Observation, 4/18/2016). Mari Mar and Lionel proposed that the class write their own stories about good wolves in order to share what they had learned (Observation, 4/18/2016). Furthermore, Andres suggested that the stories be published and given to the school's library, since books of good wolves lacked in the school library (Observation, 4/18/2016). The stories that the EL children created were their way of taking action upon the unfair portrayal of wolves in books. They were also a way for students to break the prejudice that people commonly have against wolves. With their original stories they created worlds where wolves were superheroes rather than villains, helpful rather than destructive and friendly rather than scary; creating these worlds using the power of their words (See figures 11 and 12).

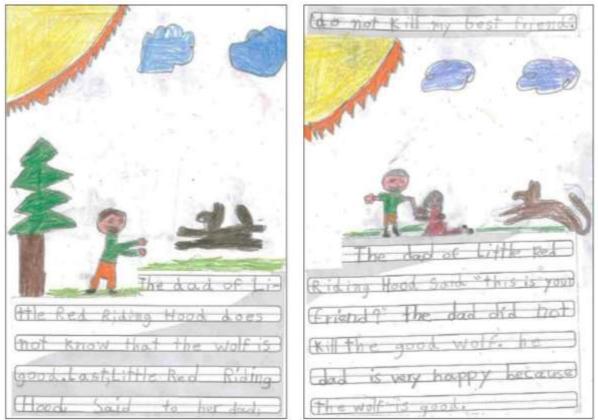*Figure 11*. Excerpts from Lionel and Andres' good wolf story, *The Superhero Wolf*.

Figure 12. Excerpts from Lola and Valentina's good wolf story, *Little Red Riding Hood and Her Best Friend*.

Similarly, after the CLRA of The Day the Crayons Quit, the young ELs expressed that they were alarmed by the scarcity of books that represented other perspectives of boys and girls within the classroom library (Observation, 6/2/2016). The vignette below demonstrates how the children understood that the gender roles portrayed in books could impact people in the real world.

The students are sitting in small groups huddled around a tall stack of children's picturebooks, mostly those that make up the canon of children's literature. They are busily investigating how the classroom library books portray girls and boys, compiling a list of terms and phrases that describe what they find in the books. The teacher walks up to and sits with one of the groups. She observes that this group has placed the phrase *play soccer* under the boy category. She asks the group, "What if a girl that likes to play soccer goes to the reading center and only finds books on soccer with boy characters? Lola responds, "The girl will feel like she do the wrong thing." The teacher continues walking around the room and observing the students inquiry. She reads another group's list and sees the word *necklace* under the girl category. She asks the group, "What if a boy has a necklace that he wants to wear but he only sees images of girls wearing necklaces in the books in the reading center? Sofia explains, "He will feel excluido because the girls have a necklace and not the other boys". Andres continues, "Sad because he thinks that the necklace is only for girls, so the necklace that the boy has he will not use no more (Observation, 6/2/2016)."

Figure 13. Students' ideas of the actions they could take towards helping others break gender stereotypes.

The young ELs brainstormed ideas as to what they could do to help others break away from the gender stereotypes found in children´s picturebooks (See figure 13). Both ideas entailed using the power of their words, however once again the ELs chose to write original stories as a way to take action. Figure 14 demonstrates how the EL children used their words to disrupt the gender stereotypes that picturebooks often portray. They created worlds where male monsters went shopping for shoes, boys were gymnasts and girls were soccer stars.

Figure 14. Excerpts from students' stories that break gender stereotypes.

Allowing the EL children to read, listen to and explore picturebooks with a critical literacy perspective helped them to understand the power of words, more importantly, the power of their own words. The children's new sense of empowerment took their reading experiences into a realm where they felt comfortable questioning and reimagining the worlds portrayed in books. Their new reading experiences also developed in them an innate desire, or feeling of responsibility, to take action in order to change what they understood as unfair in the words of the books they read and in their worlds.

Chapter Five

A Discussion on Young English Learners' Reading Experiences in Response to CLRA

In this study I set out to explore picturebook read-alouds with a critical literacy perspective as a possible solution to the limited reading experiences of a group of young English learners. I implemented a CLRA strategy and collected data in the form of student interviews, observations, audio recordings of discussions, and artifacts. In this chapter I answer my research question by discussing the findings and connecting those findings to previous studies. I explain the implications that my study places on major stakeholders of children's English language education. I reveal the study's limitations and layout directions for future research. Lastly, I conclude by sharing a brief personal reflection.

Answering the Research Question: EL Children's Experiences with and Responses towards CLRA

This study explored how young ELs experienced and responded to critical literacy read-alouds in terms of: (1) what they read, (2) how they read, (3) what they do with what they read, and (4) the feelings provoked by reading. Through my analysis of the data, I found that the young ELs responded to the CLRAs in a manner which expanded and enriched all four aspects of their reading experiences, leading to more meaningful learning that reached far beyond the classroom walls. Below I answer my research question by discussing how the participants responded to the CLRAs, essentially opening a space within their reading experiences for them to develop as text critics (Luke & Freebody, 1999).

EL children developing critical consciousness and disrupting the common word/world. The data revealed that the young ELs developed a critical consciousness of what

books and reading were for, in response to the picturebook read-alouds with a critical literacy perspective. Furthermore, the ELs began to observe a deeper connection between the words in books and the real world, not only identifying the worlds portrayed but also questioning them. I saw these responses to the CLRAs as connected to two aspects of their reading experiences; *what* they read and *how* they read. In terms of *what* they read, I found that the EL children no longer simply read the letter sounds and words they found on pages. Rather, they began reading beyond the printed texts and into the world. In terms of *how* they read, the EL children read not solely by decoding words, but by questioning, disrupting and reimagining those words in relation to the world.

My study supports what previous studies found regarding the personalization of texts as a strategy to engage with critical literacy during and after read-alouds (Kuo, 2009 & 2015; Labadie et al., 2013; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015; Silvers et al., 2010; Souto-Manning, 2009). My study showed that young ELs used their personal experiences as a springboard for exploring and developing critical literacy. The stories that they read crossed over into their lived experiences, those that they had that dealt with fairness and unfairness as well as with issues of gender, prejudice, and the environment. As with other previous studies (Silvers et al., 2010; Souto-Manning, 2009), I believe that this connection that the children felt between the texts and their lives influenced them to initiate genuine and meaningful inquiries, looking into what they understood as unjust.

Andres used a personal experience in order to describe how he understood the notion of perspective. He shared, "When my brother and I fight, we play and then something happens to us. My brother was annoying me and the I went to tell my mom the truth but my brother had his own truth of what had happened" (Own translation, audio recording, 4/12/2016). My study

showed how the EL children's previous knowledge, lives and personal experiences gave them something to use in order to relate to the stories that the picturebooks told.

EL children understanding and exploring the multiple perspectives of texts. The data demonstrated that the young ELs responded to CLRAs by exploring the multiple and alternate perspectives of texts which eventually paved the path for a change in their own perspectives. I connected this response to the two aspects of reading experiences mentioned in the previous section above; *what* we read and *how* we read. The young ELs understood the notion of perspective and when they read, they were aware that what they were actually reading was a specific, single-sided perspective. In terms of *how* they read, they read by imagining the multiple and alternate perspectives of a story and placing themselves in the shoes of others.

My study exhibited that the CLRAs and the responses that the EL children had towards them allowed for extended meaning making, which involves interpreting and making inferences from what an author has said or not said, using one's knowledge and experiences (Shanahan, et al., 2010; Snow, 2010). As the children discovered and identified 'other' perspectives, they were able to see the multiple sides to one story or situation. Having various perspectives creates a space for children to understand topics, issues, and events from multiple perspectives so that they can make informed decisions regarding what to believe and what to do about what they believe. My study expands previous studies on the use of read-alouds as a means to develop reading comprehension (Al Tiyb, 2014; McGee, 2007; Neugebauer & Currie-Rubin, 2009; Santoro, 2008; Shegar & Renandya, 2009), which entails extracting and constructing meaning from written texts (Snow, 2010), as the participants' explorations and understandings of perspective allowed them to comprehend not only the version of the story that the picturebooks told, but also the stories that the picturebooks did not tell.

EL children's growing sense of empowerment leading to social action through

literacy. The data showed that EL children responded to the injustices and unfair situations that they found in the word/world by taking social action through literacy; predominantly writing and drawing, as seen in similar studies from the literature review (Bourke, 2008; Kim, 2014; Kuo, 2015; So Jung, 2016). In order to help answer my research question, I linked these responses to the remaining aspects of reading experiences; what we do with what we read and how reading makes us feel. The study revealed that infusing the reading experiences of young ELs with a critical literacy perspective helped them develop a new sense of empowerment. In terms of what the participants did with what they read, the study demonstrated that the EL children took what they read, reflected upon it, and then used those reflections to take social action against unfair and unjust situations.

My study confirmed the literature that declared literacy as empowering (Beck, 2005; Clarke & Whitney, 2009; Cope, n.d.; Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1987; Janks, 1993, 2000, 2014; Luke, 1991, 1994; Mora, 2012, 2014a; Morrell, 2005; Sahni, 2001). I perceived the empowering nature of literacy in this study as multidimensional, considering that what empowered the young ELs was the complete combination of reading, dialoguing and writing. The CLRAs empowered the EL children because they helped them explore, connect to, question, learn about, and reimagine the world; ergo the classic cliché, *knowledge is power*. The critical conversations that grew from the read-alouds empowered the young ELs as they created a space for them to think aloud and interact in a critical and meaningful manner. Additionally, the critical conversations encouraged the children to use their voices and make them be heard. Finally, the actions that they took, through writing and drawing, empowered them as they offered the EL children the space to project their imaginative ideas and voices.

Taking action towards social injustices became an innate aspiration for the EL children in this study. I understood this to be influenced by the newer and deeper connections they felt to the texts, which was similar to what I understood from Silvers and colleagues (2010) and Souto-Manning (2009). The stronger the connection that students feel to a text, and the injustices found within, the more desire they will have to take action towards change. The actions taken though small, and seemingly trivial in the grand scheme of things, were significant. Considering a ripple effect, the minimal actions they took could be engraved into their minds and hearts throughout their childhood and into their adulthood, leading to bigger social actions in the future (Kuby, 2013). My study supports Souto-Manning's (2009) conclusion as both found that read-alouds from a critical literacy perspective not only provided children the opportunity to grow critically aware of the inequalities and injustices found within the word/world, but more importantly they sparked children's interest in taking social action. Towards the end of the study, during an English Language and Literacy class that was not an actual part of the study, Mari Mar added the following writing topic to the class' *Writing Inspiration Tree*; "help the animals and poor people" (Observation, 5/5/2016). Taking steps towards transforming the world had become a part of Mari Mar's writing inspirations.

EL children as text critics. Overall, through the new types of reading experiences that the CLRAs offered, I found that the EL children had the opportunity to develop and explore the text critic practice (Luke & Freebody, 1999) which had been missing from their repertoire of literacy practices prior to the implementation of the CLRAs. The reading experiences that revolved around the CLRAs opened up a space for the young ELs to practice a more critical way of analyzing texts. The study demonstrated that the young ELs rejected the neutrality of texts, juxtaposing their lives and experiences with those portrayed in the texts read. Furthermore, they

understood that texts were written from one particular perspective, silencing some voices and ideologies while promoting others. Finally, the study showed how the EL children saw texts as objects that could be reimagined and rewritten as a means to transform the word/world.

In conclusion, my study supports the long standing agreement that there is no statute of limitation for age or language proficiency when engaging with critical literacy (Ko, 2013b; Ko & Wang, 2009, 2013; Lau, 2010, 2013; Wallace, 2003), demonstrating that critical literacy can be taken up in settings with young children that are simultaneously learning the English language. Although the children's varying English proficiency levels could have affected how they interacted and engaged with critical literacy, all of the participants demonstrated a certain degree of critical literacy throughout the study. The study revealed that as the young ELs responded to the CLRAs they developed as text critics. They used their previous knowledge, personal lives and lived experiences while engaging critically with texts and the social actions that resulted from their reading experiences became very natural for them. The study demonstrated that through the CLRAs literacy became a means to empower young ELs and deepen their learning experiences and processes.

Implications

Because English language education essentially affects everyone involved in the wider field of education, there are a great number of stakeholders when addressing the implications of this study; teachers, school administrators, teacher education programs, and educational policy makers. Below I discuss some of those implications, taking into account the findings and conclusions of my study.

Implications for school personnel. This study suggests numerous modifications to the traditional curricula and teaching practices used for the teaching and learning of the English language. Teachers and school administrators need to work together to make informed and conscious decisions about reframing the curricula for ELs, finding a balance between conventional and critical literacy, as I do not foresee it easy to simply do away with conventional literacy practices. As my study demonstrated, the stronger the connection that the young ELs felt towards a text, the more desire they had to take social actions towards the injustices they discovered. This implies that in order to foster critical literacy within a classroom of EL children, the curriculum should connect with the ELs life experiences, interests and expertise, considering what these children bring to the language classroom in terms of their family, language, and cultural background.

As my study demonstrated, young ELs are capable of interacting and engaging with critical literacy therefore, curricula should reach far passed lower-level thinking and skills such as defining, repeating, identifying, and using. A suitable curricula for young ELs should include higher-level thinking and skills that are conducive for a critical literacy environment, such as inquiring, dialoguing, and taking action. EL children should be given the opportunity to extend their reading passed phonics readers and the canon of children's literature; texts that focus on social justice issues and multiculturalism should become staples within the curricula guidelines for ELs.

Throughout my research process, I, the teacher-researcher, often had to give up control and allow my young ELs to take the lead based on their meaningful inquiries. This implies that school administrators should not require such strict pre-determined lesson plans from EL teachers, rather they should encourage EL teachers to forego complete control of their

classrooms, creating a classroom environment favorable to critical literacy, where students are entrusted to take the lead. EL teachers should work with their students in order to negotiate a curriculum, one where both the teacher and students are viewed as constructors of knowledge. Additionally, teachers need to work within their classrooms to encourage young ELs to find their voices and then value those voices once they have been discovered. I also find it necessary for EL teachers to take part in a reflective exercise, looking inward at their own assumptions, prejudices, stereotypes, beliefs and ideologies in order to discover and understand how those dimensions influence their own teaching and their EL students' learning.

Proposing a curriculum for ELs that fosters critical literacy implies new learning opportunities not only for ELs but also for school administrators and teachers alike therefore, professional development should be offered to both parties. Critical literacy should be presented to school administrators and teachers in a slow and sensitive manner, avoiding misinterpretations and misconceptions if it is a relatively new concept for those involved. Furthermore, teachers need guidance in order to help them take on the different types of practices, that I mentioned above, which critical literacy calls for.

The upmost important implication that my study places on school administrators and EL teachers is that they not underestimate what English learning children are capable of doing. Too often, children are viewed as innocent and simple beings, while English learners are viewed as having limited language abilities. Both children and ELs are more than capable of exploring and taking on critical literacy perspectives therefore, they must be given the opportunity to do so by the schools that help guide their education.

Teacher education programs. Universities have the responsibility of educating the future and current teachers of ELs thus, the findings of my study also place implications on

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teacher education programs. My study suggests the inclusion of critical literacy perspectives in two distinct moments within teacher education programs. First, critical pedagogy and literacy should be built into university literacy, methods and approaches classes, as a means for future and current EL teachers to be able to develop critical literacy perspectives in their own teaching practices. More importantly, is the opportunity for future teachers and current EL teachers to explore critical literacy as part of their own learning processes. Therefore, critical literacy should not only be taught in methods courses but should be incorporated into other classes, outside of the school or faculty of education. After all, teachers cannot be expected to teach something which they have never discovered for themselves. Furthermore, universities are also sites of innovative research however, they must share their research with educational policy makers, school administrators, and teachers in order for their work to be effective.

Educational policy makers. The reality of the matter is that we live in a top-down society, where those that are the farthest from students essentially make the most important decisions over their education. As a result, it is important to bring to light an essential implication that my study suggests. The standardization and test-driven nature of education places great pressures on schools to meet certain measureable learning outcomes, often learning outcomes that do not value or favor ELs. In order for schools and teacher education programs to step forward with more critical literacy approaches, EL education needs to become less standardized, allowing for ELs to connect their learning to their lives, experiences and the world and this decision comes from the government. Although I believe that this change in educational policies could greatly increase the development of critical literacy in EL settings, I am fully aware that critical literacy perspectives can and have been taken up within early childhood EL classrooms even in this era of standardization.

Limitations

Throughout this research process I faced challenges and discovered weaknesses that essentially impacted my study in terms of methodology, findings and implications. In this section I describe the limitations of my study and I propose how these could be reduced or avoided all together in the future.

The particularity of a critical literacy perspective and qualitative research. I am thoroughly aware that the findings and implications of my study are not generalizable to the wider early childhood EL population, primarily as a result of my study being built on critical literacy. The underlying tenets of critical literacy can be adopted in different contexts but what critical literacy looks and sounds like will vary in those different contexts. Additionally, as with all qualitative research, my study was conducted in a particular context with an even more so particular set of students. I consider that the young EL participants of this study receive a higher intensity of hours in English per week when compared to their Colombian and international counterparts. This, combined with the fact that children are unequivocally unique in their experiences, knowledge, abilities, and interests, makes it clear that the findings of this study would differ in another early childhood EL context. The field of education and research can use the demonstrations and findings from this study to help inform their thinking, their research, and their work.

Literature on critical literacy with young ELs. As a novice researcher and critical literacy educator I felt that there was a gap in the literature on critical literacy in terms of how it had been fostered within the early childhood EL setting. This impacted my study as I did not have an abundant amount of significant resources that dealt with my particular context to turn to,

when designing and implementing the CLRA strategy. I propose more synergy between current critical literacy preschool educators and future research. Teachers and researchers can look for support by turning to other types of literature on critical literacy with young ELs such as blogs, social media and even directly contacting current critical literacy practitioners themselves.

Parents' and administrators' understanding of critical literacy. Throughout my study, I often felt that I was staying on the "safe-side" of critical literacy when taking part in the CLRAs with my young ELs because I was fearful of the topics that could arise from the critical discussions. This fear was not a result of me trying to avoid certain topics but rather a result of what parents and school administrators might think or say if their young children were exploring controversial topics such as race and sexual orientation. The lack of understanding that parents and administrators had on critical literacy effected the books that I pre-selected for the CLRAs and the critical questions that led the discussions. This kind of fear on behalf of the teacher-researcher can be avoided or demised if the teacher-researcher exposes parents and school administrators to a deeper explanation of critical literacy, its importance and possible benefits prior to the start of the study. Essentially this could improve future studies on critical literacy with young learners as fear of parent and administrative reactions will not restrain the reach of children's inquires.

Time constraints. The majority of this study was built into only one part of the English Language and Literacy curriculum, story time. This meant that I, as the teacher-researcher, had to continue responding for the remainder of the curriculum which consisted of phonics, vocabulary, independent reading and writing. Often, the discussions and activities that emerged from the CLRAs extended past the weekly 40 minute story time block which became a challenge for two reasons. As a teacher I did not want to use up class time that was already designated for

the other areas of English Language and Literacy, Science, and Math. However, as the teacher-researcher of this study I did not want to cut short the critical discussions or limit the extension activities as they both provided students the opportunity to explore and develop their critical literacy skills. In order to better foster critical literacy and surpass the challenge of time constraints, teachers and/or researchers should weave critical literacy into the entire literacy curriculum and even look into the possibility of expanding it into other parts of the general curriculum.

Pseudonyms. When I planned the methodological design of this study I did not take into account the significance and importance of the participant's pseudonyms. I picked their pseudonyms for them, later understanding that this decision ran counter to critical literacy as I was trying to foster agency. In the future I will encourage the student-participants to select their own names as a way to make their voices and identities more present in the text of the study.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of my study can be seen as a departure point for how critical literacy can be fostered and developed in young English language learners however, this is not the end all. During the literature review process, I found very few studies on critical literacy practices within the field of early childhood EL thus, future research in this area would be valuable to the field of EL education. As previously mentioned, the small size and particularity of my study limited its generalizability. Therefore, I consider it important that the study be repeated with different populations in order to support CLRA as an effective strategy.

Future studies could involve populations in other EL countries, larger populations, younger preschool populations and populations with a different level of English proficiency.

Moreover, conducting the research within my classroom a second time around could be beneficial as I could change the criteria set for the selection of participants to include those students that are less participatory. By opening up the participant pool to include these less participatory children I could get a glimpse of how CLRAs might motivate and engage otherwise less forthcoming or interested students.

Another way to reaffirm CLRA as a strategy would be to conduct future research on young ELs perceptions of critical literacy practices, as the studies I found while reviewing the related literature only included the perceptions of older participants. The findings of these types of studies would not only standby CLRA as a strategy, but they would also help increase its effectiveness by continuing to add to its development.

Another direction I propose for future research is based on various articles that I read as I prepared my literature review. These articles described studies demonstrating that the use of picturebook read-alouds in other content areas such as science, math, social studies, health and art significantly increased learning gains in preschool and elementary-aged children. I suggest inquiring into the potential of CLRAs for ELs in other content area classes to understand if and how it could be used in these settings.

My study focused on how young ELs experienced and responded to CLRAs and although I feel that I witnessed an increase in their English oral language skills I did not have any instruments set in place to measure this effect. I suggest expanding my study in order to evaluate the effectiveness of CLRA in increasing language proficiency. I feel that a study of this kind would be beneficial in order to sell school administrators and parents on critical literacy as they tend to focus on language proficiency.

A Personal Reflection: The Influence and Impact of Childhood

The process of conducting my research project and completing my thesis has been one of awareness raising, not only for my young ELs, but even more so for myself. Learning about and immersing myself in a critical literacy perspective during my graduate studies often led me to reflect upon my own childhood as an English learner in the United States. I grew up in a small, predominantly White suburb outside of New York City and attended a public school system where my older sister and I made up the majority of the student population with immigrant parents. I was never one of the "good students", those that regularly participated in class and made the honor-roll. In fact, I remember avoiding any type of class participation, dreading English class the most. Early on in my elementary years I was placed into remedial classes, as was done with all of the children that came from non-English speaking homes, but I was pulled out of the program shortly after. The special education teacher explained to my mother that I knew more than I led the other teachers to believe.

That special education teacher was one of the reasons I decided to go into the field of teaching, always remembering her as someone who saw something in me that others did not. Well, that was the sweet and cliché story that I convinced myself of for years. It was not until I began exploring and discovering newer notions of literacy and the concept of critical literacy that I finally began to understand what had happened to me as a young English learner. I found myself endlessly wondering; *As a child, was I as smart as the kids whose parents spoke English? Why wasn't my English good enough? Did my experiences and culture give me something valuable to bring into the classroom? If so, why didn't my teachers value this? Did I hate school, reading and English class because I felt that the English language wasn't mine?* I was

immediately intrigued and fascinated by critical literacy and its value for young ELs as I felt that it helped me understand my childhood as a young EL myself.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory explains that we are all products of our experiences and now more than ever I understand how my childhood experiences influenced and impacted the way I see myself and the world. In the case of the story I shared above, I understand how my school experiences as a young EL could have led me to research the school experiences of young ELs today. It was this same theory that drove me to begin looking at the possibilities that books offered EL children. If the stories we experience and read as children impact the adults we become, I saw an endless field of potential in using picturebooks with a critical literacy perspective. Yet again, I found myself endlessly wondering: *Could a critical literacy perspective help young ELs feel more confident about their languages? What kind of citizens would we have if as children, young ELs were exposed to critical literacy? Could these critically literate ELs help make the world a better place?*

My hope is that my study has in some way helped to secure critical literacy a necessary and respected place in the field of early childhood EL education. As for myself, it has surely helped secure critical literacy as a necessary and respected part of my life, not only as an educator and learner but more importantly as a human being. Gandhi encouraged us to be the change we wished to see in the world and so I have taken my critical literacy perspective and applied it to my life outside of the classroom as well. As a result, my new critical literacy perspective has changed the way I not only understand teaching and learning, but also the way in which I understand the word and the world. This new life perspective has also intrigued classmates, colleagues, family and friends which has led to opportunities of sharing and further reflection.

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I used two versions of informed consent letters, depending on the consent I was seeking to acquire.

Informed Consent Letter for Parents

Estimado Rector:

Cordial saludo,

Yo, Ana Karina Rodríguez Martínez**,** soy estudiante de la Maestría en Procesos de Aprendizaje y Enseñanza de Segundas Lenguas de la Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. Uno de los requerimientos para aspirar al título de magíster es el desarrollo de un proyecto de investigación como parte de mi trabajo de grado (tesis). Para dicho trabajo, he propuesto la investigación "Children's Picturebooks as Sites for Critical Literacy", cuyo objetivo es describir como la lectura se transforma cuando usamos una perspectiva crítica hacia los cuentos de niños. Este trabajo de investigación está dirigido por el Dr. Raúl Alberto Mora Vélez, Profesor Asociado de la Escuela de Educación y Pedagogía de la Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana.

Como parte de la investigación se hará la recolección de datos, que consiste en grabar los mementos de lectura, grabar discusiones, entrevistar a los estudiantes, escanear trabajos de clase, tomar apuntes de observación sobre los estudiantes. Esta recolección de datos se planea desde el 1 de abril hasta el 1 de junio del 2016. Se hará dentro del salón y durante las clases de Language and Literacy.

Espero que los resultados de este estudio me ayuden entender como los cuentos de niños pueden ser usados con estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua en preescolar para crear espacios de literacidad crítica. Los resultados de este proyecto de investigación se emplearán en principio para la escritura del trabajo de grado (tesis). Sin embargo, los datos que se recojan en el trabajo de campo también se podrían utilizar en futuras ponencias y publicaciones académicas. En todos los casos, se hará uso de pseudónimos. En el caso de la institución, solo si usted como líder de su institución lo permite, se hará referencia al nombre de la misma en el trabajo investigativo a realizar.

Esta carta, entonces, tiene por objeto solicitar su autorización para que yo, en el marco de este proyecto de investigación, pueda llevar a cabo el trabajo de campo para desarrollar esta investigación. A los padres de familia que vayan a apoyar esta tarea se les entregara una carta de consentimiento similar. En el caso de los estudiantes, se les enviará copia del consentimiento a sus padres o acudientes.

Los padres de familia y estudiantes que participen en esta tarea lo harán en completa libertad y se espera que no haya ninguna coerción para su colaboración. Ellos estarán en completa libertad de no participar, sin que ello pueda constituir motivo de represalias en la Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. Ellos estarán en derecho de ver el producto final y, de no estar de acuerdo con algo en el mismo, se harán los cambios del caso.

De antemano agradezco su colaboración en el desarrollo de esta investigación, la cual me ayudará en mi formación como investigadora. En caso de cualquier inquietud con respecto a este proyecto de investigación, puede contactarme directamente al correo akrodriguez@vermontmedellin.edu.co. También puede contactar al Coordinador Académico del programa, Dr. Raúl Alberto Mora Vélez, en el correo maestria.ml2@upb.edu.co.

Atentamente,

Ana Karina Rodríguez Martínez
Candidata a Magíster en Procesos de Aprendizaje y Enseñanza de Segundas Lenguas
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Sede Central Medellín

He leído la información en esta carta y estoy de acuerdo con la participación de los estudiantes y/o docentes de esta institución en esta investigación.

Nombre, Cargo y Firma

Fecha

Informed Consent Letter for Parents

Estimados Padres de Familia,

Cordial saludo.

Yo, Ana Karina Rodríguez Martínez, soy estudiante de la Maestría en Procesos de Aprendizaje y Enseñanza de Segundas Lenguas de la Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. Uno de los requerimientos para aspirar al título de magíster es el desarrollo de un proyecto de investigación como parte de mi trabajo de grado (tesis). Para dicho trabajo, he propuesto la investigación "Children's Picturebooks as Sites for Critical Literacy", cuyo objetivo es describir como la lectura se transforma cuando usamos una perspectiva crítica hacia los cuentos de niños. Este trabajo de investigación está dirigido por el Dr. Raúl Alberto Mora Vélez, Profesor Asociado de la Escuela de Educación y Pedagogía de la Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana.

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Espero que los resultados de este estudio me ayuden entender como los cuentos de niños pueden ser usados con estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua en preescolar para crear espacios de literacidad crítica. Los resultados de este proyecto de investigación se emplearán en principio para la escritura del trabajo de grado (tesis). Sin embargo, los datos que se recojan en el trabajo de campo también se podrían utilizar en futuras ponencias y publicaciones académicas. En todos los casos, se hará uso de seudónimos.

Esta carta, entonces, tiene por objeto solicitar su autorización para que yo, en el marco de este proyecto de investigación, pueda trabajar con su hijo/a y pueda grabar, entrevistar, observar y usar sus trabajos para la recolección de datos de esta investigación.

Usted está en completa libertad de aceptar la participación de su hijo/a, sin ninguna forma de coerción para su colaboración y sin ninguna posibilidad de represalias en su institución educativa o en la Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana en caso de no aceptar. Usted tiene derecho a ver las grabaciones, las respuestas de las entrevistas, los trabajos de clase y el producto final. De no estar de acuerdo con algo en el mismo, se harán los cambios del caso.

De antemano agradezco su colaboración en el desarrollo de esta investigación, la cual ayudará en mi formación como investigadora. En caso de cualquier inquietud con respecto a este proyecto de investigación, puede contactarme directamente al correo akrodriguez@vermontmedellin.edu.co. También puede contactar al Coordinador Académico del programa, Dr. Raúl Alberto Mora Vélez, en el correo maestria.ml2@upb.edu.co.

Atentamente,

Ana Karina Rodríguez Martínez
Candidata a Magíster en Procesos de Aprendizaje y Enseñanza de Segundas Lenguas
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Sede Central Medellín

He leído la información en esta carta y estoy de acuerdo con la participación de mi hijo/a en esta investigación.

Nombre, Cargo y Firma

Fecha

He leído la información en esta carta y estoy de acuerdo en que mi hijo/a aparezca en materiales de audio y video para el propósito de esta investigación.

Nombre, Cargo y Firma

Fecha

List of Critical Questions Used During the CLRAs

I created a list of predetermined critical questions to guide the book discussions. During the CLRAs some of the questions changed or disappeared. Questions were added to this list during the CLRAs, at the teacher's discretion.

Seven Blind Mice

- Does this book have a message? What is it? (What is this book/author telling you?)

- Where do you think the author got the idea for this book from? (Do you think something happened to the author in his real-life to make him want to write this book?)

- Why did the 6 mice see something different, if they were all looking at the same thing?

- Why did the illustrator only show parts of the elephant on pages 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28? What did you see on pages 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28? Was your perspective different from the perspective of the (color) mouse?

- Why did the author use the word 'blind' to describe the mice? Are all of the mice blind? Did the mice ever get their entire sight back?

- What did this story help us learn about ourselves? About the world?

- What did we learn from the book, 'Seven Blind Mice'? Is this important? How could we share this with others who don't know the importance of perspectives?

- Does this book remind you of any other books we have read this year?

The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs

- Who is talking in this story? Who is not talking in this story? Whose perspective is given? Is this different from the 3 little pigs story that you read before?

- Is anybody else in the story like Al? Is this why no one else likes him in the story?

- If the 3 pigs were to tell this story, what would they say? If the reporters and/or cops were to tell this story, what would they say?

- In this story, is Alexander T. Wolf really *big* and *bad*?

- Who do you think gave Alexander T. Wolf the name of the *Big Bad Wolf*? Why was this name given to him? Is this a fair name for him? What can we change his name to?

- What does the author want us to think of Alexander T. Wolf? The pigs? The reporters and cops?

- What did this story help us learn about ourselves? About the world?

- Have you ever felt like the wolf feels in The True Story of the Three Little Pigs? Have you ever gotten in trouble for doing something big and bad, but no one let you explain your side of the story? Have you ever gotten in trouble for an accident? If so, is that fair?

- What did we learn from the book, '*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs'*? Is this important? How could we share this with others who don't know this?

- Does this book remind you of any other books we have read this year?

When comparing this version to the traditional version of the story:
- What is the wolf's name in both versions?

- What words would the author use to describe the wolf in each version?

- What words would the author use to describe the pigs in each version?

- How does the illustrator draw the wolf in each version?

- How does the illustrator draw the pigs in each version?

- Why does the wolf go to the pig's homes in each version?

- Why do the pigs not answer the wolf in each version?

- Which version of the story do you like better? Why?

- Which version of the story do you think is true? Why?

- Is there a way to find out which version is true?

- Have you ever disagreed with someone about something that happened? Did you figure out what really happened?

- When you have two different stories of the same event, how can you figure out which story is true?

Click, Clack, Moo, Cows That Type

- Does this book have a message? What is it? (What is this book/author telling you?)

- Who talks the most in this story? The animals or the farmer?

- Is there a 'bad guy' in this story? Why do you think ---- is the 'bad guy'? Think about ---'s perspective.

- Does the 'bad guy' talk more or less in the story? Why?

- Does the 'good guy' talk more or less in the story? Why?

- If the animals did not know how to type (write) would they have been able to fight for themselves? Is there power in words?

- Do you think that the farmer would have given the cows and the hens the blankets if only 1 animal would have written the letter? Do you think 1 person or a group of people have more power?

- What does the author want us to think of the animals? The farmer?

- What did this story help us learn about ourselves? About the world?

- Can animals ask for what they want or fight for their rights in the real world? Who has to speak and act for them?

- Do your words have power?

The Day the Crayons Quit

- Who talks in this story? Duncan or the crayons?

- If Duncan talked, what would he say to his crayons?

- Is there a 'bad guy' in this story? Why do you think ---- is the 'bad guy'? Think about ---'s perspective.

- If the crayons didn't know how to write would they have been able to go on strike? Is there power in their words?

- If only 1 crayon would have gone on strike, would Duncan have changed how he used his crayons? Is it better to work alone or together with other people?

- What did this story help us learn about ourselves? About the world?

- Which color is used to represent skin? What other colors could the author have used to represent skin? Is it fair that only 1 color was used to represent skin?

- Do you usually use the color red to color hearts, purple to color grapes, grey to color elephants, green to color trees, yellow to color the sun, blue to color water, pink to color

princesses? Why? Is it usually what you see around you? Do other images influence how we color our own pictures?

- If the main character of the story were a girl, would the pink crayon have the same complaint? If the main character were a girl, which color do you think would be the least used? Why do you think that some colors are for boys and some colors are for girls?

- What other words or images do we see in our class library books that show us what's for girls and what's for boys, as in clothes, behavior, toys, games, jobs, etc?

Appendix C

Small Group Interview Questions

I used these interview questions twice with each group of participants. During the interviews, some questions were modified, shortened, and/or extended for comprehension and/or elaboration.

Interview Questions:

- During story time I've noticed that you seem to enjoy listening to me read books. Why do you like listening to these books?

- What does it mean to read?

- Look at the books that we have read this year. Which are some of your favorite books? Why?

- Do you think the books we read have a connection to our real world? Why or why not?
  - Clarification: Do the books remind you of the world around you? Do you see your world in the stories we read?

- What do you feel when we finish reading a book? (teacher-researcher can refer back to the book covers from question #3)

- What do you learn from the books we read in class?

- What activities do you like to do after we read a book?

Author's Biography

Ana Karina Rodriguez Martinez is currently living and teaching in Medellin, Colombia. She works at a private bilingual school in the rural outskirts of the city as a preschool English teacher. Her past experiences include teaching English as a Second Language and Spanish language and culture at various elementary and middle schools in New Jersey, USA. She holds a B.A. in Spanish from William Paterson University and a K-12 New Jersey Standard Teaching Certificate as a teacher of Spanish. She is a candidate for the MA in Learning and Teaching Processes in Second Languages from Unidersidad Pontificia Bolivariana (2017). She is also a teacher-researcher at the Literacies in Second Languages Project. She expects to continue researching critical literacy with young ELs and hopes to find a way to combine her research with her passions of teaching and traveling.