Almost ten years ago, Perez (1999) suggested that if diaspora is a history of dispersal coupled with myths and memories of a homeland where alienation in the new surroundings often fosters a desire for eventual return while a collective memory reconstructs the cultural group's history whether real or imagined, then Chicanos are appropriately diasporic. When considering diasporic groups throughout history, the current relocation of high numbers of Latinos are unique in that this particular group is largely settling in the southern region of the United States—very close to their homeland of Mexico, which in a sense makes them both diasporic and nondiasporic (Calafell, 2004). The situation gets even more interesting due to the fact that some Latino immigrants are now living illegally on land previously governed by their native country. The close proximity of new home to the "homeland," creates a situation of living with the heart, the mind, the soul, and the identity in two places. In addition, since the United States is historically a "nation of immigrants," and many of the newly arriving illegal immigrants brave the dangerous journey to be reunited with family members legally living in the United States and who are productive U.S. citizens, there is little acculturation that takes place due in part to the strong cultural, religious, and familial ties to the homeland of Mexico. This in itself presents a new type of diaspora—one where the displaced group is living dually, thus creating a dual American culture or dual diaspora.

Public school teachers, who are trying hard to meet the challenge of the rapidly growing numbers of Spanish-speaking, non-English students entering the classroom, see the "dual diaspora" on a daily basis. Many public school teachers—who lack background and experience in teaching non-English speaking students—are puzzled by the dual culture presented by the illegal immigrant child. However, U.S. law requires all children of school age to be enrolled in either a public or private school by a certain age. Therefore, the illegal immigrant who is not a citizen of the U.S. is entitled to a fair and equal education. Upon entering the classroom, the Latino child—with strong family, religious, and cultural ties—is somewhat feared by the general teaching population. Relying on media images of Latinos who are commonly portrayed as gang members, thieves, drunks, and criminals, many teachers become highly alarmed when they observe students creating artwork that illustrates elements of the Latino culture. Prompted by the dual diaspora and dislocation that school-age children are dealing with, drawing and

illustrating is a process that seems to come naturally to them and which is non-threatening in that is does not require mastering the English language to create. However, there are two critical issues that have been observed that—in many cases—are preventing the non-English speaking student from creating art. These include:

- Lack of funding for art programs where students can attend classes at least one hour per week that are devoted to visual arts, and
- Fear on the part of school administrators and teachers who view Latino students' art as "gang tagging," violent, and inappropriate for the classroom.

The situation is alarming in that when learning a second language, there is an affective filter that can get clogged. According to Krashen and Terrell (1988), the affective filter contains all of the non-classroom elements that prevent a child from learning a new language. Situations, learning environments, and other classroom factors that produce anxiety when learning are considered aspects of the affective filter. By eliminating these aspects, the second language-learning environment becomes one that is non-threatening, comforting, safe, and conducive to learning. Perhaps one of the most important techniques used to alleviate the affective filter is to remove the demand for immediate language production and expression in the new language. By removing the demand to immediately speak English, students are given the opportunity to gain confidence and to learn at their own pace without the pressures involved in language production. One way to assist in removing the demand to speak immediately is to have students draw and create illustrations. However, when administrators and teachers prevent students from using illustrations and drawings to express themselves in the early stages of language learning, they contribute to clogging the affective filter thereby halting language acquisition. The stories students have to share about their identity, culture, and displacement remain untold as their voice is suppressed when they are not given opportunities to create.

The situational milieu of the second language classroom involves the free expression of students—whether the expression is verbal, musical, or visual in the form of artwork. The premise of this study began with three overarching questions stemming from the idea

that English language learners be engaged in activities that involve free expression through visual art. The following questions framed the study:

1. Does free expression in the form of artwork assist in alleviating the affective filter aspects involved in language acquisition and if so, does the absence of free expression halt language learning?
2. Can teachers learn about diaspora, dislocation, and cultural identity from immigrant students' artwork and if so, how can this data inform practice?
3. Do opportunities for free expression assist in developing student voice, thereby, creating a non-threatening environment for communication?

The study—which took place in an urban middle school classroom that served English language learners who spoke primarily Spanish as the first language—examined artwork created as a means of free expression while learning a second language. Artwork designed by ELL middle schoolers was collected, analyzed, and coded according to emerging themes. Following an action research approach with a strong qualitative stance, the researchers gleaned information regarding, a) culture, b) language learning, c) displacement and relocation, d) religion, e) cultural views regarding gender, and d) identity through the analysis. Elements of the dual diaspora, dislocation, and connection to the homeland described a strong voice and reflected the art typically found on low rider vehicles and barrio art. Findings were shared with school administrators, regular education teachers, and ESL teachers in order to promote language acquisition, enable voice, develop identity, and provide insights into the cultural ties related to dislocation and diaspora of illegal immigrant students enrolled in public schools.

Review of Literature

The New Latino South and the Dual Diaspora

> *Don't tell me how to live my life*
> *Don't tell me how to pray*
> *Don't tell me how to sing my song*
> *Don't tell me what to say*
> *'Cuz I believe that miracles happen everyday*
> *I don't care what you say,*

> *I'm gonna do it my way.* ("My Way" from the album *Sacred*, Los Lonely Boys, 2006)

The lyrics above illustrate the identity that is emerging and that represents the new population of English language learners in today's schools. With an overwhelming number of immigrants coming to the United States from Spanish speaking countries, the cultural identity of this new immigrant population is like none other in that many of the aspects of the homeland culture are remaining intact. In a study conducted by Kochhar, Suro, and Tafoya (2005), it is reported that Tennessee is among the "new settlement" areas of the southern region in the United States. Among the ten fastest growing states, Tennessee ranks fourth in the number of Latinos who immigrated to the area. An analysis of growth indicates that from 1990 to the year 2000, the Latino population grew by 278 percent. This percent far exceeds the overall increase of Latinos across the United States, which was 58 percent. Now in excess of 91,000 in Tennessee, this unique population explosion is being driven by immigration primarily from the neighboring country of Mexico. The population consists mostly of young males, who secure employment, marry and have children. The newly found economic success enables these young families to travel between the U.S. and Mexico, therefore, retaining many of the cultural elements of the home country. However, U.S. Census data reports that only 43 percent of all Latinos in the new settlement areas speak English well (*Pew Hispanic Center Research Center Project, 2005*).

Latino immigrants bring cultural identities, experiences, and ways of knowing and understanding to their new locations. Using this information they are able to create models of what knowledges, skills, and dispositions are important and necessary for survival in the new location. Many of these models, however, often present a contradiction (Wortham, Murillo, and Hamann, 2002). Moll and Gonzalez (1997) suggest that equipped with the knowledge that they bring with them to the United States, as well as the habits and experiences of immigrants who have preceded them, Latino immigrants adopt various beliefs and behaviors once they arrive. These behaviors are blended with those carried with them from the homeland. Many imagine themselves as being part of the new community, however, more feel detached and tentative (Chavez, 1994; Anderson, 1983). In addition, an analysis of the states where the numbers of

Spanish speaking immigrants are settling indicate that—historically—these states have been settled by a population made up primarily of African Americans and whites. The new influence of the Latino population creates a new environment and presents a new, dual diaspora, unlike the historic diaspora represented by the African American population (Calafell, 2004). This in itself causes a disconnect due to unfamiliarity of the Latino culture on the part of the general, mainstream population. In addition, the situation also causes many whites and African Americans to become cautious, fearful, and resentful of the new population.

Historically, the concept of a diaspora refers to an ethnic group that maintains sentimental or material links with the land of origin (Gutierrez, n.d.). Shain (1994), suggests that diasporas may also consist of a transnational collectivity whose members maintain a real or symbolic tie to the home country. They may be imagined communities whose identity and composition are being constantly reinvented by ethnic elites, rank and file, or outsiders to the group The diaspora of the African American living in states located within the southern region of the United States has been present and recognized for many years. The African American population can trace their heritage and culture to Africa and the Caribbean. Being forced into displacement and slavery against their will, the African American diaspora spoke many languages, practiced a variety of religions, and represented unique and distinct cultures. With time, these cultures blended into the mainstream culture through the common element of communication—the English language. In addition, due to the circumstances of the dislocation, many African Americans never had opportunities to return to the homeland, therefore, being forced to adopt the United States as the new permanent homeland.

For the past decade, the dual diaspora—represented by Spanish speaking immigrants, many of whom are illegal—is now rapidly growing across the southern states. Flores (2002) describes the population as one that takes its position in U.S. society based on legacies of conquest and colonization with identities "dual identities" representing the immigrant and exile nationalities combined with mobility between the old and new. This dual diaspora has many elements of previous groups, however, there are additional aspects of the new diaspora represented by Spanish-speaking immigrant populations that are uniquely different. These elements include:

- The desire, decision, and choice to relocate prompted by economic factors,
- Large numbers immigrating from one central location (Mexico) thereby keeping the group somewhat intact,
- The proximity of the home country to the new country,
- Common religious practices,
- Historical ties to the United States,
- Political aspects of an "open-relationship,"
- Common language, and
- The idea of retaining the "Mexicanness" (*mexicanidad*)—defined by Gutierrez (n.d.) as folklore, art, holidays, and celebrations.

Bajito y Suavecito (Low and Slow) - Elements of Latino Culture

In order to truly understand a culture, one must understand the elements that make the culture unique and original. When considering critical elements—language, religion, holidays, and customs come to mind. One critical element that is present within the Latino culture is the low rider. Gemat (2001) and Stone (n.d.) offer that the term "low rider" refers to modified automobiles that have been lowered within a few inches of the road as well as the driver who owns the car. The low rider is customized and modified with chrome, spotlights, fender skirts, and color. Perhaps the most unique modification made to the autos is the elaborate drawings and artwork depicting a cultural identity in addition to the owner's individuality. Low riders and lowriding are symbols of the Latino culture in the United States and Mexico. The cars themselves represent family, honor, and respect—which are unwritten social codes for lowrider car clubs. The tradition of the low rider is rooted in the history of the Latino culture and is regionally, nationally, and internationally connected to members of this particular ethnic group (Sandoval, 2003).

The history of the low rider can be traced back to a time in Mexico when people did not actually own vehicles. Community members would assemble in the center of town to parade and promenade around the square showing off their new clothing. The ritual is a Mexican custom associated with ancient courtship ritual. The promenading slowly emerged to the tradition of "cruising" through the barrio. The low rider tradition in the United States can be traced back to the 1930s and early 1940s where it historically

became part of barrio youth culture. Researchers have paralled the popularity of the low rider with the appearance of the zoot suit. The zoot suit was first worn by jazz musicians and consisted of much exaggerated lines, cuts, and colors. The zoot suiters or *pachucos* were making a political statement with their individuality. Slowly the zoot suit became a symbol of Latino pride. Upon returning from World War II, many veterans were short on cash, therefore, the only affordable cars were those which were used or pre-owned. Since owning a car was viewed as a sign of prosperity, veterans—striving to live the "American dream," purchased used Chevrolets as the car of choice. Modifications were made which reflected the cultural history of the Latino in the U.S. Elaborate, airbrushed murals were added to personalize the vehicles. The murals told stories about the culture and ethnicity of the car's owner. Some murals depicted the struggles of the Chicano (Latino) movement. Many of the murals illustrated the zoot suiters, Cesar Chavez, Aztec warriors and battles, and the Virgin of Guadalupe—a patron saint of Mexico (Penland, 2003; Genat, 2001; Bright, 1997; Chappel, in press).

Decades after the first low riders appeared in the United States, the tradition remains strong among Latinos. The elements of low riders are still present as they blend symbols of the dominant Anglo culture and assert counter meanings and values, which colorfully illustrate the Mexican-American, Latino culture. The low rider has grown into an icon and signature emblem of pride, ethnicity, and personal artistic expression. Unfortunately, however, the low rider has also become a symbol of gang violence, counter-culture, and resistance to acculturate into the mainstream American culture (*The Osgood File*, 2002; Lujan, n.d.).

A second critical element in the Latino culture is art and in particular the mural. As seen on the low rider, the mural created on the hood of the car presents a vivid story and picture of the culture. The mural—as depicted in low rider art—takes the elements of poster design and converts those elements into symbolic realism. The artist sets the parameters of imagery, style, and content. These parameters are highly influenced by factors such as *pachuco* street style, the visual bravura of gang graffiti, and other aspects of urban street culture blended with the struggles of the migrant farm worker as well as the dangerous journey of the illegal. Perhaps the greatest influences on the Latino "muralism" include Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Jose Clemente Orozco and Frida Kahlo. Incorporating these influences into the parameters, results in murals that:

- Offer a portrait of critique of the status quo,
- Display the establishment of art measured on its own terms,
- Present visual demarcations between conventually accepted cultural modes and Latino values, and
- Illustrate cultural integrity and self-affirmation (Marin, 2002).

The Latino muralism described above can be viewed in urban areas across the United States and is currently appearing on walls, street signs, and buildings throughout the new settlement areas in the southern region of the U.S. Commonly referred to as "cholo art" or "barrio art," these images reflect social declamatory images, migrant workers, religious ties, views of gender, and family references. Like the low rider art, barrio art also contains illustrative stories of the zoot suits, Aztec symbolism, popular Mexican culture, and the history of the Mexican immigrant (Treguer, 1992; Hughes, 1988; Bojorquez, n.d.).

The Study

Prompted by a combination of factors the researchers took a qualitative stance to research. Based on the practitioner-oriented nature of the inquiry, the researchers considered:

1. The process of second language acquisition,
2. The affective filter involved in the process, and
3. Providing opportunities for free expression in order to foster language acquisition.

It was determined that an action research approach would be followed. Action research—typically employed as a means for improving practice—would enable the researcher to study the situation as participant observers. The study reflected characteristics of qualitative methods in that it involved a teacher-researcher as well as prolonged engagement, participant-observation, and multiple forms of data. The teacher-researcher worked closely with a university professor, who served as a research mentor for the project. The teacher-researcher engaged in interactions with student participants. Daily activities were observed and recorded. Student interactions with each other were recorded and transcribed. The teacher-researcher collected a variety of data including

artifacts, samples of student work, and student-designed illustrations. The professor assisted in observations, data collection, and analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. *Collaborative Researchers*

Researcher	Role
Researcher #1 Classroom Teacher	Participant-observer Collected data Recorded field notes Engaged in interactions Designed and implemented lessons and related activities Analyzed data
Researcher #2 Professor	Participant-observer Assisted with data collection and organization Recorded field notes Engaged in interactions Analyzed data

The study examined artwork designed by second language learners enrolled in an urban middle school. Table 2 and Table 3 provide an overview of the subjects involved in the study. The study was guided by the following overarching questions:

- Does free expression in the form of artwork assist in alleviating the affective filter aspects involved in language acquisition and if so, does the absence of free expression halt language learning?
- Can teachers learn about diaspora, dislocation, and cultural identity from immigrant students' artwork and if so, how can this data inform practice?
- Do opportunities for free expression assist in developing student voice, thereby, creating a non-threatening environment for communication?

The questions were used as a framework for collecting student artwork, coding the pieces, and conducting an analysis. Data sets were aligned with each overarching question in order to ensure triangulation (Table 2). Table 3 illustrates the data collection schedule followed by the researchers.

Table 2. *Overarching Questions and Data Sets*

Overarching Question	Data Set	Data Set	Data Set
Does free expression in the form of artwork assist in alleviating the affective filter aspects involved in language acquisition and if so, does the absence of free expression halt language learning?	Student art samples (completed on paper and digitally)	Subject Journals	Researcher field journals
Can teachers learn about diaspora, dislocation, and cultural identity from immigrant students' artwork and if so, how can this data inform practice?	Researcher field journals	Student vocabulary test scores	Content area assessments
Do opportunities for free expression assist in developing student voice, thereby, creating a non-threatening environment for communication?	Student artifacts (content area work)	Discussions and interactions	Researcher field journals

Table 3. *Data Collection*

Overarching Question	Data Set	Data Set	Data Set	
Does free expression in the form of artwork assist in alleviating the affective filter therefore promoting language acquisition?	Student art samples (completed on paper and digitally)	Subject Journals	Researcher field journals	Ongoing daily collection of data
What can teachers learn about diaspora, dislocation, and cultural identity from immigrant students' artwork that may assist in improving practice?	Researcher field journals	Student vocabulary test scores	Content area assessments	Ongoing observations, weekly vocabulary tests, periodic tests in content

				areas
Do opportunities for free expression assist in developing student voice, thereby, creating a non-threatening environment for communication?	Student artifacts (content area work)	Observations of discussions and interactions	Researcher field journals	Daily observation, ongoing collection of student artifacts, weekly analysis of journal entries

Subjects

Subjects included 34 middle grades students who were identified as English language learners. At the time of the study, subjects were operating at varying levels of English proficiency. The subjects represented several different home countries—differing in length of time in the United States as well as length of time enrolled at the middle school site. The majority of subjects' first language was Spanish. However several spoke Kurdish and Arabic. One student spoke Dinka as the first language. The majority of subjects were male (Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3. *Male Subjects*

Subject	Gender	L1 / First Language
Lucio	Male	Spanish
Fernando	Male	Spanish
Emerzon	Male	Spanish
Octabio	Male	Spanish
Cristian	Male	Spanish
Steven	Male	Spanish
Stephen	Male	Spanish
Leonardo	Male	Spanish
Guillermo	Male	Spanish
Wallaut	Male	Kurdish
Derhat	Male	Kurdish
Hamza	Male	Arabic
Yousef	Male	Arabic

Amir	Male	Spanish
Odani	Male	Spanish
Jose	Male	Spanish
Jorge	Male	Spanish
Ismar	Male	Spanish
Rafael	Male	Spanish
Joel	Male	Spanish
Angel	Male	Spanish
David	Male	Spanish
Diego	Male	Spanish
Javier	Male	Spanish
Boris	Male	Spanish

Table 4. Female Subjects

Subject	Gender	L1 / First Language
Judith	Female	Spanish
Carolina	Female	Spanish
Tania	Female	Spanish
Irene	Female	Spanish
Klarissa	Female	Spanish
Melissa	Female	Spanish
Rachel	Female	Dinka
Edilvia	Female	Spanish
Norma	Female	Spanish
Wendy	Female	Spanish

Methodology

The process of action research led the researchers to investigate in a systematic, process-oriented manner. Following guidelines outlined by Sagor (2005), the researchers:

1. Identified and defined the focus of the study,
2. Refined the focus through discourse and dialog,
3. Designed the set of overarching questions,
4. Identified appropriate data sets,
5. Built a data collection plan based on the research questions,
6. Conducted data analysis,
7. Gleaned information regarding findings,
8. Presented and shared findings as a means of improving practice.

Noffke & Stevenson (1995) suggest that there are multiple definitions of action research due to the nature of the process. As a research method, action research is recursive or cyclical in nature—meaning that it does not initiate from an initial question to the formulation of data collection, analysis, and conclusion. Instead, the process begins with a set of overarching themes or questions and progresses in a manner that recognizes emerging patterns, multiple forms of data, and ongoing analysis leading toward an informed plan for improving practice. Perhaps the most unique aspect of action research is that those within the working environment evaluate the situation from the "inside," therefore gaining authentic data and first-hand information. Sagor (2000) sums up action research as a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by practitioners who want to improve their own situation. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the "researcher" in improving or refining situations, environments, and practice. The study utilized the action process within the scope of qualitative methods.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that two types of knowledge play an important role in creating meaning and in developing understanding. First, tacit knowledge is unarticulated, unformulated knowledge such as the type of knowledge we have in the act of "doing." The second type of knowledge—explicit knowledge—is that which can be written down. In conducting qualitative studies, the researcher relies on both types of knowledge to derive meaning from a particular situation. Due to the nature of the study, the researchers took a qualitative stance. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggest that qualitative researchers study a specific setting or situation because they are

concerned with the context of the environment. Taking a qualitative stance, therefore, involves: a) descriptive data, b) concern with process, c) inductive inquiry, and d) seeking "meaning" within the situational milieu. According to Patton (1990), the research design should address specific issues of the inquiry—with considerations made to the purpose, focus, data, and approach taken. In addition, triangulation options were explored in order to address validity and confidence in the findings. Considering the notion that research is conducted to describe a particular phenomenon, understand what is taking place, and utilize findings to inform practice, a formative research model (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte, 1999) was designed.

Research Procedures

The study began with classroom observations of student interactions. Researchers recorded the interactions as reflective field journal entries. Students participating as subject in the study also kept field journals in which they recorded ideas, thoughts, and reflections regarding: a) learning English, b) their experiences in the United States, and c) experiences as middle school students. The researchers identified relevant data sets. Data were collected based on the data collection schedule. Once collected, data were copied and organized according to initial codes. For example, student artifacts were organized by student, type of artifact, and date collected. Copies of original artwork, student work, artifacts, and student samples were made. Originals were organized and stored. Each code related closely to each overarching question. At the end of the data collection period, the researchers re-organized the data sets based on the overarching question. Notes and memos were recorded if any data were connected initially or if data related to more than one overarching question. Unanticipated relationships were noted.

Data Analysis

Once all data were collected in a particular data set, the researchers transcribed information as needed and made copies of all data in order to prepare for analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that there are differing levels of data analysis when working within the qualitative framework. The levels of analysis also involve interpretation. The levels of analysis and interpretation range from low-level, narrative and reporting to a level called, recognizable reality, to the highest level which involves

the constant comparative method of analysis. Due to the time constraints and the nature of the inquiry, the researchers determined that: a) narrative reporting analysis and b) recognizable reality analysis best suited the inquiry.

The researchers attacked the task of data analysis using the suggested procedures outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The procedures included:

1. Organizing the data by creating a system that both researchers would be able to utilize. This included organizing by folder and making duplicates so that the data could be analyzed by two individual researchers at different times. This process assisted with triangulation and comparison.
2. Initial coding of each unit of data. An initial code was assigned data as they were collected. The codes reflected the type of data, date, subject (if appropriate), and the overarching question aligned with the data.
3. Unitizing the data which involved making duplicate copies and re-organizing as needed.
4. Discovery which required the researchers to examine each unit of data in order to identify any emerging patterns, themes, or categories.
5. Defining each category discovered. Defining or "writing the rules" of each category involved assigning a set of attributes to each category and then conducting a re-check of data in order to confirm the category.
6. Exploring patterns and relationships among data which required the researchers to complete a re-examination of all data in order to determine, identify, or confirm relationships.

Researchers conducted the analysis individually—apart from each other. The individual analysis was then compared and confirmed. The researchers collaboratively examined the triangulation matrix in order to ensure triangulation and confirm the collaborative findings.

Findings and Conclusions

As student artwork was collected, samples were analyzed and coded. Analysis led to discovery. During the discovery stage, samples were re-coded and re-organized into emerging themes. Themes developed into categories and attributes of each category were

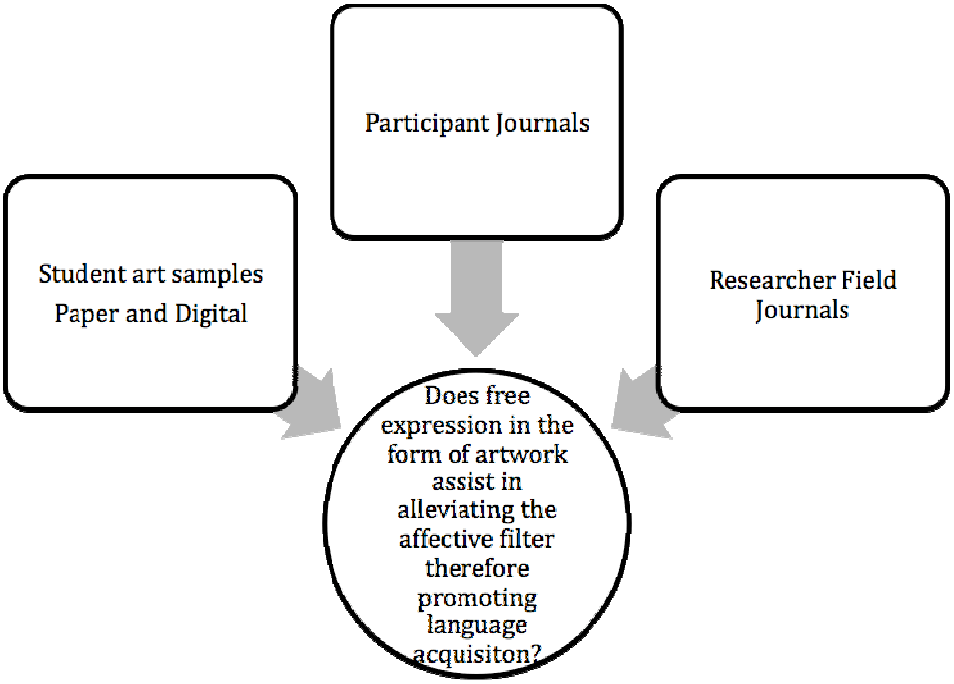
defined. The researchers then examined each category with related sets of student samples paying close attention to relationships and patterns (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Table 5 illustrates the categories and attributes that emerged from the analysis. The following findings were organized based on each overarching question. An explanation of findings follows.

Table 5. Categories, Patterns, Relationships

Category	Attributes
The Mighty Aztecs	Repeated references to *Quetzalcoatl Myth* The "Feathered Serpent" image (authority) *Topiltzin* and *Mixcoatl* (Aztec warriors)
Mexicana y Americano / Blended Culture	Images of *Lucha Libres* / Mexican Wrestlers
Cholo / Chola	Illustrations of *Cholos* and *Cholas* with characteristics including defined and exaggerated makeup on females, sunglasses, facial hair, and elaborate and detailed drawings of the red rose. NOTE: Definitions of the word, Cholo, include: dog—not purebred, coyote, poor, and mestizo gangster.
Viva la Raza / Ethnic Pride	Frequent captions (with diagrams) using terms, *raza, viva la raza, latino, and chicano*
Mamacita!	Detailed drawings of female characters in suggestive poses and revealing clothing

Mi Familia! Gang as Family	Repeated references to gangs
Bajito y Suavecito / Low Riders	Elaborate, colorful diagrams of low rider cars
Religion and Superstitions	Religious illustrations with crosses, eagles, snakes, including references to the Santeria religion.

Figure 1. *Overarching Question #1 Triangulation*



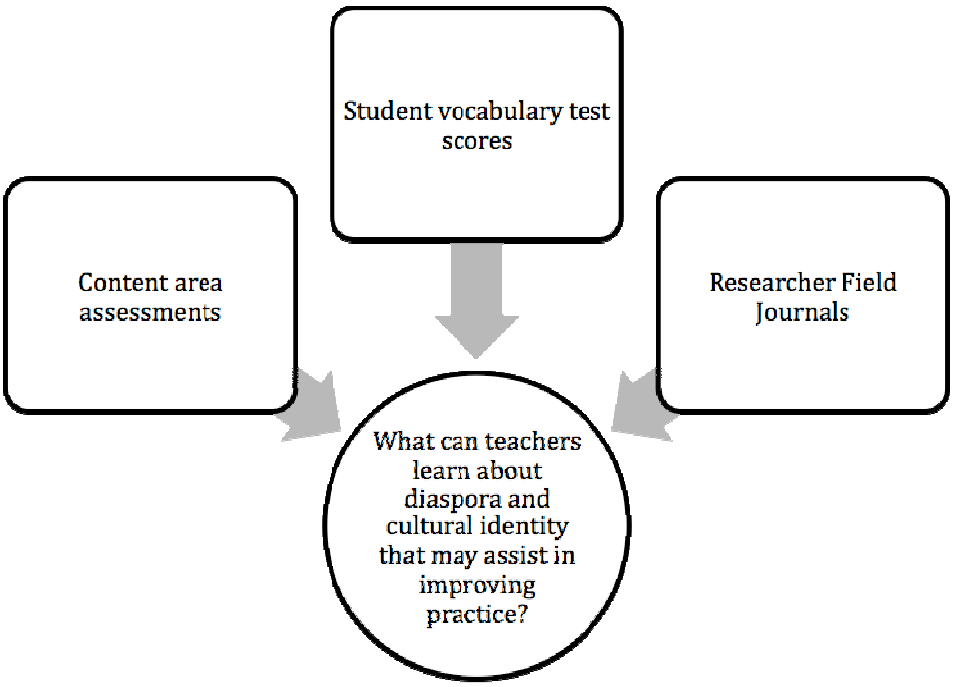
Overarching Question #1: Does free expression in the form of artwork assist in alleviating the affective filter therefore promoting language acquisition?

The themes related to the first overarching question included:

- The Mighty Aztecs
- Cholo/Chola
- Viva la Raza and Ethnic Pride
- Mi Familia!

An analysis of data revealed that as students were given opportunities to create drawings and illustrations, they began interacting and discussing the artwork. The use of vocabulary increased as they shared with each other. The researchers encouraged the students to use time to create and provided materials such as drawing paper, markers, paint, and related art supplies. Artwork was displayed around the classroom. This also encouraged students to continue to create as well as engage in dialogs and discussion regarding their work. The natural flow of language used when describing their art carried over to content area subject instruction and language learning. Students were eager to discuss their artwork and freely talked about what they created. The personal voice that appeared during "art conversations" was clear, strong, interesting, and proud.

Figure 2. *Overarching Question #2 Triangulation*



Overarching Question #2: What can teachers learn about diaspora and cultural identity that may assist in improving practice?

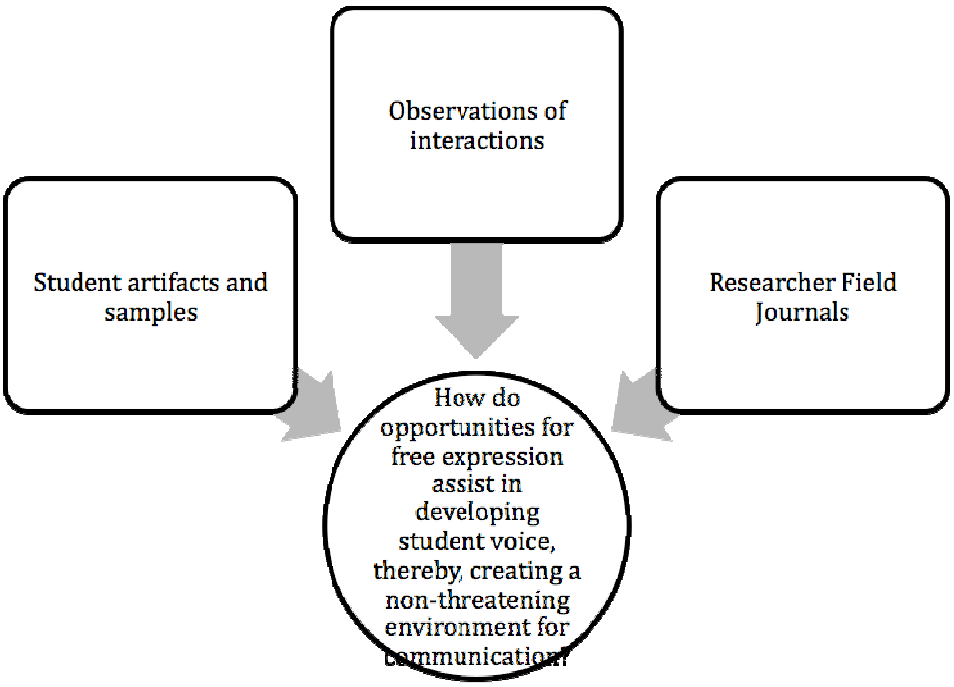
The themes related to the second overarching question included:

- Mi Familia
- Mexicana y Americano Blended Culture
- Mamacita
- Bajito y Suavecito
- Religion and Superstitions
- The Mighty Aztecs

As students continued to illustrate and create, the interrelated themes were repeated throughout the work. The themes were strong and related and reflected a cultural pride. All too often many of us operate under the guise of media stereotypes and lack of knowledge regarding certain cultures. The history of the low rider is one of pride and rich in culture. However, the connotations of the low rider are negative within the larger

framework of the macroculture of north American society. The same holds true of the choice of dress and outfits typically selected by Hispanic females. Prior to the study, the gang references categorized in the Mi Familia theme were repulsive to teachers who shared the students who participated in the study. In addition, prior to the study the teachers discounted the nature of the gang references and how the references related to diaspora and displacement. The attributes of the Mexicana y Americana category reflected the repeated images of the Lucha Libres. In general, many do not have any idea as to what a Lucha Libre is other than what some have seen in a popular movie. A good example of this occurred during the study. At the time of the study, a robbery was reported on the local news. A young, Hispanic female was interviewed as she was the victim of the robbery. Holding her small child she told the reporter that the baby screamed and ran after the thief because he thought that the thief was a Lucha Libre. The comment caused confusion among the viewers as they did not make the connection that the thief was wearing a ski mask and that the little boy associated the mask with a Lucha Libre. The findings were shared with teachers who shared the students across content areas. Operating within a school system located in a protestant-based area, the information regarding religion was especially interesting to teachers who work with the participating students. Many were fascinated with the information and felt that it would be helpful in understanding individual student situations, which in turn would assist in better meeting their needs. The information gleaned from the themes aligned with the overarching question offers insight to teachers—both ESL and regular instruction—regarding the strong cultural ties that are related to diaspora and dislocation. Teachers—equipped with information—are better informed, therefore, are better able to meet the needs of students.

Figure 3. *Overarching Question #3 Triangulation*



Overarching Question #3: How do opportunities for free expression assist in developing student voice, thereby, creating a non-threatening environment for communication?

All the themes repeated throughout the data collected to inform this particular question. Students—with encouragement to express themselves through artwork—steadily progressed in all areas of school. Their communication skills became stronger as they continued to discuss their art work. Providing opportunities for free expression enabled the students to share freely, thereby, developing individual cultural voice.

Further Discussion

Typically immigrant children in a new school environment experience a variety of conflicting emotions. Most of these children are in the new surroundings due to choices made by the adults in their lives, not of their own volition. They are often not proficient with the language and culture of their new location. Many of these children possess few mementos of their homelands, their belongings having been left behind in frequent moves. The memories that these children have are locked away, with limited opportunity to find expression in a non-threatening atmosphere. Yet in school, these students are expected to perform at an academically acceptable level, and function effectively in the

mainstream American culture. The researchers in this study sought to discover whether the addition of unstructured art periods in the English language classroom, with few limitations as to the subject matter of the students' artwork, would foster a sense of belonging and acceptance in the classroom leading to a greater ease in English language acquisition.

The study yielded some surprising results. Initially the students were hesitant to use any other media than pencil and paper. Although art paper, poster paints and acrylics, colored pencils, crayons, and markers were readily available, most of the children would only use regular pencils and copier paper. During the initial phase of the study, the researchers discovered that several of the students had never used crayons before and were astonished not only by the function but also by the physical composition of the crayons. Additionally, students were afraid to draw in class, especially the images that they frequently drew outside of class, having been reprimanded either by parents or teachers for doing so. Some students were unsure of their artistic ability and thus were unwilling to let others view their initial artwork. As the study continued, students became more relaxed not only with the various types of art media, but also with the reactions of their classmates. Students began by copying images that they had seen elsewhere, but eventually began creating original designs. These original art pieces were frequently reflective of their homelands and their ethnic backgrounds. Often the children would collaborate with each other, communicating in Spanish at first, but increasingly in English.

The researchers in this instance were able to encourage the students to talk about their art, expressing themselves in English with greater facility. At first the children would simply ask questions in English about the mechanics of a particular task, but with time, the conversations took on more of an expository feel, as the students offered explanations and interpretations of their artwork. Knowing that they were not going to be reprimanded or judged for the imagery contained in their artwork, the children began to talk freely about the stories they represented by their creations. One boy who frequently drew gang symbols explained that he saw those images when he lived in Miami and that he missed living in Miami. What some may have misinterpreted as gang involvement was to this child merely a longing for his home. The students eventually shared their

interpretations of their artwork not only with the teacher, but with other students as well, with oral proficiency in English skills increasing noticeably.

Although the majority of the students in this study were from various Hispanic backgrounds, an interesting phenomenon was observed among the non-Hispanic children in the class. These students constitute a second minority within a larger minority in this particular school population, being immigrant children who do not speak Spanish. At first these children were especially hesitant to express their own backgrounds and interests, preferring to copy the themes they observed in the Hispanic students art pieces, for example, Kurdish and Arabic children were creating drawings of low riders. As these children became more relaxed with the art supplies and process, they began to create artwork more reflective of their unique backgrounds, such as a Sudanese child drawing a savannah.

The addition of unstructured art periods to the English language classroom in this study lowered the affective filter and contributed to a greater degree of comfort and proficiency with the use of oral English skills. An increased proficiency in written English was observed as well, as students began to either write or dictate their stories about their art in English. As their sense of accomplishment increased, so did the children's self-confidence. They began to expect and experience success in other areas, such as content area instruction. These immigrant children had begun to find their own voice.

Suggestions for Improving Practice

Visual art in the English language classroom makes a perfect bridge from the past world of the immigrant child to his present circumstances. There is a minimal use of oral or written English, yet such language experiences can be added to the art periods as the instructor sees fit.

- Have a wide variety of art supplies in the classroom, with frequent opportunities to use them. Require that the students try the various types of media at least once.
- Incorporating art experiences in the various content area subjects. For example an initial art project may include having the child draw and color a map and flag of their home country. Then ask the students to create images that remind them of

their home country. Ask them then to illustrate a memory of their new country, whether good or bad, and explain that illustration to someone.

- Encourage the students to talk and write about their artwork, but do not force it. The expression will come freely as the child becomes more adept at the various types of expression, whether artistic, verbal, or written.
- Create an atmosphere where all students feel comfortable expressing themselves. Once children learn the rules of etiquette in art periods, the same courtesy and acceptance will be more easily applied in other areas of school.
- Allow the children opportunities to celebrate and display their art for the general

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