The Affective Dimensions of Learning at El Pueblo Mágico: An Analysis of the Practice of El Maga Letter Writing

Daisy Merrill Pierce

University of Colorado Boulder, daisy.pierce@colorado.edu

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THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS OF LEARNING AT EL PUEBLO MÁGICO: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICE OF EL MAGA LETTER WRITING

by

DAISY MERRILL PIERCE
B.A., Williams College 2003

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Colorado Boulder in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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An Analysis of the Practice of El Maga Letter Writing

Written by:
Daisy Merrill Pierce

Has been approved by the department of Educational Psychology / Learning Sciences for the
School of Education at the University of Colorado Boulder

____________________________
Dr. Susan Jurow

____________________________
Dr. Elizabeth Dutro

____________________________
Dr. Kris Gutiérrez

____________________________
Dr. Dan Liston

____________________________
Dr. Amy Wilkins

Date ______________________

The final copy of this dissertation has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both
the content and form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above
mentioned discipline.

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Pierce, Daisy (Ph.D., Educational Psychology / Learning Sciences)

The Affective Dimensions of Learning at El Pueblo Mágico:

An Analysis of the Practice of El Maga Letter Writing

Dissertation directed by Professor Susan Jurow

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined how affective dimensions of learning are expressed in children’s writing by looking at the practice of El Maga letter writing at the after-school club El Pueblo Mágico. In educational research there is a growing understanding of the intersection between emotions and cognitive learning, and toward that end this study investigated one way in which children expressed emotionally charged topics through writing to a mythical cyberwizard, El Maga, and the responses they received. Data analysis was completed using Critical Discourse Analysis, through the conceptual lens of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory. This study draws attention to how the informal mode of communication between the students and El Maga can be leveraged to promote experimenting, by way of written language, with social and emotional topics in a powerful and productive way. This exploration of how the textual artifacts of Gmail unveiled the emotional component of students’ learning emphasizes the importance of attending to how El Maga’s responses to children’s letters are purposefully framed. The significance of the practice of letter writing at El Pueblo Mágico calls for an equally intentionally designed approach of responding to the emotionally charged topics in children’s letters. This has implications for how the organizers of El Pueblo Mágico think about and enact the function and objective of El Maga. Additionally, this study aimed to contribute to an already ongoing conversation about how sociocultural learning theories can more explicitly account for the affective dimensions of learning.
DEDICATION

To Millie, Mumzy, and Dad for your unconditional love and endless support.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Dear El Maga,
You're not real. You're not magic. You can't fly. You can't go through things. You're ugly! You have a beard. Are you a boy or girl? Do you have a bubblehead? What's your name, bubblehead? Do you have a mustache and a beard? Do you have a brain? Do you have clothes? Are you just ugly? What's up? Do you play any sports?
I play basketball. I play soccer, baseball, I play everything. I'm in 4th grade. 4th grade is good. I'm almost the oldest here. I am not the oldest in Pueblo Magico. I hope I am when I am in 5th grade.

This letter might leave you wondering, who is El Maga, and why does this kid feel comfortable asking so many cheeky questions? In this study I will explore the potential of drawing out the affective dimensions of learning through children’s writing to a magical cyberwizard at an after-school club. In this example, the student is being brutally honest by immediately challenging the story he has been told about the mythical cyberwizard, yet engaging with El Maga by sharing about himself as well. He is polite with his greeting, “Dear El Maga”, and impertinent when he says: “You’re ugly!” This letter is one example of the richness of children’s writing in this context of the after-school setting, and provides a unique lens on studying an environment that is purposefully designed for engaging emotions and children's experiences through writing. The tone of impertinence points to the freedom of expression within this form of dialogue, and the student’s hopes for continuing to be part of El Pueblo Mágico speak to the enjoyment of the program. This letter is just one of many thousands sent to the cyberspace wizard, known as El Maga. So, how did this all come to be?

In 1981, almost thirty-five years ago, an innovative after-school program was created by Michael Cole and the Laboratory of Human Comparative Cognition at UC San Diego as a university-community collaboration. Known as Fifth Dimension, the program was designed with
diversity of the human experience as part of the principle ideology. Since that time, institutional and community settings across the United States, and around the world, have implemented Fifth Dimension after-school clubs, providing a unique learning experience for elementary school children and college students. Fifth Dimension programs are educational activity systems that are specifically designed to offer elementary school-age children an environment in which to explore a variety of technology-mediated games and gamelike educational activities during the after-school hours for the purpose of advancing academic achievement and literacy skills, as well as to provide college students with practicum experience for understanding learning and development (Cole, 2006). Five years ago, El Pueblo Mágico (the magical village) was established as a Fifth Dimension club by Professor Gutiérrez, modeled after her years of experience at Las Redes in Los Angeles, California. Located in Lafayette, Colorado, El Pueblo Mágico is a collaboration between the University of Colorado Boulder and Alicia Sanchez International Elementary School. As the name suggests, El Pueblo Mágico endeavors to infuse a magical element to the informal learning environment; where play, imagination, and creativity intersect with learning.

El Pueblo Mágico is a space where mediational tools, such as games, technologies, letter writing, hands-on activities, and science experiments are used to encourage the appropriation of a variety of skills and knowledge amongst the participants. These tools are intentionally and deliberately chosen to assist students, both undergraduates and elementary children, in managing their interactions and achieving their personal goals at site through play (Cole, 2006). One such mediational tool that has been used at El Pueblo Mágico is Gmail and a Google education site.

1 Las Redes (Networks) is another Fifth Dimension after-school club, located at a port-of-entry urban elementary school near the Los Angeles International Airport (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999).
2 The current social learning platform used at El Pueblo Mágico is iRemix. “Remix Learning provides an online platform for schools, cultural institutions, libraries, museums, and after-school programs to create their own customized social learning network. The iRemix platform is a hosted, cloud-based customizable social learning platform affordably available to schools, institutions, and organizations seeking to safely and securely connect children and adolescents with curriculum, extended learning and mentorship opportunities” (Remix, 2013, para. 1).
Through Gmail students can share their thinking, learning, and project work with each other and the patron of El Pueblo Mágico: El Maga. With the use of technology, students and El Maga communicate, write back and forth to one another, via a social learning platform that enables students to develop a digital identity, take risks and make mistakes, and can be a transformative experience for learners. I chose to focus on the El Maga letters as mediational artifacts with great significance for the participants in the El Pueblo Mágico activity system. As Lupton (1998) argued, mediational

[objects not only serve as means by which notions of style and membership of sub-cultural groups may be communicated to oneself and others. They may also function as part of social relations, supporting emotional bonds between people. Some objects are vital to the development and maintenance of emotional relationships between people. Instruments of communication, such as writing implements and greeting cards, fulfill the function of directly conveying how someone feels via words, as do electronic technologies such as computers that are interlinked. (p. 149)

The Cyberspace Wizard: El Maga

In the mythology of the Fifth Dimension after-school club, there exists the mystical cyberspace wizard known as El Maga (some clubs use the names the Wizard, the Wizardess, Proteo, or Golem). “[T]his figure acts as the participants’ patron, the provider of games, and the mediator of disputes – as well as the sometimes irritating source of computer glitches and other misfortunes” (Cole, 2006, p. 7). Besides being the mischievous and playful patron of the after-school club, El Maga’s role includes mediating children’s learning by promoting the values of the program, providing feedback and new challenges to students as they write to El Maga about their activities, encouraging students to develop identities as learners, and exemplifying the creative genius of one’s imagination. Along with having various names at various after-school
clubs, El Maga’s role is also flexible in terms of how the wizard is leveraged for student
learning. For example, El Maga has been used to promote mathematics skills (Khisty & Willey, 2013; Razfar, 2012), literacy practices for both in and out of school settings (Baquedano-Lopez, 2004; Hull & Schultz, 2002), and emergent academic identities for dual language learners (Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, & Pierce, 2011; Vasquez, 1994). This after-school program is meant to be a space of community outreach, rather than a homework club, with the objective to help students learn in ways that make them feel like empowered learners.

As the whimsical and mythical figurehead, El Maga ensures an element of play as children engage in joint activity learning tasks, and gives the adults at site a chance to play along with the students in an imaginary world with cyberspace wizards. The true identity of El Maga is meant to be unknown, ensuring “the adults can collude with the children in the pretense of the figurehead’s existence and thereby play with them” (Cole, 2006, p. 27). As an organizing principle at Fifth Dimension sites, the mixture of, and productive tension between, play and learning creates a non-traditional learning environment. In this space, the Fifth Dimension model gives rise to “zones of development otherwise not evident in traditional classrooms. In sociocultural theory, play provides the environment for natural learning to occur” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999, p. 89). El Maga also reorders power relations between adults and children at the after-school club. Adults and children at site can share with El Maga any problems that arise, and El Maga will reply with words of wisdom. “When conflicts arise, adults need not confront children directly, since it is the figurehead, not a participant, who has the power to adjudicate disputes” (Cole, 2006, p. 27). El Maga communicates with the children primarily in writing, through community letters and personal letters. In doing so, the magical cyberwizard “provides many different occasions for children to engage in reading,
writing, and wordplay and to use communication skills more generally” (p. 27). Across various Fifth Dimension settings, El Maga has been considered a benevolent overseer, an arbiter of disputes, and a fiction-in-action character, much like the spirit of Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny.

Students can practice writing in a context without repercussions (e.g., marked-down grades) providing the opportunity to develop literacy skills in a fun and meaningful way. In the student letter below he made inquiries about El Maga’s appearance, age, and pets, told a story about once having a dog of his own, and shared what games he played that day at the after-school club. Despite having spelling, grammar, and punctuation mistakes throughout, the student’s message is easily understood.

Dear elMaga,
Is this how you look like please tell me. If not I could find another picture should I or not. And just talking about that how old are you and do you have any pets. I use to have a pet but it barcked to much so my dad didn't want it so we gave it away. Oh today I played Battleship I lost VS kid named Jarod he sunck two of my ships and I sunck one of his what do you think. BYE.

Writing to Maga is a playful learning space with many resources for students to draw on when composing letters, such as language, pop culture, and social experiences. El Maga promotes all of this in order to help children gain a better sense of themselves as self-regulated learners. The
affective\textsuperscript{3} dimensions of learning help students do this because this site is deliberately designed for allowing students to engage with emotions and their experiences through writing.

El Maga was created intentionally as informed by the theory that underlies the Fifth Dimension program. As I argue, El Maga also creates an opportunity for students to engage in the affective dimensions of children’s learning and problem solving through writing. For example, elementary students will often write to El Maga expressing their feelings towards El Maga, and their interest in figuring out more about who El Maga is. At the after-school club students experience a freedom of exploring how to express themselves in email letter writing that is not typically afforded by traditional classroom dialogue. Perhaps this is due to El Maga being a cyberwizard, and seemingly not real, in the otherworldly sense, to the students. This flexibility empowers students to openly and candidly express themselves. The excerpt below is another example of a student exploring the social dimensions of their interactions with El Maga, by examining who El Maga is, and sharing about themselves too:

Dear El Maga

Thank you m for the realyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy nice letter. It made My heart explode. do you have a wii b3cause we played wii today and I have a wii. How many family members im guessing you have alote. I have at least 100 some here and some in mexico. I like hot cheetos

It is important to note that El Maga is framed with a hybrid identity (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999) as deliberately all-gendered. The name “El Maga: is

\textsuperscript{3} As argued by Ochs and Schieffelin (1989), I am using the term “affect” as broader than just emotions. Throughout this paper the affective dimensions of learning include emotions, feelings, dispositions, and attitudes. Ochs (1996) defines affective stance as “a mood, attitude, feeling, and disposition, as well as degrees of emotional intensity vis-à-vis some focus of concern” (p. 410).
intentionally grammatically incorrect: “El” is masculine in Spanish and “Maga” is feminine; however, for the purpose of making El Maga an all-gender character, both the masculine and feminine forms were used in the naming of the Fifth Dimension patron. In order to stay true to the mystique of El Maga’s gender identity, in this study I have avoided using the binary and gender specific pronouns he or she. I instead use ‘Maga,’ ‘wizard,’ or ‘they’ (although grammatically incorrect) because the English language does not yet have a commonly used gender-neutral pronoun⁴.

**Current Study**

In my dissertation study, I explored the intersection between emotions and cognitive learning taking place through the after-school community’s interactions with El Maga. I focused my research at El Pueblo Mágico, the after-school program for 2nd – 5th graders. This site was an ideal location for my study for several reasons. First, El Pueblo Mágico, like other Fifth Dimension sites, aims to create “a structure for ongoing interaction that capitalizes on diversity and brings together children and adults of various ages and from various cultural, economic, religious, and racial groups” (Cole, 2006, p. 5). This was key for my research focus, finding a place where learning intersects with potentially emotionally consequential issues. Second, El Pueblo Mágico is theoretically grounded in sociocultural learning theories, such as the work of Vygotsky (1986), cultural-historical activity theory (Cole & Engeström, 1993), communities of practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and communities of learners (Rogoff, 2003). At El Pueblo Mágico, the theoretical framework is influenced by theorists “who argue that if an environment is to be conducive to development, social participation in activities that are meaningful to the participants must play a role” (Cole, 2006, p. 8). Third, this after-school program has not been

---

⁴ Multiple and ever-expanding labels to describe the many different non-binary identities are in development, along with the occasional use of bespoke pronouns, such as “ou” (Lowder, 2013; Urquhart, 2015).
designed like classrooms historically have to keep separate the affective and cognitive aspects of learning. Although my intention is to one day inform classroom practice, El Pueblo Mágico allows for the intersection of emotions and learning in a way that was most beneficial to this research project. Finally, in collaboration with the University of Colorado, El Pueblo Mágico is a practicum site for future teachers. Having such a space for teacher education students to interact, play, and learn with children can provide them with insight they may not otherwise acquire from traditional classroom practicums, such as how teacher-student relationships play into the intersection of learning and emotion. “As Cole points out, after-school programs can reorganize learning such that typical student-teacher relationships and participant structures are turned on their heads” (Hull & Schultz, 2001, p. 47). As a result of this after-school program transforming well-established classroom dynamics of teacher-student relationships and roles, it provides a unique environment for examining topics, e.g. the affective dimension of learning, which have historically been downplayed and devalued in traditional educational settings.

In this study I completed an analysis of the letters that students wrote to El Maga and the responses they received through Gmail. Although previous researchers (e.g., Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999; Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, & Pierce, 2011; Hull & Schultz, 2001) have looked at the letters and noted their value for children’s development, especially in regards to literacy practices for dual language learners, the letters had not been examined in terms of the intersection between emotions and cognitive learning. El Maga conversations provided a good opportunity for me to look at this intersection because of the opportunity children had to write about their feelings in regards to the developmental and social
context of El Pueblo Mágico, as well as look at if, and how, the responses the children received from El Maga took up those issues.

El Maga helps sustain the culture of collaboration and promotes meaningful participation, socialization to the culture of the setting, and affiliation among participants through ongoing and highly personalized dialogue … For example, [the students] hypothesize about who El Maga is, ask questions to help them resolve issues or conflicts that emerge in the club, or narrate events in their lives as members of larger communities. (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999, p.89)

It is through asking El Maga personal questions, and El Maga responding, that the process of building rapport begins. Having a bi-directional conversation allows the students to relate to El Maga.

Having outlets like Gmail for communication is another central practice at Fifth Dimension sites.

Implicit in much of the foregoing is our belief that the development of communication skills in many media is of positive intellectual benefit to children. There are many theoretical justifications for emphasizing communication skills. For example, Vygotsky is perhaps best known for placing communication – the mediation of activity through language and other “psychological tools” – at the center of his theory of language, thought, and development. (Cole, 2006, p. 28)

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5 Various members of the El Pueblo community wrote the responses children received from El Maga over the years. At the start of the program five years ago, the site coordinators took on the role of El Maga. In more recent years the undergraduate students who work with the students at the after-school club wrote back as El Maga. Currently, one Learning Assistant is in charge of ‘being’ El Maga. Having adults from site take on the role provides El Maga the omniscient quality of knowing how each and every student has participated in the joint activity and group projects during the day at El Pueblo Mágico.
Sharing with each other and writing to El Maga is a significant mediational tool at El Pueblo Mágico, and an important component of how the learners engage in the activities at site and their collaborative problem solving. “El Maga, the mythical cyber wizard who serves as sage, friend, and confidante for the citizens [of Las Redes] and who comes alive through the cultural practices of the community” (Gutiérrez et al., 2011, p. 246) might have to create and invite the engagement of emotion in the correspondence with El Pueblo Mágico students. In this sense, El Maga engenders the affective dimensions of learning and El Maga letter writing is an interactional achievement.

My collection of data sources, specifically El Maga letters, at a site where the theoretical underpinnings were congruent with my own was important for my goal of understanding how sociocultural learning theories could account more comprehensively for the affective dimensions of learning. A Fifth Dimension program is a powerful site for transformation: “change in the participants; their practices; and their social contexts of development” that is likely also a place where emotionally consequential issues will arise (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010, p. 102). Therefore, the hybridity of the space lends itself to investigating, observing, and understanding the intersection of emotion and learning. The way El Maga is framed, with a hybrid identity, as deliberately all-gendered, sustaining cultural and linguistic differences, and the central question that students often try to answer revolves around El Maga’s identity and personal characteristics, is what made letters to El Maga so significant in relation to my research questions.

**Research Questions**

In this study I aimed to understand how the textual artifacts of Gmail unveiled the emotional component of students’ learning, so as to help me participate in an already ongoing conversation about how sociocultural learning theories account for the affective dimensions of learning. Emotions permeate all human activity, and in this study I focused on how emotions
were revealed through the production of artifacts using Gmail. This is not to suggest that other practices in the activity system of El Pueblo Mágico do not involve emotions, but El Maga letter writing was a key practice of El Pueblo Mágico where students were most likely to reveal emotionally consequential issues. The questions driving my research were:

- How were the affective dimensions of learning revealed through the production and engagement with Gmail letters at El Pueblo Mágico?
  - How were the affective dimensions of learning made evident in El Maga letters?
  - How were the affective dimensions of learning expressed in children’s letter writing to El Maga? How were the affective dimensions of learning taken up in El Maga’s responses to children’s letters?
- What evidence, if any, is there of how children’s expression of the affective dimensions of learning changed over time?

**Problem Statement**

As human beings, how we think, what we know, how we know it, and what we do cannot be separated from how we feel. Since feelings are central to learning, the study of emotions should attract critical attention and be incorporated explicitly into theories that focus on learning as a social process. As the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1986) argued, if emotion is left out of the understanding of our actions, “thought must be viewed … as a meaningless epiphenomenon incapable of changing anything in the life or conduct of a person” (p. 10). In other words, we must recognize emotions as integral to the understanding of our cognitive processes; otherwise our thoughts are mere incidentals rather than a critical component of our actions. Vygotsky identified the “existence of a dynamic system of meaning in which the affective and the intellectual unite” (p. 10), but his sociocultural theory was underdeveloped in
regards to their interplay. As sociocultural learning theories currently stand, this connection between emotion and cognition has not been taken up systematically.

In this dissertation study, I sought to understand if educators can observe in children’s writing how emotions can be drawn out intentionally, by El Maga, and hence looked at as they affect students’ learning and how sociocultural learning theories can better account for the affective dimension of learning. Sociocultural theories of learning have a great capacity to incorporate emotion into their existing framework, as this perspective already points to the significance of emotion in cognition and action (Lupton, 1998). That is, sociocultural learning theories are based on the premise that all learning is inherently social, whereby there is a social element to meaning making not only through interactions with other people, but also through texts, other mediating artifacts, as well as history and cultural practices. From this perspective, “learning is not an end in itself, but an integral aspect of participating in a community’s activities, and mastering the tools and practices that enable one to do so effectively” (Wells, 2000, p. 59). Emotions are also mediated “in response to individual experience and the sociocultural system of norms about emotional expression in which an individual is located” (Lupton, p. 14). Therefore, it is important to recognize the inherent connection between sociocultural learning theories and emotions.

When we consider cultural practices, defined as repeated, culturally normative actions that are shared with others in a social group, it is possible to see the significance of how emotions are shaped in a similar way and thereby play a role in learning from this perspective. Here I refer to “cultural practices” as a construct theorizing development in such a contextualized way as to bring together thinking, doing, feeling, and becoming (Miller & Goodnow, 1995). Despite sociocultural researchers’ contemporary focus on cultural practices (Brown, Collins, &
Duguid, 1989; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991), researchers in this tradition have not developed a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the relation between emotion and cognition (the affective dimensions of learning) even with sociocultural learning theories predisposed to acknowledge this intersection.

As Vygotsky (1986) and Miller and Goodnow (1995) point out, the affective component of thinking is not separate from the cognitive, and as such, we should not analyze them separately. Rather than viewing emotion as opposed to reason, emotions should be “seen as its indispensable ally,” and learning theories should shift to recognize this symbiotic relationship (Burman, 2001, p. 1). One such way that schools have worked on incorporating emotions into the daily lives of schoolchildren is through Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculums. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) guidelines for educators outlines four primary domains of SEL: (1) life skills and social competencies, (2) health promotion and problem-prevention skills, (3) coping skills and social support for transitions and crises, and (4) positive contributory service. SEL programs are becoming more widely acknowledged as helping build children’s abilities to recognize and manage their emotions, appreciate the perspectives of others, handle interpersonal situations effectively, create positive goals, and make responsible decisions (Greenburg et al., 2003). This investigation was designed to address another way we can attend more critically to the affective dimensions of learning in practice.

When we view learning from the sociocultural perspective, knowledge is explained as being socially and culturally interpreted. “A fundamental claim of this approach is that mental functioning is assumed to be inherently situated with regard to cultural, historical, and institutional contexts” (Wertsch & Toma, 1995, p. 159). Meaning is therefore not discovered, but
constructed [by people] as we interpret the world. All meaningful knowledge then is contingent upon human interactions, between each other and our world. From this viewpoint learning is not understood as a transmission of information or knowledge, but rather as an active process on the part of the learner; a collaborative discovery of meaning. Additionally, as human beings we cannot be removed from our social or cultural environments, and thus we use our experience in the community to give our knowledge meaning. After-school environments provide a unique vantage point from which to observe the intersection of learning and emotions in a community setting. In these settings we can look at individual thinking processes as they relate to the cultural contexts and the social interactions of the students, which provide guidance, encouragement, direction, challenge, and motivation for development. After-school programs, in particular Fifth Dimension clubs such as El Pueblo Mágico, are also a domain in which children’s emotions in practice can be intentionally mediated. In this way, after-school settings can be viewed as a good site for investigating this more comprehensive outlook on learning and development as they relate to emotions.

Understanding the affective dimension of learning in after-school programs and how they play a role in the learning environment and children’s lives in schools, is particularly important, because as Goleman (1995) notes the learning environment is, “of course, as much a social situation as an academic one; the socially awkward child is as likely to misread and misrespond to a teacher as to another child. The resulting anxiety and bewilderment can themselves interfere with their ability to learn effectively” (p. 122). After-school settings, such as the club that I studied in this project, have emotions in play all the time, as they are areas where there can be stimulating or challenging activities, teacher-student and student-student relationships are inescapable, and students experience social, emotional, and academic roles (Boler, 1999). “There
is little point in debating whether emotions have a place in the classroom, because they exist there as they must in any human endeavor” (Bowen, Seltzer, & Wilson, 1988, p. 1).

In seeking to understand if educators can observe in children’s writing how emotions affect students’ learning, I focused on how students expressed in writing topics that directly engaged emotions and cognition; topics that could conjure up strong emotional reactions, such as those involving deep questions about who we are and how others see us, like race, gender identity, religion, class, linguistic background, and cultural differences. These are emotionally consequential issues that may be especially challenging topics for students because of the social and emotional skills necessary for such discussions and understandings of how these issues affect their role as students. I have labeled these issues as “emotionally charged” because they are topics that can be integral to how one views him/herself, identifies his/her position in society, and yet can be difficult to talk about, often resulting in emotional reactions, such as outbursts or social withdrawal. As Tatum (1992) points out, “it is very difficult to talk about these concepts in a meaningful way without also talking and learning about racism, classism, and sexism” (p. 1), so we must engage students in discussions of emotions with “attention to political and cultural differences or analyses” (Boler, 1999, p. 103).

The separation between psychological aspects and academic aspects of students’ thinking are detrimental to everyone, but especially to marginalized students who do not fit into the mainstream racial and ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic categories, for whom these emotionally charged issues may be most personally relevant. As Boler calls it: this is “the “emotional baggage” we all carry into the classroom, stemming from our different cultural,

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6 My use of the term “emotionally charged” differs from the meaning of this term as used by Goodwin & Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin, Cekaite, & Goodwin, 2012; and Wierzbicka, 1992. For these scholars, emotionally charged is used as a descriptor in conversation analysis for a pejorative outcry, as conveyed through affective intensity, vowel lengthening, pitch leaps, and raised volume.
religious, gendered, racialized, and social class backgrounds” (p. 3). For example, students whose race, gender identity, class, religion, or linguistic background are not the norm, and consequentially these issues are less often discussed in positive ways, if at all. “In an educational context in which all schools are being called upon to provide access and equity to increasingly heterogeneous student populations, the tensions between official discourses and minority discourses should be principal focuses for educational research” (Luke, 1995-1996, p. 21).

Looking at discourse and student writing around these issues is important because the opportunities for students to develop their racialized, gendered, sexualized, classed, religious, or cultural identities can be a place where emotions and cognitive learning powerfully intersect and inform each other. As Vygotsky’s (1986) zone of proximal development demonstrates, we often learn the most when we are challenged and pushed past what is comfortable. In this way, students can learn the most about their differences, and how they feel about them, when they collaboratively develop an understanding of emotionally charged issues through discourse with their peers and adults.

The Significance of Attending to Affective Dimensions of Learning

A main strategy that I used in order to document how the affective dimensions of learning were revealed in students’ electronic communications was to focus on emotionally charged issues that may be consequential (significant to how a student views him/herself and identifies his/her position in society) for the emerging identities of students, as they appeared in the letters students produced. I contend that these were important questions to ask because there are severe emotional issues that are a concern affecting students’ learning. Epidemiological studies indicate that up to 22% of the nation’s youth experience social, emotional, and mental

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7 Discourse, as referred to here, happens among students and adults, but is not limited to the spoken word. It includes conversation, readings of texts, and written discourse. Discourse practice can change form over time and may be associated with social change (Erickson, 2004; Cazden, 2001; Fairclough, 1992).
health issues that require treatment (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran & Merrell, 2009). Furthermore, an estimated 7.5 million children and adolescents suffer from one or more mental health disorders (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran & Merrell, 2009). In 2011 the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System reported that during the 12 months before the survey, 32.8% of students had been in a physical fight, 12% had been in a physical fight on school property, and 20.1% had been bullied on school property in the 12 months prior to the survey (Eaton et al., 2012). Nationwide, 5.9% of students had not gone to school on at least one day during the month before the survey because they felt they would “be unsafe at school or on their way to or from school” (p. 9). Additionally, 28.5% of students nationwide had felt hopeless or sad everyday for at least two consecutive weeks, 15.8% seriously considered suicide, and 12.8% had made a suicide plan in the 12 months before the survey.

More than ever, when we turn on the news we hear stories of students committing suicide because of being bullied at school. According to the Bullying Statistics website (2013), victims of bullying are 2 to 9 times more likely to consider suicide than non-victims. The consequences of bullying do not just culminate with suicides either, but “[a] disturbing element of some of the high profile school shootings in the United States during the past few years has been that some of these youthful shooters were repeat victims of bullying and peer harassment, were unpopular, and they ultimately went on a shooting spree as a way of exacting revenge” (Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008, p. 27).

The Bullying Statistics website also reports that some of the reasons a person becomes a bully are due to cultural, social, and personal history issues, as well as the institution’s standards for the way people treat each other. Furthermore, bullying and being bullied have been linked to serious and long-term effects on the physical and mental health of students; for example, being
bullied is a significant predictor of depression an average of 7 years later (Ttofi & Farrington, 2009; 2011). Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, and Isava (2008) completed a meta-analysis looking at the effectiveness of school bullying intervention programs from 1980 through 2004. As they highlighted, key features of bullying include “intent to harm, the repeated aspect of the harmful acts, and the power imbalance between bully and victims” (p. 26). As such, it is no surprise that bullies are therefore associated with negative outcomes such as poorer academic performance, a higher risk of substance abuse, and aggression being used as a means of problem solving.

Although the statistics are upsetting, efforts are being actively made to improve the social and emotional environment of schools. Evidence-based K-12 Social and Emotional Learning programs have been designed to create simple systems to teach behavior and academic skills. These skills prevent acting out and inappropriate behaviors and aim to create school cultures of connectedness, character, and academic success. The curriculums include training modules in emotional intelligence, social skills, anger management and impulse control, character education, and moral reasoning. For example, one common SEL program used in Denver Public Schools is also one that is considered a model program by the Blueprints Project of the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado Boulder. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is a universal intervention for the reduction and prevention of bully and victim problems with school-wide, classroom, and individual components (Blueprints, 2015).

A school’s social and emotional climate is a significant factor in whether or not the environment is conducive to learning. By better incorporating the affective dimensions of learning into sociocultural learning theories, educators can continue bridging the gap between the cognitive and emotional components of learning. The affective dimensions of learning are at play all of the time, ubiquitous in learning spaces. Through this study, I have come to think about
utilizing a robust and comprehensive way of looking at emotions and learning in a cultural-historical activity system, which provides us with more insight needed to continue understanding how the affective dimensions of learning affect children’s abilities to participate in the social practice of learning.

Given the dynamic relationship between social and emotional development within the after-school environment, I sought to understand what kinds of resources students drew upon, cognitive and emotional, as they navigated the social contexts of the after-school club and expression of emotionally charged topics. In this study I aim to contribute another perspective to the ongoing conversation about our understanding of the intersection between emotions and theories of learning by looking at the discourse around topics such as friendships, family, race, gender identity, class, religion, and language, as they relate to each other in an after-school setting. Recognizing this as a realm where the intersection of emotion and cognition is noticeably prevalent provides a context in which we can capitalize on teaching future teachers how to engage these issues with greater intentionality. I argue that students need to know how to relate to each other, understand one another’s feelings, and talk about issues of personal importance in a way that brings about an awareness of what could otherwise be emotionally disruptive to their educational experiences.
In this chapter I define cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), discuss how the affective dimensions of learning have been conceptualized in psychology, sociology, cognitive science, and philosophy, and explain why I used CHAT to explore and account for the affective dimensions of learning. I will focus on how I studied this component of learning in social practice, using a CHAT lens. In doing so, I outline the perspective I chose to take because it allowed for emotion to be viewed as an integral dimension to learning in the greater activity system of El Pueblo Mágico. Using this lens I analyzed the textual artifacts of Gmail produced by students at El Pueblo Mágico to identify emotionally charged topics as they held the potential to make clearly evident some of the affective dimensions of learning. As discussed in the introduction, emotions have been under-theorized in theories of learning, and although the affective dimensions have a role in CHAT, even this otherwise comprehensive theoretical perspective can be contributed to by studying how emotions play a role in learning as observed in children’s writing at an after-school club.

**Cultural-Historical Activity Theory**

The perspective of learning known as cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) is founded upon the mediating relation between the individual and the collective (Engeström, 1999; 2014). CHAT falls under the umbrella of sociocultural learning theories. From this perspective, we live in a world where our interactions with each other and our environment are mediated by the artifacts of our cultures. Everything we do is in some way shaped or influenced by both the symbolic and tangible tools that we use while navigating through daily actions. We move in and out of, and amongst various cultural practices as we engage with different customs, traditions, and practices of the communities we traverse. Here, “practices are actions that are repeated,
shared with others in a social group, and invested with normative expectations and with meanings or significances that go beyond the immediate goal of the action” (Miller & Goodnow, 1995, p. 6). One such culturally mediated activity is learning. Learning is a dynamic social process by which individuals and groups appropriate, organize, and develop an understanding of the world and its inhabitants. This is a dynamic process in which we question, observe, interact, and identify with our gained knowledge, rather than just acquiring it, thereby changing us and our views as we in turn change our surroundings (Wenger, 1998). Knowledge is privileged with respect to what is a valued enterprise in particular communities, and “knowing” is therefore a “matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world” (Wenger, p. 4).

The conditions affecting learning include the time and space (when and where; the situation and period of one’s life), the members of the community, and the broader historical, social and emotional, and cultural theories and processes that undergird the practices in place. As students in school, we cannot be removed from the social or cultural environments, and thus we use and are influenced by our experiences, and I argue our emotions, which can be productively understood as part of our routine cultural practices, to give our knowledge meaning. From a CHAT perspective, learning is understood as both internally and externally motivated because it occurs through an individual’s participation in the community, also known as an activity system (Engeström, Miettinen, Punamäki-Gitai, & Punamäki, 1999). As explained by Engeström, an activity system is a unit of analysis for understanding the larger flow of human life, where the activity “fulfills the following demands: it is representative of the complexity of the whole, it is analyzable in contextuality, it is specific to human beings by being culturally mediated, and it is dynamic rather than static” (Foot, 2001, p. 66). The combination of the various components of an
activity system, such as mediating artifacts, subject, object, rules, community, division of labor, and history, illustrate the “ways in which cognition can be said to be distributed in that context” (Cole & Engeström, 1993, p. 13). In the activity system, individuals are active agents in their world who, through interaction with mediating artifacts, including one another, are continually shaped by and shape the cultural practices in which they participate, also known as Engeström’s (1999) expansive cycle.

How learning mediates and is mediated by culture depends on how the learning space is organized, factors of the surrounding environment in which the learning space is situated, and the particular members of the community. As Cole (1996) wrote, “in order to give an account of culturally mediated thinking it is necessary to specify not only the artifacts through which behavior is mediated but also the circumstances in which the thinking occurs” (p. 131). Thus, cultural practices are also mediated through the occurrences of our thinking and feeling. Without interactions between people, artifacts, and actions there cannot be cultural meaning; everything is in relation to a larger setting. The cultural practices in which individuals participate have been inherited, but are not static and permanent. Instead, due to the influence of individuals upon cultural practices, these practices are dynamic. Thus, they are greatly influenced by history. “The historical origins of the cultural medium lead directly to the conclusion that all culturally mediated behaviors are social in their essence, and social in the dynamics of their origin and change in the course of a single human life” (Cole & Levitin, 2000, p. 70). Although the history of each component in the activity system cannot necessarily be observed and directly identified, it is essential to be aware that it always plays a role in how they interact and influence one another.
Historicity, in the sense that every object and person has a history of constitution and the quality of being part of history (as opposed to myths and fictional characters), does not necessarily assume specific inevitable action, but rather produces schemas or scripts that predict typical practices in a given context (Cole, 1996). An example of this that will be particularly important in relation to the affective dimensions of learning is the script as described by Cole (1996). He asserts that scripts are “event schemas that specif[y] the people who appropriately participate in an event, the social roles they play, the objects they use, and the sequence of actions and causal relations that appl[y]” (p. 126). D’Andrade argued that “[s]uch schemas portray not only the world of physical objects and events, but also more abstract worlds of social interaction, discourse, and even word meaning” (as cited in Holland & Cole, 1995, p. 478).

Using El Pueblo Mágico as the example of an activity system [see Figure 1], I will discuss each of the components and their relations, often symbolized as a triangle. I will use the triangle only as a useful heuristic to represent the activity system. At the top of the activity theory triangle are the mediational tools: the activity guides, Gmail, laptops (amongst other tools), dialogue between participants, hybrid language practices, and the personal experiences the students bring with them. When writing about mediational tools, Luria (1928) argued, “instead of applying directly its natural function to the solution of a particular task, the child puts between that function and the task a certain auxiliary means … by the medium of which the child manages to perform the task” (as cited in Cole, 1996, p. 108). There is a dual conceptual and material nature of mediating tools, whereby mediation through artifacts applies equally to objects and people. Most of these mediating artifacts are operationalized in part by their tangible characteristics, since they are defined by solid boundaries; the activity guides and the various tools can all be seen and touched. The less tangible mediating tools, the discourse, the personal
experiences, racial, socioeconomic, gender, religious, and linguistic diversity, and I contend emotions, although not visible to the naked eye, are just as meaningful. Such mediational tools as these promote zones of proximal development and transform the division of labor of the activity system, thereby expanding learning (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 2009).

Figure 1. Cultural Historical Activity Theory Triangle

For the purpose of this study, the textual artifacts of Gmail letters that students produced were the important mediational tools I focused on to answer my research questions. According to Vygotsky (1986), speech and language are the most important sign systems we use in the process of cognition, thinking, and meaning making. Artifacts, in particular El Maga letters, functioned as products of speech and language demonstrating how the affective dimensions of learning were
revealed at El Pueblo Mágico. Because the letters are some of the cultural artifacts of El Pueblo Mágico, a sociocultural perspective building on Vygotsky’s key insights would lead us to recognize that they are important mediational tools of mental and emotional activities, with the capacity to reorganize the experiences for the students at the after-school club, and as such these artifacts of El Pueblo Mágico afford the expression of the affective dimensions of learning (Holland & Cole, 1995). “To state this in other words, we propose that beyond the function of communicating referential information, languages are responsive to the fundamental need of speakers to convey and assess feelings, moods, dispositions and attitudes” (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989, p. 9).

In an effort to achieve lasting, robust, expansive learning, the mediating tools at El Pueblo Mágico also include cultural and hybrid language practices, and life experiences; as evidence, the letters children write to El Maga demonstrated these mediating factors too, in the stories the students told and the language(s) they chose to use. Furthermore, mediational artifacts were significant to my effort of understanding the affective dimensions of learning because mediation “highlights the general human capacity to invent, build, and use tools to transform our environment, as well as the capacity to create and use sign systems for meaning making and to develop as a result. Rather than acting on the world directly, our physical actions are mediated by the tools we build and use to work in and transform the environment” (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013, p. 208).

Another component of the activity system is the division of labor. This describes the various positions that participants take on, each contributing to the activity system in a unique way. The different relationships between participants within an activity system, as they engage in joint activities, are captured by this notion. “In joint activity, participants contribute to the
solution of emergent problems and difficulties according to their current ability to do so; at the same time, they provide support and assistance for each other in the interests of achieving the goals of the activity, as these emerge in the situation” (Wells, 2000, p. 55). The dynamic interactions are shaped by the relationships as “they build over time, by the availability of particular undergraduates, and by the needs of particular children at any given moment” (Cole, 2006, p. 18). The division of labor in the activity system of El Pueblo Mágico includes the site coordinators, undergraduate course learning assistants, the undergraduate course students (“Amigas⁸”), the elementary aged children (citizens), El Maga, and the theoretical underpinnings of a 5th Dimension site. The community of learners at El Pueblo Mágico is intentionally created so that the hierarchical boundaries between age, socioeconomic status, language, and experience are collapsed; as undergraduates are continually exposed to a tangible instantiation of the theoretical foundations of a Fifth Dimension site through an educational psychology course focused on how people learn.

Organizing for productive social relations is not trivial in this setting, as children’s learning at [Las Redes] is mediated through new technologies and new social arrangements in which they participate in joint activity with undergraduate students enrolled in a university course on language, culture, and human development and a companion practicum experience at [Las Redes]. (Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, & Pierce, 2011, p. 236-237)

The roles that the students and adults play in this particular activity system are most often identified by who initiates the beginning of El Pueblo Mágico activity, who is in charge of the

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⁸ Amiga is the label used to identify the undergraduate students who participate in the after-school club El Pueblo Mágico as a practicum site for their Educational Psychology course. Amiga, the feminine form of friend in Spanish, indicates that the undergraduates are positioned as familiar companions with the children in the after-school program, rather than being situated as more powerful hierarchically.
materials and supplies, who creates the products, and who is collectively regarded as more knowledgeable about the site proceedings. The members of El Pueblo Mágico facilitate the learning process and the joint activities provide content for discussion, creation, and collaboration. How the participants facilitate the learning can, however, vary from situation to situation.

The next aspect of the CHAT activity system is the *community*. For the activity system of an after-school program, the community entails the school in its entirety, as well as the town / city the school is located in, and in this case the University affiliate undergraduate class. Although the activity system may be small, in and of itself, there is a larger setting in which each system is a part. The activity system of an after-school club or classroom is situated in the community and society at large. Therefore, it is important to study activity systems in their full social, cultural, and historical contexts where social relations, power, identity, and knowledge are constructed and reproduced in relationship to broader social ideology. The *subject* signifies the individuals within the activity system, while the *object* is the intended goal (outcome of the activity system for those individuals). At El Pueblo Mágico the *objective* is for the *subject*, the students, to participate in expansive learning; using all the resources they have to learn. This includes the theoretical underpinning of the program recognizing how the affective dimensions cannot be separated from the *subject’s* learning. For example, El Maga letter writing is a key practice of El Pueblo Mágico, and one of the joint activities where students are most likely to reveal emotionally charged issues. These material artifacts have a collectively remembered use and continue to be modified (Holland & Cole, 1995) as the after-school program changes and grows to incorporate the goals directed by the *objective* of the El Pueblo Mágico activity system.
The last point in the activity system to define, *rules*, are “the norms and sanctions that specify and regulate the expected correct procedures and acceptable interactions among the participants” (Cole & Engeström, 1993, p. 7). *Rules* constrain actions within an activity system because of the explicit norms and conventions conveyed through this aspect (Cole, 1996). The Constitution of El Pueblo Mágico, the guidelines of Sanchez Pride, and the basic principles of the elementary school (no food or drink in the library, good behavior in hallways, being respectful of materials and supplies) are what define the *rules* at El Pueblo Mágico.

Finally, *history* is seen as overlapping and influencing all portions of the activity system. A major component of the cultural-historical activity theory is that the history of everyone and everything within the activity system is part of the process of ongoing development. The concept of history from this perspective cannot be “reduced to ontogeny or biography” (Engeström, et al., 1999, p. 26). In reality, all domains of societal practice transform and are transformed by the interaction between the actors and mediating artifacts within the system, and the historical contexts of each. Because of the all-permeating nature of *history*, it is the most difficult component of the activity system to operationalize. How history affects each aspect of the triangle cannot necessarily be seen or heard by simple observations of an activity system.

The sociocultural learning theory CHAT is not only useful as a descriptive lens, but also as an analytical one. It is important to note that within an activity system there are tensions, or contradictions. These areas of difference are not problematic to the objective of the activity system, but rather intrinsic to learning spaces. “Most important, CHAT … is subject to inner contradictions, which compel researchers to update, transform, and renew constantly it so that it becomes a reflection of its object” (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 218). Engeström (1999; 2014) argued, tensions and contradictions are requisites for changing practices, but are not sufficient alone.
Researchers must also engage in a reflexive practice in order to recognize and imagine new possibilities and create the necessary change (Lave, 2012). Tensions are the engine of change in an activity system; contradictions are part of the transformation process that allows for expansive learning. “Using ethnographic and discourse analytic methods, we have studied the social practices of teaching and learning … This approach affords analyses across and within various levels of activity. These analyses also make visible the overlapping, interwoven, and hybrid nature of social phenomena” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 2009, p. 287). In order to understand how the affective dimensions of learning can be made known in social practice using a CHAT lens, I discuss how emotions, a factor of the essence to the affective component of learning, have been defined and studied across multiple disciplines.

**Conceptualizing Emotion as Part of Cultural Practices**

In this study, affective dimensions of learning can be understood as the expression of emotion as a cultural practice. This study examined emotions not as a “thing” or an object of analysis, but rather as a practice in which students engaged. Just as students develop other repertoires of practice around activities in the learning space, emotions, and the affective dimensions of learning, should be conceptualized as an activity. I extrapolate this further when I discuss the theories of emotion that inform how this study looks at the affective dimensions of learning in CHAT. Even though I draw upon disciplines and scholars that are not associated with the CHAT perspective, and I employ theoretical arguments outside of the field of education, I use the work to inform how the embodiment of emotions can be viewed as part of cultural practices, which are a key unit of analysis for researchers using cultural historical activity theory.

There are varying theories of emotion and a wide variety of definitions that have been proposed and developed within disciplines such as cognitive science, philosophy, sociology, and psychology; with no generally accepted definition, and relatively little consistency across
disciplines and even within a given discipline (Boler, 1999; Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981; Reisenzein, 2007; Scherer, 2005; Wierzbicka, 1992). Theories of emotion differ, not only by discipline, who is developing them, but also in what ways they are argued to be taken up in everyday lives and learned associatively to become habitual. That is, theories of emotion can range from seeing emotions as a way to engage with and interpret literature, art, or music (Nussbaum, 1990) to being viewed as forming over time to become a subconscious activity that governs our lives and has authority over what we do (Damasio, 1999).

From the perspective of psychologists, emotional processes and states are complex and can be analyzed in so many different ways that an absolute agreement is almost impossible. There are “affective definitions, which emphasize either feelings of excitement/depression or pleasure/displeasure, and cognitive definitions, which emphasize the perceptual/thinking aspects of emotion, particularly appraisal and/or labeling processes” (Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981, p. 349). There are also external stimuli, physiological, expressive behavior, adaptive, multi-aspect, and motivational definitions, as well as others. Scherer’s (2005) proposal to resolve the inconsistency is to define emotions as: the processes of causally linked mental (appraisal, action tendency, subjective experience) and behavioral reaction elements (Reisenzein, 2007). However, this definition is problematic because it requires a behavioral reaction: physiological or facial/vocal expression. As Ratner (2000) explained, “physiological consequents of emotions are equally non-specific” (p. 30) and since there is an indeterminate relationship between an experience and the physiological reaction we should not require such a reaction to be part of the definition, because “[b]iological processes are not specific to particular emotions” (p. 32).

In addition to differing definitions, emotions can be broken down into types (basic/primary or complex) and classifications (episodes or dispositions). Ekman (2008)
classifies anger, fear, sadness, enjoyment, disgust, and surprise as the six basic emotions. For Ekman, non-basic emotions are combinations of these six emotions, which may be called mixed emotional states. Plutchik (1991) proposed eight primary emotions grouped on a positive or negative basis: joy versus sadness; anger versus fear; trust versus distrust; and surprise versus anticipation, with the combination or blending of the primary emotions forming “complex” emotions. I do not attempt to categorize qualitatively different types of emotion or identify specific emotions in this research project. For the purpose of this study, I draw upon various definitions to build an understanding of the affective dimensions to which I refer, which encompasses some of the different categories discussed, yet remains broad enough so as not to disregard qualitatively different types of emotions.

In this research project I view emotions as part of social and cultural practice so as to integrate them more explicitly into CHAT to account for the affective dimensions of learning. I do this by drawing from arguments discussing emotions in a similar way as cultural practices by established theories and theorists, such as de Sousa’s (1987) “paradigm scenarios,” and Hochschild’s (1983) “feeling rules”. I chose these particular theories to focus on because they highlight the learned aspect of emotions, which is an important aspect of cultural practices, and offer a way of understanding the dynamic process through which cognition and emotion are intertwined. As will be more comprehensively discussed in the following section, these theories also fit naturally as a way of framing the discussion of affective dimensions of learning in the cultural historical activity system.

Although I designed this study to focus on mediational tools and cultural artifacts of El Pueblo Mágico to unveil the affective dimensions of learning, this is not exclusively where emotions are situated within an activity system. Emotions as part of cultural practices are also
located in the *division of labor* and *rules*, as well as being infused throughout other elements of the activity system. I will go into this further when I discuss paradigm scenarios and feeling rules as examples of seeing emotions in a sociocultural learning theory. An activity system viewed through the CHAT lens is imbued with the affective dimensions of learning, and as such the examination of emotions is simultaneously facilitated and constrained by the unremarkable existence. Therefore, in this study I focused on the aspects of the activity system where the affective dimensions could be most obviously analyzed; places where students were most likely to express emotionally challenging topics.

I use both cognitive and sociocultural theories to develop my conceptualization of emotion. Emotions have an undeniable individually interpreted quality to them, however, what we do with our emotions and how we feel in certain situations is socially and culturally constructed. “Emotions function in part as moral and ethical evaluations; they give us information about what we care about and why” (Boler, 1999, p. xviii). Thus, through the process of identifying the aspects of emotional theories that I align myself with, my understanding of emotion, I will in part be describing what I believe it means to be human, as an individual and also as a social being. I will share examples as a way to instantiate this definition and enliven my theory.

I conceptualize emotion as an intertwined and integral component of thinking. As mentioned before, as human beings, how we think, what we know, how we know it, and what we do cannot be separated from how we feel. However, theories of learning from the perspective of psychologists do not account for this relationship. “Their [intellect and affect] separation as subjects of study is a major weakness of traditional psychology, since it makes the thought process appear as an autonomous flow of “thoughts thinking themselves,” segregated from the
fullness of life, from the personal needs and interests, the inclinations and impulses, of the thinker” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 10). Vygotsky was not the only psychologist to recognize the relationship between emotion and cognition as missing from the field’s conception. Similar to Vygotsky’s rationale, Ratner (2000), a cultural-psychologist, wrote:

> Emotions are feelings that accompany thinking. They are the feeling side of thoughts; thought-filled feelings; thoughtful feelings. Emotions never exist alone, apart from thoughts … We may be fascinated by intense feelings; however, we should not be deluded into thinking that they have an independent existence apart from cognition. They are as dependent on cognition as weak feelings are. (p. 6)

Like Vygotsky, Ratner argued the belief that emotions and cognition are separate entities is misguided. Instead, he viewed feelings and thinking as symbiotic, as opposed to the common conception that feelings cloud one’s ability to think clearly.

> This differs from how cognitive psychologists originally considered emotions: as by-products of cognitive evaluation and therefore not worthy of study in their own right; that cognitive processes are the causal antecedent of emotions (Lazarus, 1982). However, current research “suggests that emotion and cognition often work together in the creation of emotional experience - although at times one or the other “takes the lead” neither takes precedence over the other” (Denham, 1998, p. 5).

> My conceptualization of emotion draws from a sociocultural perspective, whereby I argue that emotions and cognition are socially and culturally constructed. Emotions are mediated by the circumstances in which they occur and “they are formed by cultural processes, their qualities reflect these cultural processes, and they function to perpetuate cultural processes” (Ratner, 2000, p. 6). What we feel is mediated by how we think and what we think, while
simultaneously how we analyze situations and events, is mediated by our feelings regarding such experiences. Hence, the practice of emotions mirrors the dynamic nature of cultural practices; through interaction with mediating artifacts, including one another, people are continually shaped by and shape the emotional practices in which they participate. This is key for how emotions and CHAT intersect: addressing the divide between the collective and the individual in praxis and theory. “Third-generation cultural-historical activity theory constitutes a suitable framework for understanding the phenomenon of collective emotion and its relationship to individual emotion” (Roth, 2007, p. 59). As Damasio (1999) wrote:

It is through feelings, which are inwardly directed and private, that emotions, which are outwardly directed and public, begin their impact on the mind; but the full and lasting impact of feelings requires consciousness, because only along with the advent of a sense of self do feelings become known to the individual having them. (p. 36)

For example, occurrences of anxiety are informed by previous events of a similar nature, and the cultural concepts associated with situations that are anxiety producing. “The kind of emotion that is felt in a particular situation depends upon an understanding (concept, representation, schema) of it. Understanding is not simply attaching a positive or negative value to a situation, it is understanding the characteristics, causes and consequences of an event” (Ratner, 2000, p. 9).

Although people can feel anxiety from several situations, the context of the situation mediates their understanding of where the feeling is coming from and what they can do with it. As Boler (1999) states:

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9 Third-generation cultural-historical activity theory is a term used by Roth (2007) to explain the variations in the developing and expanding versions of the learning theory. Roth refers to CHAT that accounts for emotion, motivation, and identity as third-generation. From this point forward I will not be differentiating between generations of CHAT.
I question the Western philosophical and psychological tendencies to think of emotions as “natural,” “universal” responses, located solely within the individual. Rather, in each case an emotion reflects the complex dynamics of one’s lived situation. The two resistant responses above each reflect particular reasons and perceptions; and we understand the significance of the two different situations by understanding the different “histories” of resistance (anger, passion, fear, rigidity) that shape the emotional expressions. Emotions are inseparable from actions and relations, from lived experience. On the whole, education is impoverished in both theory and practice in accounting for the particularities of emotions in relation to lived power relations. (p. 2)

The unfolding and development of emotional understanding is crucial for young children. “Closer study of the development of understanding and communication in childhood, however, has led to the conclusion that real communication requires meaning … In order to convey one’s experience or thought, it is imperative to refer them to some known class or group of phenomena” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 7). Emotions are important for social transactions and communication because they are an immediate and salient contextual indicator of how others and oneself are experiencing a situation. “Clearly, knowing why an emotion is expressed and what its aftermath is likely to be aids a child in learning to regulate the behavior and affect of self and others” (Denham, 1998, p. 63). One way children learn the socially constructed scripts of, and dialogue around emotions is through participation in everyday occurrences, thus an important aspect of constructing the social scripts about emotions is a child’s own experience with models of a variety of emotions.

Sociologist Hochschild’s (1983) theory on “feeling rules” is one way to understand the guiding elements and cognitive processes of a child developing an appreciation of the
consequences of emotions. As she defines them, “feeling rules” are a means to establish “the sense of entitlement or obligation that governs emotional exchanges” (p. 56). We use feeling rules to evaluate our emotional state; as such they vary depending on the context and can change because they are not “fixed principles of emotional life” (p. 63). Feeling rules are just that, guidelines that regulate our emotions for particular events and advise us to “live out roles that are specific to an occasion” (p. 68). As young children we learn the feeling rules of our communities from our own experiences and through socialization with adults. “Feelings are shaped by the cultural understandings that constitute the norms and expectations in social environments regarding how to feel, how to respond to events and experiences, how to express feelings, how others feel, and how to respond to those feelings” (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013, p. 217). We learn what to feel in different situations, how to interpret and manage those feelings, and how to react to the feelings of others we are around. For example, social institutions, and the social conditions within, engender emotional responses. Cultural processes “mediate how people respond to the circumstances they face by shaping how people think about and give meaning to social conditions … and their expectations about the emotional habits of different kinds of people” (Wilkins & Pace, 2014, p. 390).

When the feeling rules modeled by adults are skewed, for example as with a borderline personality disorder\(^\text{10}\) (BPD) parent, children learn feeling rules that do not match the norm. Over time, and through interactions with people other than the parent, such children will begin to discover and understand that their expectations for how they should feel in certain contexts is

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\(^{10}\) Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is characterized by a pervasive instability of moods. People who suffer from BPD often have a hard time with interpersonal relationships because of this instability. The highly unstable patterns of social relationships affects not only the people with BPD, but also those close to them - spouses, children, siblings, and friends (NIMH, 2015). Another way to describe the instability of moods is to say that the rules of the game are always changing. What might make an individual with BPD happy one day will set them off in anger the next.
distorted. Yet, because feeling rules are not permanent and unchangeable children are able to learn new ones as they gain experiences in other social settings and are exposed to other models. However, it is important to note here that the parent-child relationship is the most influential in the process of learning feeling rules. “Not only are parents’ emotional displays ubiquitous in children’s daily lives, but children are also motivated to understand feelings in such an important relationship … Consequently, children learn a great deal about the causes and consequences of emotions from their parents” (Denham, 1998, p. 66). Therefore, the feeling rules modeled by parents are not only the primary influence on children, but as de Sousa’s concept of “paradigm scenarios” will highlight, they are the feeling rules most frequently reinforced.

Another theory of emotion that influences my own conception comes from a philosopher’s standpoint. de Sousa (2010) describes emotions as a way of seeing qualities of a situation more prominently, in a way that would not have been clear without emotions. His term “paradigm scenarios” are the way through which we learn the stories characteristic of different emotions. “These are drawn first from a daily life as small children and later reinforced by the stories, art, and culture to which we are exposed” (de Sousa, 1987, p. 182). Additionally, de Sousa would argue that an emotion needs to be reinforced in order for it to continue to persist; an “essential part of education consists in identifying these responses, giving the child a name for them in the context of the scenario, and thus teaching it that it is experiencing a particular emotion” (p. 183). Paradigm scenarios involve two aspects: first, a setting with the qualities and objects of specific emotions in that particular situation, and second, “a set of characteristic or “normal” responses to the situation, where normality is determined by a complex and controversial mix of biological and cultural factors” (de Sousa, 2010, p. 12). Through the process laid out by de Sousa, we build repertoires of emotions, much as the cultural-historical activity
theory reveals we build repertoires of practice in different activity systems. Our repertoires are habitual behaviors, or blueprints, for how to express, understand, and regulate emotions – intricately interdependent component skills of emotional competence (Denham, 1998). “Once our emotional repertoire is established, we interpret various situations we are faced with through the lens of different paradigm scenarios. When a particular scenario suggests itself as an interpretation, it arranges or rearranges our perceptual, cognitive, and inferential dispositions” (de Sousa, 2010, p. 13). For example, the child of a BPD parent will have a repertoire of emotions that is only reinforced over time with that particular parent. In situations with “healthy” parents, friends, and peers, the child will adopt a different repertoire. Just as feeling rules will shift over time for a child in this scenario, the paradigm scenarios they use to associate with various emotions will also change as they recognize their inaccuracies. When the rules of the game a child lives by are always shifting and unstable, as with a BPD parent, the repertoire of emotions they use to navigate their world will reflect the need to be versatile and almost chameleon-like.

**Learning as Involving Both Cognition and Emotion**

As I stated earlier, the affective dimensions of thinking and learning are not separate from the cognitive, and as such, we should not analyze them separately. Shifting from a philosophical theory of emotion to the educational context, one way to view the role of formal education on emotions is the concept of enculturation:

[L]earning to use the tools and appropriating the norms of a community and its culture. From a very early age and throughout their lives, people consciously or unconsciously, adopt the behavior and belief systems of new social groups. Given the chance to observe and practice *in situ* the behavior of members of a culture, people pick up relevant jargon,
imitate behavior, and gradually start to act in accordance with its norms. (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989, p. 34)

According to Oatley and Nundy (1996) we can divide enculturation into two components that cannot be divorced: cognitive and affective. The first integral element, “cognitive,” includes the learning of cultural skills, such as reading, writing, mathematics, oral presentations, practical skills, and declarative knowledge. These provide students access to cultural capital – the educational or intellectual non-financial social assets which can promote social mobility – and the ability to contribute to society; it also provides a sense of self, as well as the acquisition, representation, transformation, and use of knowledge. The second essential factor, “affective”, comprises emotions, attitudes, and interests. Oatley and Nundy argue that the affective component is the one that guides a student’s attention and is the primary determinant of achievement in school because “emotions are functional and indeed central to mental and social life” (p. 267). Emotional development has been seen as the foundation on which everything else is built; early emotional interactions provide the important schematic structures for social understandings on which culture and individuality depend. Thus, in their reasoning of the role of emotion in education, they assert that schooling is one of the most important forms of enculturation, because “one of the goals of education is to build a culturally useful understanding of emotional understanding and interaction” (p. 268).

As previously noted, Vygotsky argued the importance of acknowledging the intersection of emotions and cognition in the process of learning. Vygotsky also recognized that schools were cultural, political, and historical environments with diverse groups (economic class, cultural background, etc.) having differing access to power. Despite being critical of the schooling system, Vygotsky “highlighted the potential of education to foster the development of
individuals with social, cognitive, and emotional competencies as well as a disposition toward ethical action … At the center of the educational process was the social environment of the school” (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013, p 202). Furthermore, Vygotsky’s historical work foregrounded current day research (Roth, 2007; Roth & Lee, 2007; Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013), which continues to study and emphasize the importance of the affective component of learning. “The key point for Vygotsky was the potential of a variety of educational environments—including those constituted with caregivers, with educators in formal and informal contexts, and with peers—to facilitate social, cognitive, and emotional development through learning” (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, p. 202).

*Highlighting Emotions in CHAT*

In this study I was interested in looking at how learning takes place socially, culturally, and historically in order to better appreciate the affective dimensions of learning and their relationship with CHAT. “Although the pioneers of activity theory always have taken emotion as an integral component, and although there is evidence of the central role emotion plays in … cognition and teacher education, present users of CHAT do not customarily attend to this aspect” (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 214-215). With the theoretical connection between emotion and cognition forged so long ago by Vygotsky, and the evolution of CHAT asserting the intrinsic role of emotions, motivation, and identity; I will now outline an example of how I see the affective dimensions of learning already being operative in the activity system. The *rules* and *division of labor* recognize how the adults and students participate in the activity system of the after-school program, by playing particular social roles as influenced by historicity, or as having been socially and culturally constructed. In this section I will clarify how the affective dimensions of learning are also revealed in these features of the activity system, by elaborating on how CHAT is already positioned to account for the learned aspect of emotions. In order to do so, I turned to studies of
emotion and affect from other fields so as to identify ways to link back to and expand the theory that grounds my conceptual view. The concepts of “feeling rules” and “paradigm scenarios” suggest three main ideas for how the affective dimension of learning can be integrated into the CHAT perspective – socially, culturally, and historically. In Table 1 below I have summarized “feeling rules” and “paradigm scenarios”, with characteristics of rules and division of labor in bold.

Table 1. Feeling Rules & Paradigm Scenarios in the Context of CHAT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling Rules (CHAT Rules)</th>
<th>Paradigm Scenarios (CHAT Division of Labor)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guidelines that regulate our emotions for particular events</td>
<td>Emotions allow us to see qualities of a situation more prominently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What we learn to feel for specific situations, from our own experiences and socialization (both with the community and with adults)</td>
<td>Emotions need to be reinforced to persist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute to how we interpret situations; act as social conventions of feelings</td>
<td>Repertoire of emotions help us interpret various situations through that lens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding general, shared, latent rules of prevailing moods for particular situations</td>
<td>Stories characteristic of different emotions, drawn from daily life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assumptions about emotions we bring with us</td>
<td>Calibrate emotional repertoires for situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned by association</td>
<td>Learned by association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set of “normal” responses to situations, where “normality” is determined by cultural and biological factors</td>
<td>Set of “normal” responses to situations, where “normality” is determined by cultural and biological factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just as the rules of an activity system drive the guided norms and praxis the participants can participate within, “feeling rules” are social norms that tell people what to feel. “Our emotions and actions must be aligned with the norms and expectations that are found in every social setting. Each setting, each definition of the situation, will require different kinds of emotional responses and thus feeling management” (Unknown, 2011, p. 3). Through “feeling rules” we can evaluate our emotional state in comparison to the established norms. These norms are socially and culturally constructed, and so the expression and function may vary by religion, race / ethnicity, gender, and the display may be differentially distributed by socioeconomic class (Boler, 1999; Hochschild, 1983; Ratner, 2000; Wilkins & Pace, 2014).
Foundational to cultural-historical activity theory is the idea that we must take into consideration how social relationships are demonstrated in the experiences of people within the shared activity (Foot, 2001). One such area in which relationships are of particular importance in an activity system is the *division of labor*. Here we can view the division of object-oriented actions among members of the community (Cole, 1996). The role(s) each participant enacts in the activity system is determined by the *division of labor* with each role corresponding to a different part of the whole. deSousa’s (1987) overview of “paradigm scenarios” offers a way of thinking about emotions as having an intentional structure. Much like roles in the *division of labor*, deSousa’s “paradigm scenarios” have a capacity in the regulation of social life, contribute to defining our priorities (objective of the activity system), and vary in intensity, type, and context, allowing the positioning of activity system members to be seen more prominently.

Hochschild’s (1983) “feeling rules” and deSousa’s (1987) “paradigm scenarios” are useful examples in understanding how people partake in various components of the activity system (e.g. *rules* and *division of labor*), and how CHAT can be further developed to more explicitly account for emotions, yet I will not use them as prominent analytical tools in my examination of Gmail letters to El Maga. The *rules* and *division of labor* are places where feeling rules and paradigm scenarios can facilitate our understanding of the learned aspect of emotions and thereby how we can attend more critically to the affective dimensions of learning. Perhaps most importantly, feeling rules and paradigm scenarios can function as illustrations to help educators understand the context in which the affective dimensions can surface.
CHAPTER III
LITERATURE REVIEW

Currently, there is no research on the affective dimensions of learning, using the CHAT framework explicitly infused with the intersection of cognition and emotion, to study artifacts produced by children at an after-school club. However, there is a rich diversity of work on the topics of emotion, cultural-historical activity theory, and children’s writing. In order to pare down the larger body of work, I approached this literature review by addressing the following questions, aimed at informing my own research in this study:

1. How have researchers conceptualized and studied emotions in CHAT?
2. How have researchers conceptualized and studied emotions in other areas of education?
3. How have emotions been analyzed in text?

As I read research within the targeted topics, I examined how the author(s) conceptualized emotion or the affective dimensions of learning, what analytical tools the author(s) employed in their work, and what key findings the literature highlights that could provide useful for my study. I have reviewed literature related to this project, yet not all of the methodological approaches used by the researchers are applicable to my study of text. I appreciate the insights I became knowledgeable about from these researchers, particularly in regards to understanding emotions and affective dimensions of learning, and this is what I will highlight throughout this chapter. Table 2 below summarizes this information for the research I decided was most relevant.

Although thorough, this literature review does not include everything I read in the process of writing this chapter. For example, I familiarized myself with some of the extensive amount of research on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran & Merrell, 2009; Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, Haynes,
Kessler, Schwab-Stone & Shriver, 1997; Kress & Elias, 2006; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2007), but notwithstanding the areas of overlap, SEL focuses on the teaching of skills, rather than the inherent relationship between emotion and cognition. I also read literature that expanded my understanding of feeling and emotions and their role in education (Ahmed 2004; Behar, 1997; Boler, 1999), but did not directly inform my methodology. I want to acknowledge these researchers whose work I find powerful and valuable, but were beyond the scope for the purpose of this study.

I also explored the research on writing as a therapeutic method to heal trauma or mourn a loss, which has been established as a practice for adults (DeSalvo, 1999; Pennebaker, 2004; Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999), and some studies have compared this to children’s narratives and their well-being (Fivush, Marin, Crawford, Reynolds, & Brewin, 2007; Park, 1999). If children’s writing is a way to examine emotions in the context of learning, it is important to understand that writing has been used for therapeutic purposes for adults. DeSalvo’s (1999) book Writing as a Way of Healing argues that writing has health and emotional benefits. As a teacher, she has witnessed that her students experienced physical and emotional transformations when “they confront their pain in their work” (p. 11). DeSalvo also made the point that writing is a useful tool for so many because it is free.

Although writing has been found to be therapeutic for adults, the research is not as conclusive for the benefits of writing to heal for children. Fivush, Marin, Crawford, Reynolds, and Brewin (2007) found that there were no differences between a group of children assigned to writing about emotional topics and those assigned to the non-emotional writing group, “suggesting that focusing on emotional aspects of stressful events was no more beneficial for children than simply describing their daily activities” (p. 1419). Disregarding the mixed findings
on writing as a therapeutic tool, I chose not to pursue this area further since I focused on emotion as a cultural practice and the affective dimensions of learning being revealed in the activity system, as opposed to a skill, tool, or method that we should implement in classrooms.

In this chapter I organized my discussion by highlighting what I learned from doing this literature review, rather than discussing each piece of research in its entirety. I arranged the sections below in the same order as they appear in Table 2, with my examination and elaboration of the author(s) conceptualization of emotion, the analytical tools they employed, and what key points from the literature informed my own research. As with SEL, and the other areas of almost relevant research, I chose to focus on the literature that aligns with CHAT, and allows for emotion to be considered a cultural practice.

Table 2. Literature Review Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) &amp; Date</th>
<th>Conceptualization of Emotion</th>
<th>Analytical Tools</th>
<th>Relevant Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roth, 2007</td>
<td>Emotion, identity, and motivation are integrally related concepts, and mediate what we know and how we know it.</td>
<td>Uses discourse analysis of talk to provide evidence proposing a way in which emotion, motivation, and identity can be incorporated into Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, as part of its expansion and development.</td>
<td>Describes the pervasive nature of emotions in the workplace: how they work in mediating actions, motivation, and identity; and how people produce and reproduce them as part of the ongoing engagement with the workplace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roth &amp; Lee, 2007</td>
<td>Emotions, along with motivation and identity, are viewed as integral to the functioning of the activity system as a whole; educational researchers need to appreciate that emotions are always tied to the motives and goals of learning.</td>
<td>The authors completed a review of CHAT based studies in order to examine various activity systems and demonstrate that activity theory can inform how research should proceed regarding language, language learning, and literacy.</td>
<td>Authors argue for the future of CHAT research as capable of reframing “entrenched” problems and old ways of thinking about teaching and learning. Research in the psychology of learning, using activity theory, can enhance our praxis across motivation, emotion, and identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodwin &amp; Goodwin, 2000</td>
<td>The authors define emotion as an embodied practice, a social phenomenon; emotion is situated within children’s</td>
<td>Conversation analysis: provides a social rather than individual perspective on language; talk with non-</td>
<td>The “embodied performance of affect” is demonstrated through intonation, gesture, body posture, and timing,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author(s) &amp; Date</td>
<td>Conceptualization of Emotion</td>
<td>Analytical Tools</td>
<td>Relevant Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goodwin, Cekaite &amp; Goodwin, 2012</td>
<td>Emotion is not restricted to the individual who displays it; rather emotions constitute public forms of action. The display of emotion is situated in performance through intonation, gesture, and body posture. Affective stance is a phenomena conceptualized as dialogic and embedded within ongoing interaction within the lived social world.</td>
<td>Central to the investigation of emotion in this study is how the <strong>body is used to display a stance</strong> toward someone else and proposed courses of action.</td>
<td>Other investigative work on emotions has focused on a single face, examined in isolation from indexed talk and the flow of interaction. The authors argue that it is necessary to take into account not only the psychology and facial expressions of the individual expressing emotion, but also the body language and actions of the other people they are interacting with – the person producing the emotional display cannot be examined in isolation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dutro, 2010</td>
<td>The author examines children’s writing in response to the prompt “what are some signs of hard times?” The children’s written responses were filled with accounts of their own difficult experiences and challenges.</td>
<td>Uses the <strong>Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)</strong> of depth-hermeneutics, which argues for analyses that situate the study of texts within the sociohistorical context. CDA focuses on digging beneath the surface of language to reveal the ideology within written texts.</td>
<td>The author found that the curriculum revealed class-privileged assumptions about the economic conditions of the students, it did not allow for possible responses of personal experiences with poverty from the students, and the emotional dimensions of their responses were in fact successful literacy engagement with the text.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dutro, 2011</td>
<td>Emotions are part of classroom life; the <strong>difficult</strong> constitutes hard life experiences of students; sharing of struggles can act as a means of connection between teacher and student.</td>
<td>Uses the field of literary trauma studies, which seeks to understand the role of trauma in literature, film, and significant cultural-historical events. Through this lens, the author considers the <strong>reciprocal process of testimony and witness</strong> of difficult stories in</td>
<td>Difficult experiences enter the classroom, whether they are invited or not; therefore it is essential for educators to be aware of how those experiences serve teachers and students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author(s) &amp; Date</td>
<td>Conceptualization of Emotion</td>
<td>Analytical Tools</td>
<td>Relevant Findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dutro &amp; Bien, 2013</td>
<td>Students carry challenging life experiences into the classroom, described by the metaphor “speaking wound”; some students are positioned within the racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic discourses of public schools, which constitutes a trauma (a wound).</td>
<td>Draw upon trauma studies research and apply it to questions in education, and like feminist poststructuralists they challenge the binaries of self/other and public/private.</td>
<td>Authors argue that it is important to incorporate testimony and witnessing as part of pedagogy that allows for the significant emotional and personal experiences as part of school. Trauma theory is a lens through which we can conceptualize classrooms as spaces in which the framework new teachers are immersed is grounded in the pedagogy of the speaking wound.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luke, 1995-1996</td>
<td>Does not directly conceptualize “emotion”; views language development as connected with socialization, language use with norms and roles, and through conversation with peers and teachers, children learn how to participate in social relationships.</td>
<td>Defines the keywords associated with critical discourse analysis and provides examples of how discourse analysis can be used to address broader sociological concerns about the construction of power and identity.</td>
<td>It is through everyday texts that cultural categories and identities – gender identity, sexual desire, ethnic identity, class, etc - of students (and others) are taught, learned, and established in a hierarchical social framework; CDA can reveal asymmetries in these knowledge-power relations, where text attempts to position, locate, define, and guide readers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luke, 1997</td>
<td>Does not directly conceptualize “emotion”; discusses the educational applications of discourse analysis, and the importance of studying language in classrooms in order to address questions about the unequal social production of “cultural capital”, and about relationships of power amongst social actors and classes.</td>
<td>Critical discourse analysis as the approach to study language and discourse in contemporary social institutions. CDA uses techniques derived from various disciplinary fields; pragmatics, narratology, and speech act theory argue that texts are forms of social action that occur in complex social contexts.</td>
<td>CDA has at least 3 interrelated implications for the sociology of education and educational studies; 1) re-theorizes educational practice to the metaphor of text as an interpretable phenomena, constitutive to all educational endeavor, 2) provides a new set of methodological techniques, and 3) rethinks pedagogical practices and outcomes for the mastery of discourse.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* I have put the analytical tools in **bold** to draw attention to the methods used by each author(s). In the following sections I will discuss these analytical tools and whether or not they were useful in this study.
Emotion as Conceptualized and Studied in Activity Theory

In Chapter II I discussed the capacity for cultural-historical activity theory to incorporate emotion. As previously cited in Roth (2007), he outlines the way in which emotion, motivation, and identity should be included in the “integral analysis of human activities generally, and to mathematical and scientific knowing and learning specifically” (p. 40). In this article, Roth writes about using CHAT for studying learning and knowing in the workplace, specifically a salmon hatchery. His 5-year ethnography of the Canadian Salmon Enhancement Program provides evidence for how emotions are inherently a part of what people do and know in the workplace. As a result of this, he puts forward a way in which the expansion and development of CHAT can embody emotions, motivation, and identity. Although I do not directly address motivation and identity in my framework, Roth’s contribution is useful for my own study in that we both aim to approach emotion as part of the system, rather than external to it and affecting cognition.

In Roth’s description of a more inclusive cultural-historical activity theory there are three aspects of emotion he finds relevant and in dialectical relation to one another. To begin with, people act in pursuit of short-term or long-term payoffs, highlighting the relationship between motives or needs and success, or their possibility. Secondly, unconscious aspects of emotion, emotional states resulting from physical reactions such as neuromuscular, biochemical, and neurological, determine the way actions take shape. Finally, “[e]motions are not only individual, but also collective. Through social mediation, individuals come to know about emotion, but we also shape and are shaped by the collective emotional state of the moment, often denoted by the term mood” (p. 46). This final point is also instrumental to my study, in that Roth’s conceptualization of emotion aligns with the contention that there is a learned aspect to emotions, through interaction with other members of the culture.
Roth’s theoretical groundings are similar to my own, yet the analytical tools he uses focus on talk analysis of interviews and recorded observations. Roth looks for how emotions are revealed through the “analysis of voice parameters such as pitch, pitch contour, speech intensity, and speech rate” (p. 49). Although I recognize the affordances of this type of discourse analysis, I focused on textual artifacts of letters written to El Maga by the children, and therefore I did not have the benefit of using such methods as the computer software package for voice analysis, called PRATT.

Roth and Lee’s (2007) article “Vygotsky’s Neglected Legacy: Cultural-Historical Activity Theory” conceptualizes emotion in much of the same manner as above, also working to augment CHAT towards “recovering more humane forms of education” (p. 188). Their review of CHAT based on previously published studies highlights three goals: 1) review of existing CHAT literature within educational and non-educational (yet relevant) contexts so as to widen the audience; 2) communication of how CHAT has facilitated the reformulation of educational issues in the areas of language, language learning, and literacy; and 3) outlining new ways to approach learning theory and educational praxis. Through the use of vignettes, Roth and Lee articulate how the theoretical approach of CHAT, when used to design school curriculum, allows educators to witness the learning that occurs when students participate in legitimate activity.

As with Roth (2007), Roth and Lee (2007) privilege speech and utterances as the object of language to be studied. Therefore, the analytical tools they utilize focus on showing how activity theory can transform research, which does not directly influence how I will analyze text. However, the authors make a particularly significant point for me to keep in mind as I move forward. When using a CHAT framework it is important not to isolate the various entities of the system because it can lead to misinterpretation of the data by not attending to the “functional
relations between subject, tool, and object” (p. 202). It is key that I do not simplify the mediation between subject (El Pueblo Mágico citizens) and object (expansive learning) by just looking at how the affective dimensions of learning are revealed through El Maga letters, but that I show how the meditational tools undergo continuous transformation. This reflection can provide valuable to understanding the affordances and constraints within the learning activity of writing letters, as well as call attention to the relationship between the letter writers, as it shifts over time.

Roth (2007) and Roth and Lee (2007) addressed my first literature review query of how researchers have conceptualized and studied emotions in CHAT. I will now turn to my second literature review question, attending to how emotions have been conceptualized and studied in other areas of education, such as linguistic anthropology and literacy.

**Emotion as Conceptualized and Studied in Linguistic Anthropology**

In Goodwin and Goodwin’s (2000) article “Emotion Within Situated Activity” the authors’ conceptualization of emotion provides a useful way to look at the affective dimensions and study them in the situated practice of learning. The authors argue that emotion is situated in practice and the sequential organization of action is the key unit for analysis, not an individual’s feelings. As linguistic anthropologists they view language as a social tool in the organization of action. The method of understanding the social perspective, rather than a purely individual psychological view, on language and actions employed by the authors is Conversation Analysis. This analytical method allows for the investigation of the procedures participants draw on to construct and convey their talk and the occasions that happen with it. There is the sequential organization of conversation, an orderliness of generating talk, that provides for

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11 Conversation Analysis (CA) uses data that is collected by audio, and when possible, video so as to capture details of behavior that might otherwise be lost. CA focuses primarily on ordinary conversational interactions (e.g. between acquaintances, friends, and family), looking at details of language structure, including the sequential organization, and participant roles (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). “CA transcends the traditional disciplinary boundaries of social anthropology by providing a perspective within which language, culture, and social organization can be analyzed not as separate subfields but as integrated elements of coherent courses of action” (p. 301).
“rigorous, empirical ways of understanding how participants themselves make sense of the talk they are engaged in” (p. 2) and how the actions are situated within the cultural language practices. Goodwin and Goodwin argue that this organization makes emotion visible when researchers focus on interactions between people, rather than individuals in isolation. “[I]f we are to view children as agents in constructing their social worlds then we need to look at how language is used by children to position themselves in actual interactive situations … [since] emotion is situated within children’s language activity” (p. 4). Although I am looking at text where the sequence one party is responding to is the correspondence between student and El Maga, this does not diminish the importance of language as a social tool for organizing action.

Goodwin and Goodwin combine extensive ethnographic research with video recordings to analyze talk, visible behaviors, and relevant features of the settings where the conversations occur. The authors argue that talk in conjunction with non-vocal gestures mutually elaborate each other creating the organizational framework, which makes emotion visible. “Rather than viewing emotion as lodged within specific semantic categories, we see how it is conveyed through affective intensity or highlighting as indicated through pitch leaps, vowel lengthening, and raised volume” (p. 12-13). The consideration of such means for conveying emotion are particularly important when the authors discuss how emotion can be revealed without the use of a vocabulary. By using a range of different intonations and non-vocal gestures, such as headshakes and hand waves, one is able to communicate meaningfully as an interlocutor. I believe this to be due in part to the fact that emotion is a social phenomenon, and as such it is not just the vocal intonation and gestures that impart the feelings, but also an agreed upon, socially constructed, understanding of what emotion is being expressed in that occurrence.
The authors’ use of conversation analysis, looking at the “embodied performance of affect, through intonation, gesture, body posture, and timing” (p. 26), is quite useful for the assessment of participation in situated activity. Since my data set is exclusively textual artifacts, I find this article helpful in demonstrating how to look at emotions as situated practices and language as a social tool, rather than the methods through which the authors analyzed their data. However, as I will outline in my research design, I extend this theory to argue that through the process of editing text (font style, size, and color, punctuation, emoticons, and inserted / attached pictures) students can express the embodied performance of affect in compositional forms in a similar way that Goodwin and Goodwin look at intonation, gesture, body posture, and timing.

In “Emotion as Stance” by Goodwin, Cekaite, and Goodwin (2012), the authors provide an analytic framework for investigating emotions. In the article, the authors illustrate emotion as “an interactive, dialogic action rather than the expression of something internal to a single individual” (p. 23). This is in contrast to how others have traditionally theorized and investigated emotions in research: as a set of universal, psychological states, made visible on the body of the person expressing the emotion. Although the authors argue that the traditional theorization of emotion is lacking because the environment around the person expressing the emotion is not given systematic analysis, they do find how the body is used to display a stance toward someone else, and a proposed course of action, central to the phenomena being investigated. Additionally, other researchers note that emotion can be displayed vocally, yet most analysis focuses on facial expressions. Therefore, Goodwin, Cekaite, and Goodwin look at prosody – the study of the patterns and rhythm of sound, tone, and stress in language – as well as the ways participants use their bodies to take up emotional stances. Facial expressions, prosody, embodied stances, and movements are all key elements to examine in conversation analysis, but it is the authors’ note of
the “distinctive ways that emotion emerges in unfolding interaction documented in our materials” (p. 24) that I find useful for my view of how affective dimensions fit with CHAT. “In this chapter we have tried to develop a perspective for the analysis of emotion that focuses on how it is organized as social practice within ongoing human interaction” (p. 39).

**Emotion as Conceptualized and Studied in Literacy**

When I started my search for relevant literature addressing the issue of emotions in literacy, I began my search by looking for researchers that examined emotions in children’s writing. In my exploration I came across Dutro’s (2010; 2011) work discussing trauma, testimony, and witnessing in literacy. In Dutro’s (2010) “What ‘Hard Times’ Mean”, the author discusses district-mandated commercial reading curriculum and the written responses of third graders for a literacy unit portraying economic struggles of a Depression-era farm family. Dutro describes how the convergence of the curriculum, children’s lived knowledge about economic hardships, and the connection the students made with the text in their writing revealed implications for research and practice to include and be accountable for recognizing the emotional dimensions as important for analyzing what counts as successful literacy engagement.

The author employs depth-hermeneutics approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This method argues “for analyses that situate the critical study of texts within the social and historical contexts in which language is received and used by audiences” (p. 266-267). In this vein, Dutro uses the way discourse analysis views power as useful to understanding how the language children use position themselves, embedded in larger discourses surrounding them. One of those larger discourses is the curriculum text in the literacy unit. Dutro used CDA to analyze this curriculum’s structure and language, “digging beneath the surface … to reveal its ideological nature” (p. 268). The author also examined the children’s responses for content, how they situated their experiences, themes, tones, and structure of their writing in relation to the
story. The first step in this analysis was to find all references the students made to personal experiences attached to the term “hard times.” The author then considered how each account was related to each other, and finally compared the children’s written responses and the text; “including sentence structure, reference to emotions, and use of the term “hard times,” noting similarities and differences” (p. 269). The depth-hermeneutical approach to CDA, as described above, offers a useful outline for my own textual analysis; however, I will not have the larger discourse of a literacy curriculum to compare with the student’s El Maga letters. The larger discourse, in this case, includes how the students view, and are viewed by, their friends, family, teachers, the community, and society at large.

Another way Dutro examines the issue of emotions is through the consideration of emotions in a classroom. In “Writing Wounded” Dutro (2011) writes about the importance of not only allowing students the space to expose their wounds in literacy classrooms, but also the importance of being witness to those stories; she explains how emotions are ever-present in the classroom and yet the space for them in education is not well established or understood.

The weight of hard life experiences, particularly in the lives of students, is hard to bear. Yet, those stories are part and parcel of classroom life – whether or not those experiences are invited in or acknowledged, met with caring or disinterest, they are always present. Even in their ever-presence, the emotionally fraught experiences, the ongoing struggles, do not comfortably reside within traditional notions of schooling. (p. 195)

Although it is important to create the space for sharing hard times, Dutro says that it should never be a requirement. However, she does contend that without a doubt difficult experiences enter the classrooms and it is “incumbent” on educators to be aware of how those experiences impact students, and teachers. She argues that there must be a circular process to teachers
witnessing students’ testimonies and also testifying themselves. She believes that by doing so teachers will have a positive affect on students. In addition to the critical aspect of witness to testimony, Dutro highlights how we must, as educators, also recognize that how those difficult experiences function for students is different based on power, privilege, and social positioning. “Interpretations of difficult stories are soaked through with the issues of class, race, gender, and sexuality that saturate all narratives of experience” (p. 195). Through a lens provided by literary trauma studies, Dutro argues for the circular notion of testimony and witness as being purposeful pedagogy. This reciprocal process of witnessing and testimony is something I must be aware of for my role as researcher, as well as something I must look for in El Maga’s responses to students.

In “Listening to the Speaking Wound: A Trauma Studies Perspective on Student Positioning in Schools” the authors, Dutro and Bien (2013), contend “that difficult experiences play a crucial and too little understood role in children’s and youth’s relationships with school” (p. 2). They discuss their theoretical lens as drawing from trauma studies to analyze what counts as successful engagement with school in relation to the emotional-cognitive, private-public dichotomies. The authors use the “speaking wound” metaphor to describe how the challenging life experiences students carry into the classrooms can serve to provide a context for seeing the inequities in how people are positioned, as well as connect to their own positioning. Additionally, the authors “contend that some students’ positioning within the racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic discourses that permeate the institution of public schooling in the United States, as well as the material impacts of social inequities in communities, constitutes a trauma, a wound, as we are defining such experiences in our work, and must be heard” (p. 3). Dutro and Bien use the analytic tools from trauma studies to help elucidate the lives of students in the
classroom, and in doing so call for the pedagogy of testimony and critical witnessing, and the use of the “speaking wound” metaphor, which have not yet been centrally applied to questions within education. “[W]e argue that moving the analytic tools gleaned from trauma studies to representations of lives entering classrooms illuminates both the close human connections and critical distances necessary to support students emotionally and relationally and thus their engagement and success with school and school literacies” (p. 7).

The research I reviewed from the education programs of linguistic anthropology and literacy helped me to understand how affective dimensions have been conceptualized and studied in the educational arenas of linguistic anthropology and literacy. The final section of my literature review will focus on the research that addresses the methodological approach of critical discourse analysis, which I find most useful for understanding how to analyze emotions in text.

**How Emotions Can Be Analyzed in Text**

In this literature review I have discussed how emotions have been conceptualized and studied using a cultural-historical activity lens, and in the educational domains of linguistic anthropology and literacy. In this section I focus on the methodological approach I am going to use to analyze text. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an umbrella term for a variety of methods in the social analysis of discourse, which differ in theory, the type of research topics analyzed, and the approaches used (Fairclough, 2013; Luke, 1997). Discourse, as used here, is described as ‘situated’ language use in everyday talk and text of social life. CDA is concerned with studying discourse to reveal “discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias. It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical contexts” (Sheyholislami, 2001, p. 1).

There are many approaches to discourse analysis, which is the study of language-in-use: the content, structure, and meaning, as rooted in the discipline of linguistics (Gee, 2010). As a
tool of inquiry, discourse analysis allows us to closely examine how “language has meaning only in and through social practices” (Gee, p. 12). Holland and Cole (1995) found discourse theory to be important to describing aspects of cultural artifacts, in this case El Maga letters, which are significant. “They have a history of development in relation to particular tasks undertaken by people in particular environments” (p. 482). As such, overtime the artifacts / mediating tools come to embody the ideology of the environment in which they are used, and of the people who use them. Although the tools may have a variety of uses outside of that environment, their function is then shaped by the context in which they are used. According to Wodak & Ludwig (1999) “THE RIGHT interpretation does not exist; a hermeneutic approach is necessary. Interpretations can be more or less plausible or adequate, but they cannot be true” (p. 13). This is because the background, social and cultural positioning, and the lens through which the reader views the world differs from person to person, thereby shifting each reader’s interpretation of the same communicative event. The fundamental principles of CDA (Fairclough, 2013; Luke, 1995-1996; Luke, 1997, van Dijk, 2009; Wodak, 1999; Wodak & Ludwig, 1999) that are important for my study, include:

1) The historicity, historical actuality and authenticity, of discourse, as texts acquire meaning from being situated in the time and space of social, cultural, and ideological contexts.

2) Language recognized as a social practice; seen as action in a social context, involving power, values, and norms.

3) The purposefulness of linguistic features and structures, whether consciously or unconsciously chosen.

4) Power relations, social and political, are produced, employed, and reproduced through discourse, highlighting the intertwining of language and power.
Wodak (1999) wrote that the ‘critical’ aspect of CDA does not mean finding only the negative aspects of social interactions and processes, but rather “distinguishing complexity and denying easy, dichotomous explanations” (p. 186). CDA will be important for my understanding of the El Maga letters, as they are embedded in the larger text of current day society, particularly that of the community in which Alicia Sanchez Elementary School is a part of. “That is, discourse reflects and constructs the social world through many different sign systems. Because systems of meaning are caught up in political, social, racial, economic, religious, and cultural formations which are linked to socially defined practices that carry more or less privilege and value in society, they cannot be considered neutral” (Rogers, 2011, p. 1). CDA as an analytic tool can be used to address persistent questions about larger, systemic relations of class, gender and culture.

In “Text and Discourse in Education: An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis,” Luke (1995-1996) provides an overview of CDA and outlines its significant contribution to educational research. He argues that it is problematic, and theoretically and practically limiting, to view language and discourse in terms of individual development. Rather, language use should be studied in a social context because of the constructing character of discourse, as Foucault described it, “how both in broader social formations (i.e., epistemes) and in local sites and uses, discourse actually defines, constructs, and positions human subjects” (p. 8). CDA is key for denaturalizing everyday language and uncovering the negation of power, knowledge, identity, and social relations that are hidden in the everyday patterns of institutional life, particularly the dominant discourses (Hall, 2001) in contemporary cultures. “The critical discourse analysis of written and spoken texts operates in two ways: critically and constructively. Both have significant potential applications in education … discourse in institutional life can be viewed as a
means for the naturalization and disguise of power relations that are tied to inequalities in the social production and distribution of symbolic and material resources” (Luke, 1995-1996, p. 12). CDA attempts to bring to an end the seemingly natural dominant discourses in cultures that represent the social formations and power relations constructed by history, society, and cultural practices (e.g., gender roles in the workplace and at home, minority student expectations in school, LGBTQ equality, assumptions about low SES).

Luke’s (1997) “Theory and Practice in Critical Discourse Analysis” focuses on the importance of CDA as a contemporary approach to the study of language. As new cultural practices emerge, with technology and media based texts, changing structures of community life, education, and work, and hybrid cultural identities, it becomes increasingly important to recognize these changing forms of discourse and how to examine language and discourse in contemporary education. In discussion of educational applications of discourse analysis, Luke says:

Application of ethnomethodological approaches to the study of classroom talk and to educational texts further showed how normative categories of gender, student disability, deficit and disadvantages were constructed in the exchange structures and themes of classroom talk … CDA uses analytic tools from [various disciplinary] fields to address persistent questions about larger, systemic relations of class, gender, and culture. In educational research, this work has been turned to the examination of how knowledge and identity are constructed across a range of texts in the institutional “site” of the school. (p. 5-6)

Luke also argued that the extraordinary task for critical discourse analysis was to provide all-inclusive analysis of texts and cultural views in local educational sites, while attempting to
simultaneously connect these, theoretically and empirically, with an understanding of ideology and power in the broader social structures and positioning.

Summary

My review of the research literature has informed my conceptualization of emotions and the methodological approach I used to study emotions and affect in El Maga letters (see Table 1). By the same token, as I mentioned in this chapter’s overview, I selected research to review that connected with the CHAT framework I outlined in Chapter II. When we look at El Pueblo Mágico as an activity system, we can see how each of the components plays a role in the objective of expansive learning. In the above literature review I discussed the importance of examining the expression of affective dimensions as part of the whole system, rather than in isolation. This is because it is not just about an individual subject, but also the other activity system participants they are interacting with (e.g. division of labor). A major component of the cultural-historical activity theory is that the history of everyone and everything within the activity system is part of the process of ongoing development. As highlighted in the literature review, students (the subjects) are situated within a sociohistorical context and their lived experiences contribute to the successful engagement in the activities. Lastly, critical discourse analysis studies texts associated with activities. “Texts are taken to be social actions, meaningful and coherent instances of spoken and written language use … That is, particular kinds of texts attempt to ‘do things’ in social institutions with predictable ideational and material effects” (Luke, 1997, p. 6). In a CHAT activity system, such as the one I will be studying, these are joint activities, and the processes are mediated by the tools participants take up, as well as by each other. One of these tools is language; focuses on the research of language use (e.g. communication, the mediation of activity through language), which Vygotsky (1986) considers the most important social tool. Much like a CHAT framework, CDA does not view knowledge,
cognition, or emotion as residing within an individual, but rather co-constructed linguistically by the participants of the activity system. In “Analyzing Talk and Text” Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011) underline that Critical Discourse Analysis examines the ways in which texts of different kinds reproduce inequalities and power dynamics in society, and “involves research in which the language use (both written and spoken) underpinning mental realities, such as cognition and emotion, is investigated” (p. 871). According to Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori, “the key theoretical presupposition is that mental realities do not reside “inside” individual humans but rather are constructed linguistically” (p. 871). As discussed before, many of the methodological approaches taken by the researchers reviewed in this chapter, focus on talk as the form of communication. For this project, having a methodological approach designed to capture the affective dimensions in textual artifacts is necessary and crucial.

Since much of our modern social lives are mediated by written texts of different kinds (e.g. newspapers, emails, text messages, magazines, advertisements, etc.) research can easily use naturally occurring empirical materials. The authors note that informal approaches to written texts can be appealing, but in projects that solely use texts as empirical materials, such as my own, it is important to place emphasis on “theoretical presuppositions concerning the cultural and social worlds in which the texts belong” (p. 870).

The research literature I reviewed elucidates a pervasive theme of emotions in such a way to align with and illuminate my own conceptualization of the affective dimensions of learning, as discussed in Chapter II. There is a thread of emotions as an embodied, shared practice; socially, culturally, and linguistically constructed, influenced by the lived experiences of students; and integral to the activity system, the classroom, and learning. Using this conceptualization of emotion, we can draw out how the cultural-historical activity system
framework is already positioned to account for the affective dimensions of learning. In the activity system, individuals continually shape and are shaped by the cultural practices in which they participate, now including emotion, and are active agents in their world who, through interaction with mediating artifacts, including one another, work towards the objective.

The methodological approaches I reviewed, although not all relevant to my research design, have shaped the discourse analysis tools I draw upon for my examination of text. In the following chapter I will explain how I will use the theoretical underpinnings of the methodological approaches described above to examine student letters for content and how they situate their experiences. For example, viewing emotion as part of the activity system rather than external to it, I must attend to all aspects of the CHAT framework and avoid examining the El Maga letters (mediating artifacts) in isolation (Roth, 2007; Roth & Lee, 2007). Through my use of the CHAT framework to review how the emotions emerge in the unfolding interactions documented by El Maga letters, keeping in mind a social, rather than individual perspective on language (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin, Cekaite & Goodwin, 2012) I hope my analysis will illustrate how social relationships are foundational to the experiences of people within the shared activity. Using Dutro’s (2010, 2011) and Dutro and Bien’s (2013) work, I will have to act as witness, and simultaneously look at El Maga’s responses for the reciprocal process of witnessing and testimony. Finally, I will engage in the analytical approach of critical discourse analysis to consider the El Maga letters as part of social and cultural practices at El Pueblo Mágico, focusing the investigation on language use reinforcing the expression of affective dimensions.
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH DESIGN

In this research project I examined how the students made sense of the world around them, their experiences, relationships, and activities at El Pueblo Mágico, and how they wrote about potentially emotionally consequential topics. My goal for this project was to answer the following research questions: How were the affective dimensions of learning revealed through the production and engagement with Gmail at El Pueblo Mágico? How were the affective dimensions of learning made evident in El Maga letters? How were the affective dimensions of learning expressed in children’s letter writing to El Maga? How were the affective dimensions of learning taken up in El Maga’s responses to children’s letters? And, what evidence, if any, is there of how children’s expression of the affective dimensions of learning changed over time? In exploring how children wrote about emotionally charged topics, I also aimed to better understand how the sociocultural learning theory of CHAT can more explicitly account for and incorporate the affective dimensions of learning adequately and systematically.

Setting
El Pueblo Mágico is an after-school program at Alicia Sanchez International Elementary School in Lafayette, Colorado. Professor Kris Gutiérrez and a team of graduate students from the University of Colorado Boulder designed this particular instantiation of a Fifth Dimension club. El Pueblo Mágico was developed and built with influence from Professor Gutiérrez’s years of experience at Las Redes in Los Angeles, California.

School Context
Sanchez Elementary is an International Baccalaureate World School, where the mission is to:
Honor diversity and individuality in a safe learning environment. We will build a community where students, families and staff are mutually respected. We strive to inspire and challenge all to be creative, contributing members of society, as we develop lifelong learners with our high standard of academic excellence. (Mission & Vision)

The student demographics are 50.1% female, 49.9% male, 1.7% African American, 0.8% American Indian, 3.1% Asian, 24.8% Caucasian, 66.9% Hispanic, 2.8% Multi Racial, 69.4% Free Lunch, 5.3% Reduced Lunch, 34.3% English Language Learners, and 18.4% Special Education (BVSD Student Demographics, 2014). In comparison to other Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) schools, Sanchez is one of the district’s most segregated schools, with 75% of the students being low-income. In the past the school has failed to meet federal achievement standards under No Child Left Behind, and test scores are routinely at the bottom of statewide tests (Bounds, 2012). Principal Doris Candelarie has been working to turn around the school’s performance, by setting expectations for teaching at the highest level. Amongst her efforts, Principal Candelarie invited the Colorado Department of Education to audit the school and provide feedback, the staff elected nine teachers to a “dream team” to research school reform models, and she had teachers visit the surrounding neighborhoods at the start of the school year (Bounds, 2012). In recognition of her efforts, the Colorado Association of Elementary School Principals named Principal Candelarie the Colorado National Distinguished Principal of the Year in 2014.

Affiliated Educational Psychology Course
As I discussed in Chapter III, the activity system of El Pueblo Mágico, as represented by Figure 1, includes the associated Education course, participants at site – supervisors, LAs, undergraduates, kids – project activities, and the daily routine. This program is a learning ecology deliberately designed to promote technology-mediated activity, collaborative learning,
and encourage students from non-dominant backgrounds to become empowered and engaged learners in multimodal projects. In addition, El Pueblo Mágico is a service-learning site for undergraduate students in an educational psychology course at the University of Colorado Boulder, School of Education.

The core questions listed in the syllabus of one section of EDUC 4411 - Educational Psychology in Elementary Education points to the main ideas the course concentrates on for the undergraduates. Those three core questions are: How do children learn and what influences how they learn? What does this mean for how we should approach teaching? How can educational psychology help us better understand how to create effective learning environments? In doing so, the course strives to help future teachers address some of the challenges involved in teaching, such as moving from theory to practice, moving in between the general and the particular, and recognizing and understanding their own experience as learners and teachers, as well as the experiences of others.

*Day at El Pueblo Mágico*

During the Spring and Fall 2011, and Spring 2012 semesters, the after-school club met in the school’s library, the computer lab, and one additional classroom. Each day, the Amigas (undergraduates) would meet with the site coordinators to take attendance, answer any questions the Amigas had, and select two volunteers to meet the students in the cafeteria (where they had an after-school snack before coming to play). Once the young students were brought into the library, jackets and backpacks piled up in the corner, and nametags passed out, the Amigas would partner up with the citizens and the afternoon of play and learning would begin. Groups would break off to grab board games, laptops, and materials (paper, markers, popsicle sticks, pipe cleaners, glue) or rush off to the classroom down the hall to line up for Just Dance on the Wii. Throughout the afternoon, groups would be working on various projects and games
scattered around the library, while site coordinators walked about answering questions, getting more materials, fixing laptop issues, and getting in on the playing themselves. Half an hour before the day ended, groups would put materials away and move to the computer lab to write to

Figure 2. El Pueblo Mágico, Amigas and Citizens in the Library

El Maga. Amigas would sit with their citizens while they took turns logging into Gmail, reading what El Maga had written back the week before, and composing new letters. Once everyone who wanted to write to El Maga had done so, the entire El Pueblo group would meet back in the library, sit in a big circle, and share with the community what they did that day. Sometimes El Maga would send a Community Letter – a large letter handwritten on long scrolled out paper – and the group would read it out loud. El Maga used community letters to suggest students try games that they had not played before, encourage students to work on digital storytelling, congratulate everyone on their accomplishments, invite citizens on a field trip to visit the University of Colorado Boulder campus, or answer questions that many people had asked:
And now I want to answer some of your interesting questions. (Although don’t you think that sometimes the questions are better than the answers? Just having questions in the first place is awesome because it means you want to learn something new, and this is a great attitude to have!)

Anyhoo, some of you asked if I am fake. I can’t believe that some of you don’t think I’m REAL! Ouch! I am sooooooo REAL! Just because you can’t see my body doesn’t make me not real; it just makes me … invisible!

Participants
In order to answer my research questions it was important that the student population was of an age when they were more likely to be open to having the types of conversations I think are important about race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, and religion, without having yet fully adopted the socially constructed constraints on having such conversations. Young elementary students may be more open to sharing their emotions in letters to El Maga, as research suggests that they have developed egalitarianism and altruistic characteristics by 2nd grade (Fehr, Bernhard, & Rockenbach, 2008). According to Bretherton, Fritz, Zahn-Waxler and Ridgeway (1986) by the age of 7 years, children have developed the interpersonal function of talking about emotions and are reaching social and emotional milestones. Children begin to develop a “logic of feelings” around this age, as they move from language development to pseudoconcepts and everyday concepts, enabled by the increasing ability to generalize feelings and experience feelings evoked by art, literature, and music (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013). Therefore, the age range of the students at El Pueblo Mágico, 2nd-5th grade, which is approximately 7-11 years old, was ideal for this study.

During the Spring and Fall 2011, and Spring 2012 academic semesters at El Pueblo Mágico, students from grades 2nd-5th worked together in small, mixed-age groups with
undergraduate students. In this study, 2nd-5th graders, both males and females of any race and ethnicity, class, religion, and linguistic background were the targeted demographic for research participants. Children in this study were selected from the pool of already consented students for Professor Gutiérrez’s Protocol (IRB # 0610.13) titled: *Studying the mediating effects of technologies and El Pueblo Mágico on undergraduate and student learning*.

**Role of Researcher**

In qualitative research, the role of the researcher and her relationship to the participants and site influence the methodological approaches taken to collect and analyze data (Maxwell, 2005; Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). My initial role at El Pueblo Mágico was as a graduate student research assistant (RA) involved in the creation, organization, and inauguration of the after-school program. Over the course of two academic years, I worked with Professor Gutiérrez, Principal Doris Candelarie, and four other Research Assistants to establish El Pueblo Mágico as a Fifth Dimension site in collaboration with the University of Colorado at Boulder. As a contributing participant I helped work to realize the objective of our program and doing so gave me a chance to learn about the activity system from the inside (Roth, 2007). Some of the letters I analyzed for this study were from the time when I was a site coordinator and had weekly interactions with the students. This did not mean I personally knew all of the students whose writing I studied, since the program ran three days a week, served approximately 75-90 students per semester (with approximately 25-35 on each of the days), and I was there for one day out of the three.

Several changes have been made since the inception of the program to help El Pueblo Mágico grow to meet the needs of the students and facilitate the goals of the after-school club. Although I have not been a site coordinator for the past three years, I have remained a part of the
El Pueblo Mágico “family” and have a positive relationship with the current site directors, and my academic advisor is the current faculty director of El Pueblo Mágico.

Playing El Maga
One of the most important aspects of being a site coordinator was my role of “playing” El Maga and writing replies to student letters. Anyone who has taken on the challenging, and rewarding, task of responding to children’s letters as El Maga can speak to the effort, time, creativity, and insightfulness it takes to do the job well. It can be difficult to come up with some creative, funny, caring response for each child. As the current El Maga put it:

I approach it somewhat like I’m playing an improv acting game; I try and build off of whatever the student says and keep it rolling. If the student doesn’t give me much to work on, I come up with a theme for their letter, normally some imaginary situation. For example, I recently wrote a kid asking for help to get out of a spider den Maga fell into when exploring in Belize. I get to work on my writing skills, create poetry, play imagination and get to know the kids all at the same time. (A. Meluso, personal communication, February 25, 2015)

This behind-the-curtains role was something I came to understand and appreciate as a result of playing El Maga myself, yet this study taught me the significance of being intentional in that role and not taking the position lightly, responding quickly without carefully reading the student’s letter, or treating it like a chore.

Researcher Subjectivity
My positions as a female in the broader social setting of society, graduate student at the School of Education, former site coordinator, and a graduate of a public school system all influenced my role as a researcher. These various roles in my life provided me with valuable perspectives through which I approached this study. My initial ideas around what issues were
important to me stemmed from my own (negative) experiences in a public school, reinforced by experiences in class discussions my first year as a graduate student in the School of Education, and finally formed into research questions based on my time as a site coordinator at El Pueblo Mágico and as an Instructor for undergraduate classes.

As a graduate student in the School of Education I had the opportunity to teach three courses offered in the teacher education program: School and Society, which focused on the most salient issues surrounding education within the United States and the complex relationship between schools and the larger society of which they are a part; Educational Psychology & Adolescent Development, and Educational Psychology in Elementary Education, which considered theories of learning and development. Although Educational Psychology in Elementary Education is the University course affiliated with El Pueblo Mágico, the section I taught did not have a service-learning requirement and therefore my undergraduate students were not associated with El Pueblo Mágico. During my time as an instructor for School and Society I began to realize how difficult it was for students in the class to discuss the issues of race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status – all topics covered by the course. Many students struggled to talk, and listen, without getting visually upset. It was apparent that students were emotional discussing these issues because voices would rise in tone, people would fidget uncomfortably in seats, and some students wouldn’t talk at all, opting to stare at the floor instead. Over the four semesters I taught the course I had my own emotional experiences as well, sometimes reacting to what a student was saying with which I did not agree, to other times listening to a student share with me, through tears, why she didn’t feel comfortable being in class when we covered certain topics. It was important to prepare the class before entering into these discussions, reminding students about respect and talking about fostering moral conversations in a college classroom.
(Nash, 1996). It was this eye-opening experience, watching college-age students have obvious reactions to discussing emotive topics, that made me wonder where, when, and how children could be learning about engaging with these issues. Certainly before they entered a college classroom, right?

After one semester ended I received a letter from a student that encouraged me to figure out the answer to this question. Her words were powerful, and made me cry – not just because of how good it felt to hear a student say thank you, but also for the sadness in her truth:

_Hello Daisy,

I just wanted to send you a message because I wanted to be cliché and admit that you changed my life. I want to say thank you for all the talks you had with us as a class. I am very glad that they were talks and not just lectures and I think that it made the class especially more inviting...connecting...revealing...inspiring...I can not even find the right word for what this class was to me (heartbreaking...).

I have always had an issue in the back of my mind about my own education and pretty much my parents (since they really did not know any better) and my teachers brought me up believing that I was just stupid. And it took me many years (until college!) for me to finally shake off that mentality and finally convince myself that the reason I did not know things was not entirely my fault. I think I NEEDED this class, I NEEDED to hear about these issues in different terms, words, and definitions, because I am finally able to start understanding. Of course I am not an expert after taking your class, but damn if it does not make me want to be.

I did not want to think that we were letting elementary, middle, and high school students down by not discussing emotionally charged topics, resulting in students getting to college before they
had the skills to engage in such conversations. I realized that I had access to students who were of the age I imagined these topics beginning to arise, and they were writing about themselves without the constraints of a traditional classroom. So I set out to explore how the affective dimensions of learning were unveiled and could be taken up productively in letters written to El Maga.

My past experiences as a student, coupled with participating in discussions with college undergraduates struggling to talk about race, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and religion, influenced my reading of El Maga letters. I have a critical eye when it comes to stories and issues students write about that are not taken up by El Maga, and perhaps I identify topics as emotionally charged even when they are not always so for the student. I am aware, however, of my positionality and how that had an impact on my interpretation of the data. My background and experiences are what have inspired me to take the path that I have chosen, but my education and role as a researcher are what guided my decisions for data analysis in this dissertation.

**Data Collection**

Data collection for this project consisted of downloading the letters students wrote to El Maga each day at the after-school program, through their previous Gmail accounts. Letters collected included those written to El Maga during the Spring and Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 academic semesters, when Gmail was being used at site. I included letters written in both English and Spanish, since I recognize that one’s language identity is an important factor for many of the students at Alicia Sanchez Elementary. In this section I aim to make transparent my reasoning for how I proceeded to narrow my research materials into a workable data set, focused on addressing my research questions. I will discuss how I originally approached my data sources in

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12 As was explained in my conceptual framework, the organizers of El Pueblo Mágico recognize that tensions and contradictions are part of any activity system, and they are the generator of change, encouraging researchers to transform and renew as necessary. Shifts from handwritten artifacts, to Gmail, to iRemix, and back to the current approach of handwritten letters are an example of such reworking at El Pueblo Mágico over the years.
preparation for this study, how I identified the relevant components of El Maga letters key to my research questions, describe an overview of my coding themes, and how I selected the conversations analyzed in this study.

*El Maga Gmail Letters*

Gmail was used for student correspondence with El Maga from the Fall of 2010 until the Fall of 2012. During those four semesters students would log into their El Pueblo Mágico Gmail accounts at the end of the day at club and write to El Maga. Gmail organizes emails as conversation threads with an email count (number of letters sent and received), rather than individual letters. This was key to my study because I was looking at how the affective dimensions of learning were expressed in children’s emails to El Maga and taken up in El Maga’s responses, as well as if, and how, the children’s expression of affective dimensions of learning changed over time. Therefore, it was important to have the letters organized as conversations, rather than stand-alone artifacts. For example, a student may have more than one conversation with El Maga, but each letter is kept in the same thread as the email in which the reply is written. If a new conversation is started, it becomes a separate thread with a new email count. I am familiar with how Gmail works, both as a private user and as the site coordinator who originally set up the Google education site for El Pueblo Mágico.

Before I could complete a thorough analysis of El Maga conversations, I had to determine which letters were relevant to my focus on the affective components of learning, as revealed through children’s writing. A total of 914 conversations were filed under the “All Mail” folder of El Maga’s Gmail account, dating from September 28, 2010 to September 12, 2012. This total does not include the scanned images of handwritten or printed letters. I chose not to
include scanned images of handwritten or typed letters to Maga\textsuperscript{13} because they were not as clearly collated in chronological order in a conversation thread and thereby more difficult to read as a whole extended dialogue. Until the Spring semester of 2011 there were only one-count threads (solo email) from El Maga to students, without student replies included. This reduced the total of analyzable Gmail conversations to 640.

In order to explain the rest of my data reduction decisions, I must also discuss my data analysis. This is because the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying data is not separate from analysis, but part of it. All of my data organizing, coding, and reduction decisions were analytic choices that helped me figure out which data story to tell (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the following sections I discuss my data analysis in conjunction with my data selection process.

**Data Analysis**

The research matrix in Table 3 is a snapshot of the analytical approach that I used to answer to my research questions. For this project, data analysis was an ongoing reflexive process including textual critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; Fairclough, 2013; Gee, 2010; Luke, 1995-1996; Luke, 1997; Mayring, 2000). Since the letters were written back in 2011-2012 and stored online, data analysis occurred retroactively.

Table 3. Research Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is my central research question?</th>
<th>How are the affective dimensions of learning revealed through the production and engagement with Gmail letters at El Pueblo Mágico?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What construct is the focus of my analysis?</td>
<td>Affective dimensions of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does this construct mean in my study?</td>
<td>Affective dimensions of learning include the emotions, feelings, moods, attitudes, and dispositions of students. Expression of emotions in this context are part of cultural practices, feelings that accompany</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{13} I chose not to include scanned images of handwritten or typed letters to Maga for three reasons. First, I, along with, and in addition to, many other researchers, have analyzed handwritten letters in the past studying the value for children’s development, especially in regards to literacy practices for dual language learners (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999; Gutiérrez, Bien, Selland, & Pierce, 2011; Hull & Schultz, 2001). Second, because El Pueblo Mágico is a technology-mediated learning after-school club I wanted to focus on the computer-based correspondence between the students and El Maga. Third, the scanned images of handwritten and typed letters were not as clearly collated in chronological order in a conversation thread and thereby more difficult to read as a whole extended dialogue.
thinking, and as such are socially and culturally constructed, yet individually experienced and expressed.

| How will I know it “empirically” when I see it? | Language (written text) and content of letter: word choice / terms such as Ekman’s (2008) six basic classifications (anger, fear, sadness, enjoyment, disgust, surprise) or Plutchik’s (1991) 8 primary emotions (joy vs. sadness, anger vs. fear, trust vs. distrust, surprise vs. anticipation) Compositional expression: use of emoticons, use of punctuation, capitalization, intentional elongation (misspelling) of words for emphasis, use of multiple languages, alteration of text (color, format, size), and pictures inserted |
| What analytical tools will I employ to help me know it when I see it? | Using critical discourse analysis to analyze the “naturally occurring” empirical materials of El Maga letters Structural composition: purposefulness of linguistic features and structures, whether consciously or unconsciously chosen Social and cultural content: historicity, historical actuality and authenticity, of discourse, as texts acquire meaning from being situated in the time and space of social, cultural, and ideological contexts; language recognized as a social practice, seen as action in a social context, involving power, values, and norms; power relations, social and political, are produced, employed, and reproduced through discourse, highlighting the intertwining of language and power |

Critical Discourse Analysis

From the perspective of CDA, the unit of analysis in this study is ‘text’. When looking at discourse-as-text (Fairclough, 1992) it is important to carryout systematically analyzing the organization, vocabulary, grammar, text structure, and cohesion, the linguistic features, of the email text (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). As discussed in my conceptual framework and the literature review, language is an important social tool. Therefore, studying language is important for understanding emotions. In this study, the language analyzed was textual, rather than oral.

There are two levels of analysis within CDA. For the email letters to El Maga, there is first the sentence and word-level analysis, including the composition of the email (use of emoticons, text color, size, and format, and use of punctuation). Second, there is the broader social and cultural context in which the text is situated. Returning to the principles of CDA, historicity, language as social practice, and power relations coincide with the first level of greater social and cultural context analysis. The significance of linguistic features is examined as part of
the second word-level analysis. These principles are important for thinking about the affective
dimensions of learning because they facilitate my drawing out of this concept. The historicity of
discourse and language as a social practice bear a family resemblance to the premise of
Hochschild’s feeling rules and de Sousa’s paradigm scenarios: emotions, like texts, acquire
meaning from being situated in social, cultural, and ideological contexts, and thereby associated
with values and norms of a community. The purposefulness of linguistic features, much like
emotions being feelings that accompany thinking, allow us to see qualities of a situation, whether
consciously or unconsciously, in a way that we would otherwise miss. Finally, power relations
and emotions are co-constructed linguistically, and produced, employed, and reproduced through
discourse, highlighting the intertwining of language, power, and emotions.

Critical discourse analysis was a useful tool for me to analyze the letters students wrote to
El Maga because it “favors the analysis of records of natural interaction, or textual materials
produced as part of life’s activities (newspaper reports, medical records, written testimony, etc.),
rather than using experiments, surveys and interviews to generate research data” (Edwards &
Potter, 2001, p. 12). For this study, email letters are the specific texts analyzed and email, as a
genre of text, serves a conventional social purpose and it is used as an electronic method of
exchanging messages. At El Pueblo Mágico, email serves a function specific to the goals of a
Fifth Dimension site. The form the written language takes is not arbitrary or random. Whether
consciously or unconsciously, students at El Pueblo were expressing themselves in a meaningful
way.

Developing Organizing Themes

It was during my time as an “El Maga” that I became aware of the value these
conversations held as a practice at site. Therefore, my initial and informal review of El Maga
letters began before the inception of this study and it greatly contributed to and informed the
research questions, study design, and data selection. While reading El Maga emails I developed tentative ideas about categories and relationships; the preliminary themes were the broad topics established retrospectively during my time as a site coordinator and for the purposes of this study prior to data analysis. A preliminary review of the letters revealed that the topics about which students shared with El Maga included their friends, getting mad at other students and yelling at them, their favorites (e.g., colors, games, songs, foods, sports), the games and activities they participated in at site, about their family, whether or not they had fun, were bored, their age, and about their pets. They asked El Maga about siblings, favorites, gender, being invisible, coming to visit El Pueblo, where El Maga lives, what El Maga likes, and about El Maga’s pets. The problem-solving letters students wrote to El Maga acted as mediating artifacts allowing for an unstructured and natural development of emotional skills. El Maga encouraged students to write about their daily activities, challenges they were facing, and friends they were making. Through both processes of sharing with El Maga about themselves, and asking El Maga questions, students were constructing a narrative about who they imagined El Maga to be and what assumptions they made about who El Maga was. Preliminary reading of the letters revealed three categories of letter content: 1) self-identifying characteristics (e.g. favorites, family, friends, and pets); 2) daily activities (e.g. what games they played at site and whether or not they were bored or had fun); and 3) El Maga inquiry (e.g. how old is El Maga, is El Maga a boy or girl, and El Maga’s favorites).

The first step in my data reduction / data analysis process was to develop organizing themes, which allowed me to group the Gmail conversations systematically. I developed organizing themes from this general reading of El Maga letters, and deductively from the design of El Pueblo Mágico, and my conceptual framework, literature review, and research questions.
Inductive and deductive coding comprised developing descriptive themes (subcategories) and operational and interpretive codes (Maxwell, 2009). This process allowed me to view and think about my findings from different directions by continuously gaining a broader and more robust development of my discoveries as they became apparent. Coding at this level was the initial step to data analysis and functioned simultaneously to assist with data reduction. The organizing themes used to develop a general theory about what were the most important topics capturing what was going on at El Pueblo Mágico included hybrid language practices (on the part of the student), issues of gender\textsuperscript{14}, and sharing of feelings (affective).

Table 4 is a visual outline of the organizing themes I used to sort conversations, with the second column listing the descriptive codes that were later developed upon a closer reading of each letter within the sorted conversations. The third column contains the code of compositional expression, which I went back and applied after all conversations had been sorted into the three organizing themes.

Table 4. Developed Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizing Themes</th>
<th>Descriptive Codes</th>
<th>Dialogic Conversations</th>
<th>Compositional Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Are you a boy or girl?</td>
<td>Bi-directional communication</td>
<td>Emoticons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Romantic relationships</td>
<td>El Maga letter writing</td>
<td>Edited text (font size,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heteronormative stories</td>
<td>as a joint activity of El Pueblo Mágico</td>
<td>font style, font color)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Feelings</td>
<td>Reporting emotional state</td>
<td>Knowledge (and repertoires of emotion) are constructed</td>
<td>Pictures attached /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Witness &amp; testimony</td>
<td></td>
<td>inserted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings about people &amp; things</td>
<td></td>
<td>Highlighted background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Storytelling (confiding)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasized punctuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid Language Practices</td>
<td>Use of any language other than English (in student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emails)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{14} Although I use the term “gender” in this dissertation, I am not trying to reduce the complexity of the differences between gender identity, gender expression, sex, and sexual orientation, but rather using one word to capture the theme of what students wrote about with El Maga. I recognize that one’s sexual orientation (e.g. if El Maga has a boyfriend or girlfriend) is not tied to one’s gender identity (e.g. if El Maga is a girl or a boy), however, I classified these topics under the broader term “gender” for coding purposes.
Data Selection Overview

Out of the 640 conversations in my data set, I gave priority to the conversations and letters that were directly related to my research questions. In this study, the selection of data sources involved identifying relevant letters, while setting aside letters not as directly applicable to my current study. As I explained above, the first step in my selection process was to read through the conversations to identify organizing themes of hybrid language practices (by the student), issues of gender, and sharing of feelings (affective). The second step in my data selection / data analysis process was to re-read the letters in each conversation to identify and develop the descriptive codes. The descriptive codes were created to attribute a phenomenon to a segment of text (letter), which would require little interpretation (e.g. are you a boy or girl = each time a student asked El Maga about the wizard’s gender). In the course of sorting conversations and coding letters I simultaneously noted the dialogic nature of the conversations, observing when letters did and did not receive replies\(^\text{15}\). Finally, I went back through the already sorted conversations to identify those that used compositional expression. In total, conversations from 85 different students over two academic semesters were coded and sorted into the organizing themes.

Coding and Selection of Analyzed Letters

In order to identify email letters with content pertaining to issues of gender and sharing of feelings I read every letter within the 640 conversations individually and coded them accordingly. I chose to do this rather than search the “All Mail” folder for key words, such as boy, girl, girlfriend, boyfriend, married, or sad, mad, happy, and hate because the student letters are written without editing, spell-check, or grammatical corrections. I did not want to miss any conversations based on misspelled key terms. Additionally, searching for key words would have

\(^{15}\) Although I placed emphasis on dialogic conversations, I chose to include letters that contained content of importance to discuss in this study, even if they did not have a response.
prevented me from discovering letters where students explored the topic using language I had not accounted for originally. For example, asking El Maga about having a “husband”, telling El Maga about wanting to be a “cheerleader”, or claiming El Maga was “hit by a bus and is a liar” would not have been in my purview. As I read each letter I would mark it, using labels in Gmail, coding it as a letter to analyze later. If a letter had content regarding more than one category I would label it as both.

I also sorted letters into the organizing theme of hybrid language practices, however, in the end I did not analyze these letters simply because of the use of a language other than English. Four of the letters using hybrid language practices that also fit into one of the other categories were analyzed under those topics. Of the seven hybrid language practice letters, three did not specifically address my research questions or fit into one of the other categories.

*Compositional Expression*

In Gmail letters students played with fonts, colors, text size, inserting pictures, and emoticons. Although this appears at first to be simply a visual component to the letters, at the analytic level it also represents how students choose to express themselves when such composition tools are available. Goodwin and Goodwin (2000) argued that the “embodied performance of affect” is demonstrated through intonation, gesture, body posture, and timing. In this study, the choices students made about the structure of their emails and the way through which they expressed themselves compositionally act similarly, making emotion visible to the reader. Therefore, it was imperative that I attend to the use of emoticons in letters. Emoticons, short for emotion icon, are a sequence of printable characters that are intended to represent a human facial expression and convey an emotion when used in internet forums: email, instant-messaging, and text-messaging. Emoticons (text faces), also known as emoji (the Japanese term for emoticons), are used in a similar way that a person's voice or facial expression changes when
having a face-to-face conversation with someone. With the absence of body language and prosody in written communication, emoticons serve to draw a reader’s attention to the mood, tone, and tenor of a writer’s non-verbal communication.

*Dialogic Conversations*

Bakhtin’s (1981; 1986) perspective on the dialogic nature of conversation as opposed to a monologic style for supporting the development of rapport is relevant to my analysis. This is of significance when analyzing the Gmail letters between El Maga and the children, because “the bi-directionality of the linguistic and sociocultural exchanges do not privilege the adult or more expert other as sole teacher and knowledge bearer” (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999, p. 89). In line with this view, I gave priority to letters with dialogic conversation, as evidenced by the reciprocal process of writing back and forth whereby students shared stories with El Maga, rather than just listing activities at site. I made this analytic choice because there has historically been a sparseness of dialogue in classrooms, due to the misconceptions about the nature of knowledge being conveyed by the teacher, through texts and lectures, to the student to be absorbed and remembered for subsequent reproduction (Wells, 2000). The Fifth Dimension after-school club setting is deliberately designed to recognize learning as a social process, whereby knowledge is constructed through collaboration (e.g. dialogue) with participants in an activity system. “Knowledge is created and recreated between people, as they bring their personal experience and information derived from other sources to bear on solving some particular problem” (Wells, 2000, p. 63). Bakhtin’s concept of dialogicality highlights the importance of El Maga letters being two-sided conversations, in order for the students to participate in the joint activity of knowledge building, constructing and reflecting on learning, in the community of practice.
Bakhtin also wrote about analytic categories to help identify dialogic discourse in the classroom. One of these categories is “addressivity,” defined as the quality of turning to someone else “which requires that the speaker’s utterances connect with previous utterances (which might transcend boundaries of space and time) in the chain of speech communication” (Haworth, 1999, p. 99). This is in contrast to the one-sided, single perspective and single voice concept of monologic type of dialogue. “Conversely, monologic discourse (in a classroom setting) would have a single or limited genre-orientation … Knowledge would be constructed as fixed rather than provisional, the domain of the adult-teacher and not the child. Interpersonal meanings would be signaled only weakly, with limited reference to personal and collective perspectives” (Haworth, p. 101).

**Table 5. Coding & Selection of Analyzed Letters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: Log into Gmail as El Maga</th>
<th>640 conversations, dating from 2/14/11 - 9/12/12</th>
<th>Read all conversations looking for organizing themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Step 2: First round of letter selection | Sorted conversations into organizing themes | Gender = 33 conversations  
Feelings = 54 conversations  
Hybrid language practices by student = 7 conversations  
Compositional Expression = 53 conversations |
| Step 3: Closer reading of emails | Development of Descriptive Codes  
Looked for patterns / repeated themes in each category that could be analyzed as a “chunk” (i.e. the same message written, even if different wording was used)  
Looked for responses from El Maga; identified various responses given to similar questions | Gender: e.g. are you a boy or a girl; heteronormative stories; romantic relationships  
Feelings: e.g. reporting emotional state; witness & testimony; feelings about people & things; storytelling (confiding)  
Hybrid language: e.g. use of any language in email other than English (most commonly Spanish)  
Compositional Expression: e.g. use of emoticons, edited text (font size, font style, font color), pictures attached / inserted, highlighted background, and emphasized punctuation |
Step 4: Review of letters using CDA analytical tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Principles of CDA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The historicity, historical actuality and authenticity, of discourse, as texts acquire meaning from being situated in the time and space of social, cultural, and ideological contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language recognized as a social practice; seen as action in a social context, involving power, values, and norms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The purposefulness of linguistic features and structures, whether consciously or unconsciously chosen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power relations, social and political, are produced, employed, and reproduced through discourse, highlighting the intertwining of language and power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure and composition, including font size, color, and format, emoticons, and punctuation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content addressing the social and cultural context, including word choice and topic(s) addressed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Development of a Case Study of Metacognition

I wanted to develop a case study of an extended exchange between El Maga and a student that focused on diving into a challenging topic, in this case a heteronormative assumption about “boyfriends”. The extended exchange I chose showcases the potential range, power, and reciprocity of the relationships that can be established between El Maga and a student. This conversation also includes the organizing themes of gender, language hybridity, sharing of feelings, and displays the impact on a reader of compositional expression. Furthermore, this case study reveals the capability of El Maga to engage a student in the process of metacognitive awareness. Below I have outlined my approach for selecting one case study as the representative extended exchange.

Under the “All Mail” folder in El Maga’s Gmail account, the 640 conversations were organized from newest to oldest with the email count in parenthesis next to the correspondent’s name. My first step in the selection process of extended conversations was to look at

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16 I use the term heteronormative in this study to describe the belief and assumption that people can be categorized by the binary genders of male or female, with natural characteristics, roles, and behaviors attributed to each respectively. Heteronormativity also aligns one’s biological sex, gender identity, and sexuality, with heterosexuality as the presumed norm.
conversations that had at least nine letters in the thread. This meant that El Maga and the student wrote back and forth to each other at least four times, because when students and El Maga kept the same discussion going for more than two email cycles (initial email and response) as a back and forth extended typology, it created a more rapport-building conversation. I purposefully chose longer conversations, over the span of at least a few weeks, which allowed time for the student and El Maga to have a dialogue extensive enough to build a relationship (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999). My experience as a site coordinator, and ‘being’ El Maga, made me mindful of the importance of giving the students the time and space to experiment with writing emails to Maga, developing trust in the practice by receiving responses each week, and engaging in the dialogue, rather than just writing because it was encouraged by the adults at site to do so. With a sufficient amount of conversations to examine, I narrowed my data set by selecting those conversations that I was confident had enough exchanges to best address my research questions. I chose 9 over 8 because often times the conversation thread included a general introductory letter from El Maga sent to every student in the entire club, which did not specifically speak to Maga’s relationship with individual students. Additionally, with an odd number of 9 letters in the thread instead of 8, it meant that even if the first and last letters were from Maga, there could still be four letters written by the student. The informed choice to look at threads with at least four letters from the student, as the average amount of time it took for a substantial continuous conversation to form, was cultivated by my observations as El Maga and time as a site coordinator of El Pueblo Mágico.

For the next step in my data selection process, I looked for letters with stories the students told El Maga about their friends, family, and themselves. Letters that listed activities participated in at site, without engaging in a dialogic format, were set aside. I also looked for
emails that were visually engaging where students used emoticons, altered text (font style, size, color), and inserted pictures to accentuate the content of the letter. Emails that had ‘visual effects’ that did not directly add to the narrative (e.g. a string of emoticons such as this popular one 🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟🌟, which may be misconstrued to be the poop symbol but is in fact beehives with buzzing bees – for example: “smell ya later 🐝”) were not selected simply based on the inclusion of such characters. Finally, I examined the emails looking for those that included topics of race, gender, sexual identity, religion, class, linguistic background, and cultural differences; letters that spoke to the group with which the student identified, or more personal stories beyond the context of El Pueblo Mágico. I chose to look for letters with such topics because of my goal to examine the discussion of issues that could potentially be emotionally charged in relation to one’s identity. If the conversation met any of these criteria it was marked for quick identification later. This resulted in 28 Gmail conversations.

Although all of these conversations with El Maga are rich in content and warrant appreciation, I wanted to focus my attention on one extended conversation strand, so as to demonstrate how topics developed along with the child’s relationship with Maga over an extended letter writing exchange. I read each conversation and recognized those with the most analytic value, finally selecting the El Maga letter that was best suited for addressing my research questions. I selected the conversation chosen by thoroughly reading each email, returning to my research questions, and looking for a conversation that provided the most material I identified as being pertinent to my study. For example, in order to address the research question: How are the affective dimensions of learning taken up in El Maga’s responses to children’s letters?, I selected letters in which El Maga responded to the content the student wrote about, and not just a sharing of favorite colors and pet names. Or, the research question: And,
what evidence, if any, is there of how children's expression of the affective dimensions of learning change over time? required correspondence that spanned enough time to allow for change to be observed, therefore I selected letters with more of a continuous conversation thread.

In Table 6 I have summarized how I selected the extended conversation analyzed in Chapter V.

Table 6. Selection of Analyzed Case Study

| Step 1: Log into Gmail as El Maga | 640 conversations, dating from 2/14/11 - 9/12/12 | Looked at conversations with 9+ emails in thread
|                               |                                      | Searched for conversations by the same student, during the same semester saved as a separate thread
| Step 2: First round of letter selection | Read emails looking for preliminary codes | self-identifying characteristics (e.g. favorites, family, friends, and pets) daily activities (e.g. what games they played at site and whether or not they were bored or had fun) El Maga inquiry (e.g. how old is El Maga, is El Maga a boy or girl, and El Maga’s favorites)
| Step 3: Closer reading of emails | Looked for: sharing of stories, not just listing activities at site (dialogic vs. monologic) visually engaging - emoticons, altered text, and pictures related to content use of language(s) other than English topics of race, gender, sexual identity, religion, and class | Resulted in 28 Gmail conversations
| Step 4: Identifying of preliminary codes | Descriptive coding of the letters revealed three main categories: 1) gender; 2) sharing of feelings and 3) hybrid language practices | Each of these descriptive codes capture the three main ideas for how the affective dimension of learning can be integrated into the CHAT perspective – socially, culturally, and historically
| Step 5: Selection of extended conversations | Selected conversation most pertinent to research questions | Case study of Loretta
| Step 6: Review of letters using CDA analytical tools | Primary Principles of CDA The historicity, historical actuality and authenticity, of discourse, as texts acquire meaning from being situated in the time and space of social, cultural, and ideological contexts. | Stages of Analysis Structure and composition, including font size, color, and format, emoticons, and punctuation. Content addressing the social and
Language recognized as a social practice; seen as action in a social context, involving power, values, and norms. The purposefulness of linguistic features and structures, whether consciously or unconsciously chosen. Power relations, social and political, are produced, employed, and reproduced through discourse, highlighting the intertwining of language and power. Cultural context, including word choice and topic(s) addressed.

**Study Limitations**

The most evident study limitation in this study is the restricted data source of Gmail conversations. Given the limited nature of my type of data, I want to discuss the affordances and constraints of using only textual artifacts. To begin with, a limitation to using textual artifacts as my sole data source lies in the reality that interactions between people are more complex than just the language used. “Nonverbal communication, often subtle, can change the meaning of words; changes in tone (in the case of sarcasm, for instance) indicate meanings that are qualitatively different from the literal definitions of a word” (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012, p. 83). I recognize that using the written language as my only source of data does not allow me to account for such established and proven indicators of the student’s mood, like body language or prosody, while writing to El Maga. Given that the Amigas often worked with the students to write the letters, however, a video recording of that practice would have captured the interactions between the participants, rather than the inner workings of the student composing the email. Therefore, an affordance of studying El Maga letters outside of the context of El Pueblo Mágico, resides in the potential of discovering how the relationship is created between the students and El Maga via written communication alone.
The second limitation to having only textual artifacts for data analysis is the inability to triangulate data collection using a variety of sources (Maxwell, 2009). I do not have observational fieldnotes, daily video and audio recordings of the after-school club, interviews, or questionnaires. Without these materials I do not have background information on all of the students (e.g., age, social and cultural circumstances), or insight from other coordinators and undergraduates about what occurred at site that could have influenced the letters written to El Maga. Without knowing the students well, I may be missing irony, humor, and/or sincerity that does not come across in their words alone. If I had chosen to interview students about their letters to El Maga, I might have developed a greater understanding of what they had written.

Although I did not triangulate my data collection by using a variety of sources, I did collect conversations from 85 different students over the span of three academic semesters. This expanded notion of data triangulation to include more than one individual, over time, and across space is based on the assumption that understanding that social phenomenon should be examined under a variety of conditions (Mathison, 1988). I also went back and searched for disconfirming evidence, in both the other letters in conversations I analyzed, and in the conversations that did not meet my data selection criteria.

Another distinct limitation to this study was not always being able to tell who was ‘playing’ El Maga for each of the letter responses. This is a product of how we framed site during the time the conversations in this study were written, with various team members at El Pueblo Mágico taking on the responsibility for replying to a small group of students throughout the semester. As such, I have analyzed the letters treating El Maga’s responses as a collective effort, focusing on how changes can be made as a team; learning from the replies that
encapsulate the ideology of El Pueblo Mágico, and those that lack necessary nuance to promote the desired ideals of the learning ecology.

The last obvious limitation to this study was my decision to move out of state, away from El Pueblo Mágico and thereby minimizing my access to observing the after-school club as a way to think about and inform my interpretation of the data. In doing so I also distanced myself from the community of the School of Education, and fellow academics (e.g. other graduate students) who could support, encourage, and impart their wisdom when I felt stuck.

**Developing Valid Claims**

I recognize the fallibility of having a single angle from which to read the materials; in order to create a system that allowed me to strive for validity and address alternative explanations to my findings (Maxwell, 2005), I consulted other researchers and site coordinators from El Pueblo Mágico, some who also ‘played’ El Maga during the time frame the letters I analyzed were written. I sought the opinions of these other scholars, the other El Magas, as a way to evaluate the credibility of my interpretations. I did not endeavor to eliminate variance between myself and the other readers of my data analysis, but rather attempted to understand how my particular values and expectations influenced my data analysis. I also engaged in conversations with my dissertation committee chair, who is the current faculty director of El Pueblo Mágico, about my study throughout the process. I do not declare the existence of any objective truth, but rather claim that there is plausibility to my explanations, and alternative narratives have been sought out.

Frequently throughout my data analysis process I wrote memos to reflect on my methods, conceptual framework, and the goals of my project. I wrote memos simultaneous to data analysis, so as to allow the emergence of insight and findings to help me progressively focus my research questions and study design (Maxwell, 2009). Memos also served as a “valuable analytic
technique” to facilitate my “thinking about relationships in [my] data and make [my] ideas and analyses visible and retrievable” (Maxwell, 2009, p. 239). Furthermore, this practice helped with the reduction of my data and the creation of the whole story I aimed to tell. The memos facilitated the process of examining my findings in relation to the activity system of El Pueblo Mágico and how I saw the affective dimensions of learning as part of the CHAT framework.

An alternative conception of triangulation (Mathison, 1988) requires that a researcher endeavor to make sense of what she is finding, even when the data does not always add up to a convergence of evidence, but rather includes inconsistency and contradictions as well. In an attempt to do so, I was compelled to be explicit, as much as possible, about my research process, data collection procedures, and any explanations – even inconsistent or contradictory – about the social phenomena I studied. My goal is to be transparent in the discussion of my processes of interpretation, highlighting alternative explanations and disconfirming evidence when applicable, so as to establish trust and credibility in this study, knowing that there is more than one way to tell a story (Denzin, 2009).
CHAPTER V
EXPRESSION OF EMOTIONS AS A CULTURAL PRACTICE

As explained in Chapter IV, there were two primary stages of analysis for each letter. First, I considered the letter’s structure and compositional expression\(^\text{17}\), including font size, color, and format, emoticons, and punctuation. Second, I examined the content that indexed the social and cultural context, including word choice and topic(s) addressed. I developed this approach to analysis because of the order in which a reader encounters the information. When discussing the two stages of analysis it is important to recall the fundamental principles of CDA: historicity, language recognized as a social practice, purposefulness of linguistic features and structures, and power relations. Historicity, language as social practice, and power relations coincide with the second stage of greater social and cultural context analysis, while the purposefulness of linguistic features coincides with the word-level and structural analysis. As you will recall from Chapter IV, these principles are important for analysis in this study because they facilitate thinking about the affective dimensions of learning by:

- highlighting how emotions, like texts, acquire meaning from being situated in social, cultural, and ideological contexts;
- allowing us to see qualities of a situation, whether consciously or unconsciously, in a way that we would otherwise miss;
- calling attention to how emotions (and power relations) are co-constructed linguistically, and produced, employed, and reproduced through discourse.

Throughout my data analysis chapters I draw attention to El Maga’s ability to encourage

\(^{17}\) In regards to presenting the letters in this document, when students or El Maga used altered text (large font, colors, emoticons) I used a screen grab to capture the letter in its original format. When students or El Maga did not make any structural changes to the font, I re-typed the letter (verbatim and with original punctuation) so as to simplify this document and save page space.
the development of a repertoire of emotions (Denham, 1998; de Sousa, 2010). As discussed in Chapter II, this study examined emotions not as a “thing” or an object of analysis, but rather as a practice in which students engaged, whereby emotions are socially and culturally constructed. Just as students develop repertoires of practice around activities in the learning space, we build repertoires of emotions through participation in everyday occurrences. Our repertoires are habitual behaviors, or blueprints, for how to express, understand, and regulate emotions that we use to navigate our world. These emotional expressions need to be reinforced in order to continue to persist.

I also speak to El Maga’s method of bringing into play the social ideology of El Pueblo Mágico. The principles, beliefs, morals, and credo of El Pueblo Mágico encompass the goals of a Fifth Dimension program, the mission and vision of Alicia Sanchez Elementary, as well as the commitment to equity, diversity, and social justice as priorities of the University of Colorado Boulder, School of Education. The social ideology of the after-school club promotes access to a range of skills and knowledge in areas of need, as identified by the school, for students from non-dominant backgrounds, privileges play, imagination, and creativity as they intersect with learning, and encourages the development of meaningful relationships.

In this chapter I examine a specific affordance of El Maga letter writing: the wizard’s ability to promote the development of a repertoire of emotions. I discuss how this takes place by reviewing four narrative means through which the affective dimensions of learning are made evident when students express their feelings in letters to El Maga: 1) conveying feelings about El Maga and El Pueblo Mágico, 2) exploring social dimensions and relationships through writing to El Maga, 3) sharing stories in which emotional statements are embedded, and 4) using emoticons as compositional expression in particularly meaningful ways. The letters examined in this
chapter were instances where El Maga did not have to invite the engagement of affective dimensions of learning into the correspondence because students wrote, unprompted, about their feelings, moods, and attitudes regarding people and activities, both within the social and cultural contexts of the after-school club, and the broader setting of Sanchez Elementary School and the community within which El Pueblo Mágico is situated.

In order to provide a broad overview of the various kinds of letters students sent to El Maga, I have organized examples into these four categories; some letters are included because they are unique and noteworthy, while others are representative of more common topics. Although the letters I discuss in this chapter cover a wide range of topics, the common thread throughout is the impromptu sharing and expression of emotions, feelings, moods, and attitudes through the stories told by the students. In 640 conversations, 54 were found to have affective components, as defined by students or El Maga using emotional terms, such as sad, mad, happy, love, like, and hate, or fitting into one of the four categories above.

Expressing Feelings for El Maga and El Pueblo Mágico

As students learn about El Maga through participation in the El Pueblo Mágico community, they develop their own narratives about how they feel towards the mythical cyberwizard. Although many students willingly partake in the collusion of the existence of the magical patron, not all students accept the storyline and push back on who the wizard is. The various ways in which students engage in the El Maga narrative is one area where the affective dimensions of learning can be examined in the practice of El Maga letter writing.

Through the process of writing to El Maga, receiving responses, and entering into dialogue with other El Pueblo Mágico community members about the wizard, many students

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18 When available, I have also included El Maga’s responses to student letters, and any further correspondence from the student and El Maga that was applicable to the topic analyzed in the original letter. However, there are not always responses to include. I recognize that the lack of replies is also a form of data to examine in and of itself.
develop affectionate feelings for El Maga, which they expressed in their writing.

**Student Email:**

In the letter above, sent on Valentine’s Day, the student used 27 heart emoticons and 18 smiley faces to demonstrate visually the sentiment of her email. Before even reading the message, the emoticons suggested that the email was a message of love. The appearance of this letter, which resembled a Valentine’s Day card, supported the content, and as is customary on this holiday, the student told El Maga “I love you.”

**El Maga’s Response:**

*Hola [student name]!*

*I love you too! I was so happy to get your very colorful letter. It is gorgeous!!!*

In El Maga’s response the expression of love was reciprocated, which indicated Maga valued the student sharing the feeling and points to how emotions are mediated by the circumstances in which they occur. Through cultural processes, emotions are formed and the qualities of emotions reflect these cultural activities. This results in the function of emotions perpetuating the cultural practices (Ratner, 2000). In this short exchange between El Maga and the student, both participants took part in the cultural process of expressing shared admiration, followed by El Maga acknowledging how “happy” they were to get the colorful letter, which reinforced the student’s behavior. The feeling rules and paradigm scenarios modeled in such an exchange may contribute to the student’s development of a repertoire of emotions; factoring into an understanding of general rules of common moods for particular situations, and stories characteristic of different events, learned by association and from our own experiences.

In the next example exchange, the student articulated another common feeling of ‘missing’ El Maga. This particular sentiment is interesting because the cyberwizard is described
as invisible when they come to Earth. Therefore, the concept of missing El Maga speaks to the connection students feel with the wizard, despite never ‘seeing’ them.

Student Email:
Dear El Maga,
I’m so happy to see you again today! I miss you. I hope you see me. I played my friend [student name] and I hope you were watching. I miss you.

In this letter the student wrote: “I miss you” twice, “I hope you see me,” and “I hope you were watching.” Her words indicate that she was actively going along with the invisible quality of El Maga and the storyline that the wizard would sometimes come to watch over the students at site. Regardless of having never seen El Maga, she still expressed being “so happy” to see El Maga again (presumably to be at the after-school club and writing to the wizard).

El Maga’s Response:
Dear [student name],

Of course, I am always hanging around at El Pueblo! I try to pop in whenever I am on Earth for a bit. Last week, after I delivered my big letter, I stayed around to see everyone listen to it. I was happy so many of my citizens remembered things about me! I love to get to know new friends at El Pueblo and tell them things about me!

I am so happy to hear that you were playing with a friend at El Pueblo! What did you play? Did you have fun? Did you solve any problems together? Isn't that the best - when we can have fun and solve problems at the same time? Yesterday, I was teaching my friend Darnell the Dragon how to hula hoop! It was tough because he kept disintegrating the hula hoops with his fire breath, but because we were laughing and enjoying each other's company, it was a lot easier!

I am sooooooooooooooooooooooo (sic) happy that you are at El Pueblo, [student name]! I can't wait to get your next letter.

Backflips and bon-bons

In El Maga’s reply, the wizard reassured the student that they did “hang around” El Pueblo Mágico to see the citizens and listen to the community letter being read. El Maga then demonstrated their own expression of emotions by writing that they were “so happy” to hear about the student playing with a friend, asked if the student had fun, and described the wizard
and Darnell the Dragon “laughing and enjoying each other’s company” – all examples of joy. Additionally, El Maga asked the student “Isn't that the best - when we can have fun and solve problems at the same time?” drawing attention to a purposefully designed element of the El Pueblo Mágico learning ecology. Finally, El Maga declared: “I am sooooooooooo(sic) happy that you are at El Pueblo!” whereby El Maga used compositional expression to intensify the feeling by elongating the word “so” with 21 o’s, followed by an exclamation point.

Another topic that elicited emotional reactions from students was El Maga’s occasional tendency not to reply to a student’s letter. When this lapse in responding happened, students wrote about their feelings regarding this transgression. As discussed in Chapter V, Loretta expressed anger when she did not receive a response. In the two examples below, the students revealed feeling sad about not hearing back from Maga.

**Student Example 1:**

I hope u send me one next time ☹️

_p.s_ it’s almost st. patrick’s day!

**Student Example 2:**

Dear El Maga,

I’m sad that I did not get a letter back from you last week :( Today we made a soccer video! We played soccer outside and we beat the adults. That was so fun! I kicked the ball really high, and I blocked it. We’re making a digital story about it. Why didn’t you write me back last week? I was sad.

What is your favorite ice cream? My favorite ice cream is M&Ms in Cookie and Cream. Have you gone to Dairy Queen before? I did! I have only gone once.

Talk to you soon, please write back!

Sincerely,
Whether mad or sad, upset or disappointed, the reality that students exhibited these types of emotions encapsulates the significance the practice of El Maga letter writing held for the students. Much like the disappointment that came from not getting a letter in return, another common source of sadness was when El Pueblo Mágico was coming to an end for the school year.

**Student Example 1:**

Dear Maga,
I'm sad that it is the last Tuesday for Pueblo. I'm going to miss you. I might come to Pueblo next year. This was a very fun place for me. What I most enjoyed here was that I got to meet new friends and writing to you. But on Monday I am coming back for one last day. I'm going to miss everybody. Pueblo was very fun.

**Student Example 2:**

Dear el maga,
You are the best! I am still sad about every Tuesday, because I want to stay. 😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢
Sincerely,

**Student Example 3:**

Dear El Maga,
I thought that you would know where Ms. Wyo lived. I thought that you would know this because today is my last day here and I will miss you a lot and I don’t write you a letter today I would be sad.
Sincerely,
illustrated below. Another way students displayed their fondness for El Maga was by imitating the witty and silly sign-offs the wizard used at the end of their letters. The students were identifying with El Maga, and building rapport, which made space for understanding each other's feelings and ideas, and improving their ability to communicate well. For other students, the practice of El Maga letter writing was a way of testing and challenging the social norms of friendships.

In the student letters below, each author modeled behavior that is socially and culturally valued in friendships. One student wondered if El Maga was sick and expressed their worry, hoping that the wizard was “doing good.” Another student asked if El Maga had any friends and offered to be one if they wanted. And the third student wanted to know if El Maga liked her, and expressed that she loved El Maga “so much.”

Student Example 1:

my b-day is on august 21st how are you are you doing good are you sick just wondering and worried what is your favorite thing to do do you like to draw do you have any kids how old are you lizards and caramel apple lolly

Student Example 2:

Hello El Maga. I love ice cream. Do you? My name is _____ but some people call me _____. Some people don’t know that you are a boy or a girl. So which one are you? I am a girl. Do you have friends? If you don’t have friends I can be your friend. If you want me to?_love_____

Student Example 3:

hi maga
when i was on the computer i played games. it was happy fun. do you like me? we played monopoly today and i was the banker. it was fun! i would like to do a digital story next week. i love you so much el maga.

hi goodbye you should have a good night el maga
from love

Each of these letters functioned as artifacts that mediated the students’ performance in their
relationship with El Maga, and as a member of the El Pueblo Mágico community. The students’ expressions of emotion as a cultural practice were constructed and reproduced in relationship to the social ideology of the after-school club activity system.

In the following short exchange, the student checked in with El Maga about how the wizard would feel if she did not complete one big digital storytelling project, but rather had many little projects to share at the end of the semester.

Student Email:
Dear El Maga,
When are you going to come back? I want to talk to you about digital storytelling. I did not start it today, but I am thinking that digital storytelling will be my final project for this semester. But will you be mad if I don’t have a big project at the end of the semester, and instead have many little projects and stories to share. It is my spring break next week! Starting today! Over spring break I am just going to stay home and get some candy. The rest of my week was good, how was yours? I played on the computers today and did craftapolis today.
Talk to you later,

By asking if they would be “mad” the student was simultaneously testing the social dimensions of their relationship and letting Maga know she cared what they thought. El Maga responded by assuring the student that they wouldn’t be mad if she didn’t have a big project to share at the end of the semester, and wrote: “I want you to do what makes you happy,” reminding the student that El Pueblo Mágico was designed to be a place where students enjoyed the activities they participated in. Additionally, Maga encouraged the student to make whatever she would like to share and expressed curiosity about one of the “little stories”.
El Maga’s Response:

Of course I won’t be mad if you don’t have a big project at the end of the semester! I want you to do what makes you happy and I want you to make whatever you’d like to share! What is one of the little stories you might share? I’m curious!

How was your spring break? Did you stay home and eat candy? Did you play with your sisters and brother? I attached a picture that makes me think of spring ... oh, I can’t wait for the flowers outside to start blossoming and the green green grass to smell good. But, I know that you like playing in the snow!

Marshmallows & Moonbeams,
El Maga

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What the wizard received in reply was creative, beautiful, and emblematic of the artistry of the students at El Pueblo Mágico.

Student Email:
With the freedom to make and share whatever “little stories” she wanted to, the student chose to express herself through poetry and art.

*Challenging the Social Dimensions*

As mentioned before, not all students accepted the narrative offered about El Maga. Some enthusiastically assumed the role of critical thinkers and challenged the story they had been told about the magical, invisible, flying, omniscient cyberwizard. This type of sophisticated thinking is valued at El Pueblo Mágico. The learning ecology of the after-school club is a safe space for this type of critical thinking, and when children challenge the norms they are met with encouragement. In this vein, some students wrote to El Maga to express their skepticism, and share how they felt about El Maga, even when they didn’t like the cyberwizard. A common form the students’ critical thinking took was questioning the ‘existence’ of El Maga.

**Student Email:**

Dear El Maga,

You’re not real. You’re not magic. You can’t fly. You can’t go through things. You’re ugly! You have a beard. Are you a boy or girl? Do you have a bubblehead? What’s your name, bubblehead? Do you have a mustache and a beard? Do you have a brain? Do you have clothes? Are you just ugly?

What’s up? Do you play any sports?
I play basketball. I play soccer, baseball, I play everything.

I’m in 4th grade. 4th grade is good. I’m almost the oldest here. I am not the oldest in Pueblo I. I hope I am when I am in 5th grade.

In this email the student conveyed his disappointment in thinking El Maga wasn’t real, and in an attempt to test his theory he asked several impertinent questions, getting at ‘who are you, El Maga?’ The letter is a robust illustration of the problem-solving narrative, in which the student asked El Maga about being a boy or a girl, if the wizard had a mustache and a beard, and if they had clothes. In the first paragraph of the letter there was an underlying mood of impudence when the student wrote: “You’re ugly! ... What’s your name, bubblehead? ... Do you have a brain? ...
Are you just ugly?” Yet in the next paragraph he asked: “What's up?” as though he was talking to a buddy. He even boasted about playing “everything” and asked if Maga played any sports. In spite of trying so hard to push back on the existence of the wizard, the student ended up fully, and productively, participating in the practice of El Maga letter writing.

In the next example, the student expressed a strong disbelief that the wizard was real, openly admitted to not liking El Maga, and wrote that he did not want to tell Maga what he played that day. Despite the fact that the student started the letter by saying he didn’t believe Maga was real and didn’t want to write a letter, he did. In addition, he wrote to Maga three more times over the course of a month.

**Student Email:**

Dear El Maga, You are not real. I don't want to write you a letter. Well, I don't like you. I'm not telling you what I played today. I played monopoly with [student name]. Girls were chasing me today in class. I was outside and was (sic) like, what's up girls and so they were chasing me.

I sit at the special table at lunch. That's all.

Additionally, the student told the wizard about sitting at “the special table at lunch.” Without the ability to follow-up with this student I cannot say whether this is a source of pride or shame for the boy, but how it was presented, as something the student wanted El Maga to know, points to the potential of a relationship to form. This speaks to how the unassuming nature of the practice of El Maga letter writing draws out the affective dimensions of learning, even with a seemingly unwilling participant. This is not to say, however, that all students participate productively in this joint activity.

**El Maga’s Response:**

Dear [student name],

Thanks for writing me even though you didn't want to! I love getting letters from citizens and hearing about the fun they had at El Pueblo! It sounds like you and [student name] had a great time playing Monopoly with your amigo!!! I wonder...did you learn anything while you played? Did it get easier to do after you played it awhile?? Did you play it
again today? I am wondering if you and [student name] want to go to the Imagination Station on the maze...you can do lots of cool things there.

That's too bad that you don't think I am real. Is it because you can't see me? It's pretty special when we can believe in things EVEN if we can't see them.

It didn't feel good to hear that you don't like me, [student name], but I am really excited that you have joined El Pueblo Mágico, and hope that we can have fun being penpals over the next few months! Here is a joke: What happened to the cat who swallowed a ball of wool?

Make a guess for the answer, and I'll tell you next time! Do you have any jokes?

Also - why do the girls chase you?
Planets and pomegranates,
El Maga

El Maga responded to the student in a non-judgmental way, and did not hold back from asking him several questions about his day at the after-school club. In other words, El Maga’s response to this student promoted the valued practices of the El Pueblo Mágico learning ecology, just as with any other Maga-believing student, when the wizard wrote: “I wonder...did you learn anything while you played? ... I am wondering if you and [student name] want to go to the Imagination Station on the maze...you can do lots of cool things there.” Nevertheless, after this opening, El Maga approached the subject of the student thinking they were not real. The wizard asked the student about believing in things “EVEN” when we can’t see them, and how that could be a special ability to have. Then El Maga told the student how it didn’t feel good to hear that he didn’t like the wizard, but hoped to have fun being pen pals anyway; modeling the feeling rules and paradigm scenarios for such situations. El Maga’s expression of emotion was based on their own experiences within the community, but was shared as a way to allow the student to see the quality of the situation differently than they were. Throughout the email El Maga continued to strive to draw the student in, including telling a joke, and asking the student seven questions in total.
Student Email:
I'm sorry that I said that you're fake. I felt like it. Can you see me? Are you a boy? Are you cute? Are you ugly?
I played the wii with [student name] today. I danced and also battleship.
Are you having a good day?
Thank you for visiting.

At this point in their correspondence the student apologized to Maga for saying they were fake, but continued to ask questions about who the wizard was.

El Maga’s Response:
Thanks for writing me back! It was nice to hear from you. I understand wanting to say that I'm fake if you felt like it. It's good to be curious and want to know about things! But it's also good to think about how our words make others feel. I can see that you do that too! That's really awesome.

El Maga acknowledged the apology and the student’s explanation for why he wrote what he had, while being conscious of how the learning ecology of the after-school club promoted and valued curiosity. The wizard then repeated to the student why it is important to “think about how our words make others feel”, even when we are just being curious about someone, followed by recognizing that it was “awesome” the student was capable of doing that. In this interaction El Maga educated the student about how to react to the feelings of others, and demonstrated the social norms around questioning someone’s identity – nurturing a repertoire of emotion through socialization. Notwithstanding the fact that this conversation did not start out as amicably as other exchanges, the dynamic interactions between Maga and the student shaped, and were shaped by, their relationship, and mediated by the joint activity of El Maga letter writing. This exchange underscored how important writing is in this activity system for connecting with someone else.

Albeit rarely, students sometimes expressed extremely unpleasant and violent imagery in their letters to El Maga. In the example below the student wrote about El Maga having a horrible accident and dying, but what the student expressed being upset about was thinking that El Maga
was an imposter and a “LIAR.” In reading this exchange it is important to think about expression of emotions as a cultural practice – through interaction with mediating artifacts, including one another, people are continually shaped by and shape the emotional practices in which they participate.

**Student Email:**

*hi i am having a good time with my broken arm and i looked into latest accidents by hacking into the DOD’s (DOT, which stands for Department of Transportation) files and you did get hit my (sic) a bus and die so u are a person claiming to be Elmaga LIAR*

With content matter this intense, the member of the team playing El Maga needed to take up the issue seriously for the safety and well-being of the child. In response, Maga took this opportunity to start a dialogue with the student about what he wrote. The subject line of El Maga’s response even stated up front how the wizard felt, as a way into addressing the problem about which the team member had reason to be concerned.

**El Maga’s Response:**

*I am very Sad

El Maga <elmaga@elpueblomagico.org>

to

Hola,

You know I wish you would believe in me like I believe in you. I know that you are an amazing adventurous guy who likes to have fun and be very creative. We are very a like except I believe you are real and you do not believe I am real. Why do you not believe in me amigo? I am sad you think I got hit by a bus and died and I think we need to stop talking about me dying this makes me very sad and friends should not make friends sad. Let's talk about fun fun fun things we are doing! What have you been doing at el pueblo? How is your arm?

Brave adventures!*

El Maga’s effort to impart the morals, values, and ethics held by the wizard, and embedded in the ideology of the El Pueblo Mágico community, was made evident in this email. Specifically, this is clear when the wizard wrote to the student about liking to have fun, being very creative, friends not making friends sad, and asking what he had been doing at El Pueblo Mágico. By pointing out many positive qualities of the student, expressing their own emotions in reaction to
the student’s email, and encouraging the student to write about “fun fun fun (sic) things” Maga demonstrated how what we feel is mediated by how we think and what we think, while simultaneously how we analyze situations and events, is mediated by our feelings regarding such experiences. In other words, the wizard encouraged the student to reexamine his repertoire of emotions and modeled the feeling rules and paradigm scenarios supporting Maga’s own reactions to the message of the student’s letters. This was not, however, the end of the student’s cynical and fatalistic letters to Maga.

One way through which children learn the socially constructed scripts of, and dialogue around emotions is participation in everyday occurrences, thus an important aspect of constructing the social scripts about emotions is a child’s own experience and exploration with models of a variety of emotions. As evidenced by the student’s reply, his thinking around the messages in his letter writing was not characteristic of the way in which others might react to the stories he told. This is an example of a situation in which the feeling rules and paradigm scenarios the student was working from, did not align with those of El Maga or the ideology of El Pueblo Mágico.

Student Email:
Dear El Maga,
Did you Jump off a skyscraper, hit the ground & get hit by a Semi-Truck?

El Maga’s Response:
I am so sad! Why would you ask me if I jumped off a skyscraper and got hit by a truck? These are sad words [student name], negative words. We are friends and friends only want to keep their friends safe and say good things about them. This is the Sanchez way. Let’s talk about fun exciting positive things. I am happy and excited to see what ideas and games you have for El Pueblo Magico. Tell me your ideas!
Happy and Positive

When the student asked again if El Maga had experienced a terrible accident, which could have been symptomatic of a larger issue, Maga persisted in trying to explain to the student why there
wasn’t space for such language, “sad words, negative words,” at El Pueblo Mágico and Sanchez Elementary School. Through the process of witness and testimony, the wizard again modeled their morals and values, and reminded the student that they were friends and “friends only want to keep their friends safe and say good things about them.” Maga tried to help the student learn how to participate in social relationships (friendship) through language, and understand the associated values and norms. The wizard even signed off: “Happy and Positive.” In the student’s next response there was a slight indication that his thinking about El Maga and participation in the activity was beginning to shift, yet at the end of the letter the student continued to be curious.

**Student Email:**

*But Whyyyyyyyyy*

*I wanna ask you funny questions!*

*by the way have you heard of MineCraft? Its is a 3D game that you play on the computer.. And soon XBOX Live!*

*My Group are going to play world maker and make a world where we have our own countrys!!!*

*anyways another rumor is that you are a man on the outside but a Girl on the inside!*

*BYE BYE BYE BYE BYE BYE BYE BYE exclamation Point X10*

*Sincerely,*

*Chekov Willis (not the student’s real name)*

In this letter the student elongated the word “why” by adding eight y’s at the end, guiding the reader to hear a potentially pleading-like tone of the statement. In his own words the student claimed that he was trying to ask “funny questions”, which indicated that he either did not understand the social boundaries he was trespassing, or his (dark) humor was lost in the text of the letter without any compositional assistance, such as winking or laughing emoticons. The student then quickly switched to a hybrid discourse bringing in pop culture references, asking El Maga about Mine Craft and XBOX Live. This shift towards good-humored discourse was halted when he wrote about the “rumor” that El Maga was “a man on the outside but a Girl on the inside!” The student’s word choice of “rumor” is what shifted the tone of the email back to
sounding inquisitive. Although the definition of rumor does not imply a negative association, the social and cultural understanding is that rumors are gossip with malicious intent not to be trusted.

The student’s description of El Maga as a man on the outside and a girl on the inside is comparable to the portrayal of being transgender; as I argued in Chapter V, the topic of gender identity is one that can carry significant emotional consequences, particularly for people who do not identify in the dominant binaries of male or female.

**El Maga’s Response:**

* * *  
I guess if they are funny questions and not negative ones it’s ok! Very creative by the way. So I hear you are going to play world maker and make your own world! Is your world going to have yummy worms and honey that grow on all the trees and bushes? That would be so amazing! Do you think I am a man or a woman? It is different where I am from but you can guess if you want! Tell me more about your game and countries! * MineCraft for XBOX! *

In this reply El Maga instantly trusted the student’s assertion that he was trying to be funny, and complimented his creativity. Perhaps this was the wizard’s way of trying to keep the student engaged in the practice of El Maga letter writing, and they continued to do so by asking the student if he thought Maga was a man or a woman. Another way to think of this is El Maga helped the student reorganize his “everyday thinking” through the Third Space as a zone of proximal development (Gutiérrez, 2008). In this case, the informal script of El Maga letters facilitated reorganizing the student’s thinking, as well as his fatalistic storytelling, by writing through his “imaginary situations” to become a problem-solving discussion around gender. Additionally, Maga’s closing: “*MineCraft for XBOX*” showed the student that El Maga valued his hybridity. Even more so than with the last example, this conversation did not start out as amicably as others did, nor did El Maga and this student take a direct path to a friendship. Over the course of this short conversation, the affective dimensions of learning were revealed through the student’s testing of social boundaries. By way of violent imagery, unfortunate and fatalistic
storytelling, the student’s emotions intersected with his learning. El Maga took up those issues and promoted meaningful participation, and socialization to the culture of the after-school club, through their ongoing and highly personalized dialogue (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, Alvarez, & Chiu, 1999).

**Storytelling Embedded with Emotions**

Sometimes students took the opportunity to write to El Maga when they needed to talk to a friend. The stories that emerged from the unstructured, unprompted, and low-risk nature of the practice of El Maga letter writing were personally meaningful forms of self-expression through the social practice of language. Language as a social practice is seen as action in a social context, in this case writing to El Maga, involving power, values, and norms as revealed through the students’ stories.

In the letters below, the students wanted to write to Maga for a variety of reasons – to take a break from the group and write about being mad at one of the other students, being sad because best friends were moving, feeling like group members didn’t talk to her much, crying because sisters weren’t at club that day, scared when friends got dizzy and fainted, or just because they had a bad day.

**Student Example 1:**

Hola Maga,

Your welcome for the awesome and creative letter I made! . Now I am mad at one of the student in my group and her name is because I wanted to be Justin Beiber and not because , .

I left our group witch I am sad because we are best friends since like third grade . Right now i am writing to you because i wanted to take a brake from my group... We are going to present it in front of the whole CU amigos and amigas also our parents. Today might be my last day because i might go to CU every single Tuesday its really called "CU games". CU games is about science..... Well I am bored right now so im going to do all the faces there is if thats okay with you? :)

😂😊😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢�

Right now i am writing to you because i wanted to take a brake from my group... We are going to present it in front of the whole CU amigos and amigas also our parents. Today might be my last day because i might go to CU every single Tuesday its really called "CU games". CU games is about science..... Well I am bored right now so im going to do all the faces there is if thats okay with you?

😂😊😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢😢�

In my group and her name is because i wanted to be Justin Beiber and not because , .

I left our group witch I am sad because we are best friends since like third grade . Right now i am writing to you because i wanted to take a brake from my group... We are going to present it in front of the whole CU amigos and amigas also our parents. Today might be my last day because i might go to CU every single Tuesday its really called "CU games". CU games is about science..... Well I am bored right now so im going to do all the faces there is if thats okay with you?

íg and beans
Student Example 2:

Dear El Maga,

Today I played spongebob and scrabble. It was a lot of fun and I played with my sister and my best friend. She is moving so I am sad. I had lots of fun with her and I’m going to miss her lots. Tomorrow I am coming back because I LOVE this place. I was wondering if you knew how to play Jump rope?

Student Example 3:

Hola maga

I’m perfectly fine. y tu? Today we worked on my digital story. I’m very excited. My group is amazing but they don’t talk to me much though. I missed you very much too. After my digital story our group is working on jenga. It’s true I never finished my digital story last semester, so I’m finishing my story this semester. The title is interesting…..the story is about Santa gets sick with the snowpox on Christmas Eve and Mrs. Claus has to deliver the presents herself. It wasn’t easy for her but she did it.

P.S. How was space!!!

Watermelon and whales

Student Example 4:

Dear Maga,

How can you write to me if you are not on the planet? Today, we planned our video. I wanted to do a scary movie. 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 😳 🌟

Student Example 5:

El maga I had a bad day. I hope your was better!

Student Example 6:

Dear el maga,

My friend is not here because when we were at recess she told me she was dizzy and when I left she fell and fainted.

And I got scared and when she went home I felt really really sad. Will I did not add nothing to the project but I finish it and I’m really happy I would ones like to see you only ones but you are invisible. Will see you later alligator! Thanks for my letter. I love it is terrific and awesome. Will chow chow el maga 🌟 Happy dady!

Cool 😃 😃 😃
In order to think of these letters in terms of language as a social practice, it is key to recognize the values, norms, and power as presented in the letters by students. Unlike Luke’s (1995-1996) perspective on power constructed by dominant discourse I view the student perspectives on these issues as important for understanding how they position themselves and develop cultural identities at El Pueblo Mágico. Students wrote to El Maga about presenting “in front of the whole CU amigos and amigas also our parents”, and being sad when friends or family were not at club, and they wrote about loving El Pueblo Mágico and the letters they get from El Maga, showing the value held for their friends and family, and the after-school club. Throughout the text of their letters, the students demonstrated having power, as agency, to make their own decisions about what to play and what projects to work on, as well as when to participate and when to take a break from their group. Further, embedded within these letters is the belief that the practice of writing to El Maga about such stories is a norm of this learning ecology. Even though the students did not always include the emoticons as a way to enhance the meaning of their emails, sometimes they still served a purpose, for example as a way for students to stay engaged in the letter writing when otherwise bored. Unfortunately, as is the nature of the practice of El Maga letter writing, El Maga didn’t always engage and respond to what students shared.

When we think about the purposefulness of linguistic features, how students tell their stories, whether consciously or unconsciously, is a way to help us see the qualities of the situation in way that we wouldn’t otherwise. For example, when students inserted seemingly important information into the middle of letters, which positioned their stories as not that big of a deal.

Student Email:

*hola maga! a game el maga, a soldier made the good guy die. i made the game with my brother. i dont like my brother, he hit me a lot of times. the game is fun, we made the two guys able to run around and the computer controls the soldier.*
In the student’s email, the main storyline is about the game he made with his brother. Then, inserted into the middle of the letter almost as an aside comment about his brother, the student wrote: “I don't (sic) like my brother, he hit me a lot of times.” Which he followed immediately by writing more about the game, indicating the sibling situation was not his main focus: “The game is fun, we made the two guys able to run around and the computer controls the soldier.”

El Maga’s Response:

Thanks for your perfectly amazing letter! El Maga is so sad to hear that the good guy died. Can you tell me more about the game? Did you make any changes to the game? How do you use the computer to control the two guys? El Maga is also sad that you aren't getting along with your brother right now. What sorts of wonderful and magical things could you do to help the two of you get along? Owls and Orangutans!

In El Maga’s reply, the wizard mirrored the student by privileging discussion about the game over asking about his brother. “El Maga is so sad to hear that the good guy died. Can you tell me more about the game?” Yet this did not keep El Maga from being witness to the student’s story about his brother hitting him. “El Maga is also sad that you aren’t getting along with your brother right now.” And then in true Maga fashion, the wizard asked the student what “wonderful and magical” things he could do to help him get along with his brother.

Compositional Expression of Emotions

As evidenced by several of the letters discussed so far, as well as by the extended conversation between Loretta and El Maga, many students use the Gmail function of inserting emoticons to enhance the meaning of the messages in their letters. Some students, however, take the compositional expression to another level and use emoji in place of text. The following three examples demonstrate how effective this method of expression can be.
Student Email:

I am bored!! Today we are going to play the Wii 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊梭
The Lord of the Rings), where they can, and do, kill other characters with magic. The student then asked El Maga: “Are you real? because if you are not I am going to be so mad that I joined this program.” This last statement highlights how the student’s expression of emotion intersected with his problem-solving narrative about whether or not El Maga was real. As mentioned before, as human beings, how we think, what we know, how we know it, and what we do cannot be separated from how we feel. This student was expressing how he would be upset if he learned that El Maga was not real, and therefore the exploration of that question was tied to his feelings around the issue as well.

One of the striking qualities of the letters students wrote to El Maga was the blunt, genuine nature of the dialogue. In the 640 conversations I reviewed as part of my analysis, not a single email contained an obscenity. The letter below, however, expressed the feeling communicated with profanity by using the grawlix\(^{19}\), or symbolic euphemism instead. An emotion that was supported when the student wrote: “I hate them very much.”

**Student Email:**

*dear el maga this was ok but they are @#$#! I hate them very much but i want to stay here*

**El Maga’s Response:**

*I hope that this week is better than last week. I know that meeting new people can be really hard, but maybe you should try to be nice to them. That usually works. I heard that your group is making a computer game!!!! That is great. What is the game about?? I am looking forward to hearing about it and hopefully your group is better than before.*

El Maga started the response with a caring comment, telling the student they hoped the week had gone better for the student than the week before. Following this, the wizard related to the difficulty of meeting new people and urged the student to “try to be nice to them” because “that usually works.”

\(^{19}\) Grawlixes: typographical symbols standing for profanities, appearing in dialogue balloons in place of actual obscenities (Walker, 2000).
As wonderfully poignant letters could be, especially when students added compositional expression to their emails, it was not always clear to El Maga what the children were trying to express in their letters, and even El Maga, the omniscient and omnipresent cyberwizard had to ask for clarification sometimes.

Student Email:

```
i am having a good time in pueblo magico 😊😊❤❤
play games and boo hoo hoo
```

El Maga’s Response:

*I am so glad to hear that you are having a good time at El Pueblo Magico! It really is a magical place to be. You can be whoever you want to be at site! You can be an inventor (by creating your own games/stories) or you can even be a teacher (by teaching someone else how to do something)! 😊
What did you do today? What level on the adventure guide did you reach? I bet your at the advanced level huh? Or maybe even the expert level!

Boo hoo hoo? I don’t know why you sent that, but it sounds like a crying noise when I read it out loud! Were you sad? Or maybe you were trying to scare me, by saying BOO!

*Hope you had a good day at site today, let me know how it went!*

Student Email:

```
yes i have amigas and i love el pueblo magico and i like el pueblo magico❤❤❤
```

El Maga’s Response:

```
Hola 😊,

I like you too! 😊 What did you do at El Pueblo today? Who did you work with? You should start on one of the long term projects so you can present them to your friends and family at the end of the semester! Maybe you can try creating your own game. Or create a digital story! I would be happy to help you out if you want to send me some ideas that you have.

I’m glad you’re having fun at El Pueblo Magico! Keep up the good work.
```

Student Email:

```
now im sad and in happy😊😊😊 and we started to create a new game today and we had a fun day❤
```

El Maga’s Response:

```
Hola [student name],
```

```
Why were you sad and happy? Did something happen at El Pueblo? Or maybe something happened in school?

Anyways, I hope you are happy today! It's great to hear that you started creating a new game today. It's always exciting to start new things. What kind of game are you starting? What is the goal of the game? Are you actually creating it? If so, what materials will you need?

I hope to hear all your ideas about this fantastic new game! Don't forget to share some of your ideas with your amigas/amigos to get their feedback too. That's always helpful. :) 

When used in conjunction with the written message, emoticons can provide a form of embodied performance of affect (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2000), however, sometimes emoticons can confuse the intention of the letter. This may happen for example when used more as decorations or random additions to a letter. In the above below, El Maga struggled to understand the student’s mood, but nevertheless continued to attempt to decipher the emotions expressed in her emails, as well as communicated the valued practices of El Pueblo Mágico. For example, when Maga wrote: “You can be whoever you want to be at site! You can be an inventor (by creating your own games/stories) or you can even be a teacher (by teaching someone else how to do something)! 😊” the wizard was taking the limited content of the student’s email and encouraging her to become an active participate in the after-school club. Maga also acknowledged the feelings shared by the student throughout their correspondence, even though it never became clear why the student had shared being sad and happy. This speaks to the reality that although El Mag is positioned to draw out the affective dimensions of learning, the attempts to do so are not always productive.

Reflections on Expression of Emotions
In this chapter I shared how the impromptu expression of emotions was revealed in children’s letters. Students drew upon social and cultural categories to tell El Maga stories about their daily activities, both within the context of El Pueblo Mágico as well as their broader home
and community lives. Within these stories, students shared their emotions, feelings, moods, and attitudes as they explored and made sense of issues they encountered and the events they were participating in. In the next chapter I will take a closer look at one such issue in students’ letters: the topic of gender.

I also addressed how, and when, El Maga took up those expressions of feelings, moods, and attitudes in two notable ways: modeling feeling rules and paradigm scenarios and the reciprocal process of witness and testimony. Maga drew upon their own feeling rules and paradigm scenarios to help the students develop a repertoire of emotion. For example, when students asked questions about who El Maga was in an impertinent way, or made statements that affected El Maga (e.g. made Maga sad) the wizard would share how that made them feel and why the student needed to think about what they said and how it could affect their friends. Alternatively, when a student would share how they felt with Maga, the wizard would often acknowledge the sentiment and authenticate the student’s expression of that feeling, participating in the process of witness and testimony. Furthermore, by continually calling attention to the ideology of El Pueblo Mágico, El Maga used the purposefully designed features of the learning ecology to promote the students engagement in the activities at site, as well as mediate the affective dimensions of learning in the practice of El Maga letter writing.
CHAPTER VI
AFFECTIVE DIMENSIONS & GENDER IDENTITY

One of the problem-solving narratives that children engaged in with El Maga revolved around the issue, and I would argue emotionally consequential topic, of gender. In the 640 conversations between El Maga and students, there were 33 conversations that brought up the issue of gender – asking if Maga is a boy or a girl, if Maga is married or has a significant other (boyfriend or girlfriend), writing about heteronormative gender roles, and talking about their own love lives. I chose to devote an entire chapter to the topic of gender-themed letters for two primary reasons. First, the intentionally designed hybridity of El Maga’s gender identity results in students frequently writing about this issue. As an invited topic of discussion at El Pueblo Mágico, it is important that we have an understanding of how this issue is taken-up and considered by students. This is because it is important to study activity systems in the full social, cultural, and historical contexts where social relations, power, identity, and knowledge are constructed and reproduced in relationship to broader social ideology. Second, I view gender as an emotionally charged issue, which can be consequential to one’s identity development and cultural categories, as they are taught, learned, and established through everyday discourse and texts. As such, I recognize this topic as one where the intersection between emotions and learning – the affective dimensions – can be identified and examined.

In this chapter I will provide a broad overview of the ways in which “gender” emerged and was taken up in El Maga letters. I will then provide a deeper look, using an analysis of an extended conversation between El Maga and one student, into what these interactions look like and how they develop over time.

Are you a boy or a girl?

In the exploration of finding out more about who El Maga is, the most common question
asked by the students was: are you a boy or a girl? When students asked if El Maga is a boy or a girl, Maga’s answers varied from explaining that wizards are different from human beings, to saying El Maga is both, and sometimes not even replying to the question at all. When El Maga didn’t reply to the question, some students asked again. One student asked three times without getting a response about Maga’s gender. This substantiates the significance students felt about knowing the answer to this question, and the variations in how El Maga answered this question speaks to the complexity of gender in our society. At this moment in U.S. history, we view gender as a binary, either/or, and rather fixed identifier (transgender, transsexual, and genderqueer\textsuperscript{20} are still the exception, not the norm). The value placed on this classification is reinforced in our daily lives – separate bathrooms, locker rooms, and dressing rooms, colors associated with boys and girls, differences in clothing and hairstyles, and gender targeted toys. Therefore, reading the numerous responses and varied answers that El Maga wrote to the students, it is not surprising that even Maga didn’t always attempt explain the hybrid-gendered characteristic of the wizard. The four examples below are representative, and backed by analysis, of the most common responses El Maga had for the “are you a girl or boy?” question:

Cyberwizards do not have genders like humans:

$I am not a girl or a boy. I am not human and my species (cyber wizard) does not have genders. It's not that I am a boy AND a girl like some of your amigos like to say. I am just different from humans.$

El Maga is neither a boy nor a girl:

$You asked if I am a girl or a boy: I'm actually not a human so I'm neither. That's why my name is el maga, since in Spanish el is masculine and maga is feminine. I am just different from humans, but I am not a boy AND a girl, just different.$

El Maga is both a boy and a girl:

$To answer your questions, I'm not a boy or a girl, I'm both!$

\textsuperscript{20}“Genderqueer, along with the somewhat newer and less politicized term nonbinary, are umbrella terms intended to encompass individuals who feel that terms like man and woman or male and female are insufficient to describe the way they feel about their gender and/or the way they outwardly present it” (Urquhart, 2015, para. 2).
El Maga is all of the above:

Well, sometimes I'm a girl and sometimes I'm a boy. Sometimes I'm both and sometimes I'm neither!

There are a couple of dilemmas that arise with these various responses. To begin with, each type of answer sent a contradictory message to the students. This is only problematic if the students compared notes and decided they cared about which answer was true. As far as I know, this doesn’t happen often, if at all. However, the larger worry is that none of these explanations aligned with shifting the discourse towards the Human Rights Campaign statement that “gender is more of a spectrum, with all individuals expressing and identifying with varying degrees of both masculinity and femininity” (HRC, Gender Basics). Gender identity and expression are central to the way we view ourselves, engage in the world around us, and how society positions us. Although it is not the message El Maga intended to express, it could have read as: if you do not identify as a boy or a girl, you are not human.

The letter below demonstrates that this question is one that didn’t take students very long to feel comfortable asking El Maga about, and even as a new citizen of El Pueblo Mágico, this student knew that the “truth” was hard to come by. I reuse the student’s word choice of “truth” because having been asked the question about Maga’s gender at site, when I answered students would often laugh and say, “no, tell me the truth!” They considered the “both”, “neither”, and “wizards are different” answers to be coy.

Student Email:

Hi! I'm new in El pueblo magico. Are u a boy or girl? Tell me the truth pleaseeeeeeEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE eees!! I did a craft ___ and ___ and ___.

At the structural and compositional expression level of the letter, this student inserted a smiley face emoticon, used large font, and accentuated the “please” by drawing out the word with 28 e’s
and an exclamation point. By doing so, the reader can hear the girl earnestly ask El Maga to tell her if the wizard is a boy or girl. Anyone who has witnessed a child plead for something she wants, can translate this email to imagine what this letter would sound like in person.

In the reply to this example, El Maga didn’t undertake the task of helping the new student understand the wizard’s gender hybridity.

**El Maga’s Response:**
*I'm so excited that you decided to join El Pueblo! Well, sometimes I'm a girl and sometimes I'm a boy. Sometimes I'm both and sometimes I'm neither! It gets kinda confusing, huh?*

This reply had El Maga embracing many options – boy, girl, both, neither – and yet did not employ the “cyberwizards are different” model. Given how purposefully constructed the activity system of El Pueblo Mágico is, and how intentionally designed the cyberwizard El Maga is in facilitating the children’s expansive learning, it should follow that how Maga answered this question should have been carefully framed as well. In El Maga’s reply above, there was no explanation for why the wizard’s gender identity is complex, or why it can’t be reduced to a binary either/or, but rather left the student with the query: “It gets kinda confusing, huh?”

The “are you a girl or boy” question was an issue that El Maga often tried to explain in Community Letters, sent to the whole group by Eagle Express. As discussed in Chapter IV, these letters were typically sent to the group at the beginning and end of each semester, or when the whole community needed to hear something from El Maga. In the snippet from Maga’s community letter below, the wizard shifted the discourse about gender from *being* a boy or girl and therefore *thinking* of oneself that way, to *being* a time-warper and castle-builder.

**El Maga’s Community Letter:**
*Some of you asked me if I am a boy or a girl. I have to say, amigos and amigas, I get this question a lot, and it is not an easy one to answer. Where I am from, we don’t think about ourselves as boys and girls. BUT, we do think about ourselves as hula hoopers, castle builders, time warpers, moonbeam chasers ... and more! I learn how to be these different*
ways because friends teach me what they know, and I teach them what I know and we get to be different and the same all the time! AND, I get to be a teacher and a learner all the time!

In some responses, like the explanation in the community letter, El Maga was trying to help students think of gender as something less fixed, and begin to unpack the culturally constructed concept of there being only two contrasting genders. Additionally, El Maga brought in the concepts of being different and the same, as well as teaching and learning, with and from friends. These reminders are emblematic of the El Pueblo Mágico learning ecology, encouraging children from non-dominant backgrounds to become empowered learners. El Maga also explained to the students that the question of the wizard’s gender identity is not an easy one to answer, thereby setting the example that gender identity is not as simple as one or the other, either/or, boy or girl.

In one conversation, El Maga tried to use a similar explanation as written in the Community Letter above. When the student asked:

Student Email:
i forgot to tell you are you a girl or a boy?

El Maga’s Response:
Thanks for your question. I know it seems strange that I am not a boy or a girl, but cyber-wizards aren’t the same as humans in that way. You know what I am, though!? A moonbeam-chaser and a sports-player and a dancer and a letter-writer! I am so many things! What are you, [student name]?

However, El Maga again used the “cyberwizards aren’t the same as humans” justification.

Furthermore, this student didn’t quite understand what Maga was getting at, trying to move beyond our society’s necessity to classify ourselves as male or female and think of oneself as a unique individual composed of all the different qualities she possessed. Rather than describing herself by sharing things she likes to do, she answered Maga’s question by writing:

Student Email:
im a human girl i think that you know (sic) that im a girl human before
Of note, the student referred to herself as a “human girl,” pointing to her awareness that humans, unlike wizards, have genders. El Maga did not specifically take the issue of gender identification any further, but did push the student to describe herself as more than just a girl. In the next letter sent by El Maga, the wizard again tried to impart the ideology of El Pueblo Mágico to the student.

**El Maga’s Response:**

Yes, I know you are a human girl :) , but I was just wondering about the other things you are - like a dancer and a video game designer from what I hear!!!!

Here El Maga did something the wizard was very good at – drawing from knowledge about a student that she had not previously shared with El Maga in a letter. This added to El Maga’s ability to be all-seeing and all-knowing, an omniscient and omnipresent being. With this omniscience, the wizard tried to encourage the student to think of herself, not in terms of gender, but in terms of her skills and her strengths, which may have contributed to her gender identity, but were not limited to, or defined by it.

The gender question is not limited to students asking El Maga, but about Maga’s pet dragon too. This highlights our society’s unavoidable proclivity to categorize people, and pets, perhaps all “living things,” into either/or, binary groups of male or female.

**Student Email:**

Tell me when you’re going to get your dragon. What kind of dragon is it gonna be and what are you going to name it? Is it going to be a boy dragon? Or a girl dragon?

In this conversation El Maga answers the student’s question about the dragon’s gender with the same level of tactful evasiveness as when asked about the wizard’s gender.

**El Maga’s Response:**

I’m not sure if it will be a boy or a girl, but I know that I want to name it Dreamy...doesn't Dreamy the Dragon have a nice ring to it??

The student took the suggested name and continued to discuss it in terms of gender, and in doing
so she wrote through her thinking about the potentially gender-neutral name. By associating a specific gender to a gender-neutral, unisex, or androgynous name is another way that students, and people in society at large, can reveal heteronormative assumptions.

**Student Email:**
Tell me it you get a boy or a girl dragon. I like the name Dreamy for a dragon. Is that a girl name? It sounds like a girl name. Or is is (sic) a boy name? I don't know.

El Maga explained that they thought Dreamy could be either a girl or boy’s name, but in this particular instance decided to give the student a concrete answer about Dreamy being a boy dragon.

**El Maga’s Response:**
I think Dreamy can be a girl's or a boy's name, personally. Just like my name! Dreamy is boy dragon, though.

El Maga’s comment about their own name being hybrid led the student to become curious about El Maga’s gender and she replied by asking the wizard the popular question – are you a girl or a boy? El Maga pulled from the variety of responses and gave the student the “all of the above” answer.

**El Maga’s Response:**
Well, sometimes I'm a boy and sometimes I'm a girl. Sometimes I'm both and sometimes I'm neither! It's just that simple!

By writing “it's just that simple!” El Maga was trying to minimize the abnormality of being neither a male nor a female, and reduce the importance of needing to identify as one or the other. Although one could read this as undervaluing the complexity of gender identity, the ideology of El Pueblo Mágico seeks to recognize and value diversity, and members of the community respect students that come from any cultural, social, or linguistic background.

Some students acknowledged that El Maga’s gender identity did not fit into the “boy or girl” categories, with one student offering El Maga the option of being both: “*Are you a boy or a*
girl or both?” and another student accepting that El Maga is neither: “Please write me back and have a nice day. I know are not a girl or a boy. I hope I will see you soon.” Unfortunately, neither of these letters received a response from El Maga. I argue that one way to assist students in shifting the dominant discourse of thinking about gender as only being two dichotomous labels of male and female, is to encourage a dialogue when a student accepts that El Maga is neither a boy or a girl, or thinks outside of the box and asks if they are both, which is just as important as when a student asks which gender El Maga is.

**Heteronormative Storytelling**

Another gender-themed code that ran through letters written to El Maga revolved around telling stories, and making statements, that were underscored by heteronormative assumptions (e.g. describing girls as being pretty and boys as being strong). I have included the analysis of these conversations because they call attention to the simple ways in which children reproduce the dominant discourse around gender and sexuality.

One student shared with El Maga his dream to become a cheerleader when she grows up. When El Maga asked why she wanted to be a cheerleader, her response was based on a view that is reinforced by the social and cultural narrative about what it means to be a girl:

**Student Email:**

*I want to be a cheerleader because I get to wear dresses and skirts.*

Unfortunately, in El Maga’s reply to this letter the wizard did not follow-up on the student’s explanation of why she wanted to be a cheerleader, and why that meant she would get to wear dresses and skirts.

In the email below, the student thought that El Maga had let her in on the secret that the wizard is actually a boy. At the structural level she chose big pink letters on a purple background, both colors associated to be feminine, and drew attention to the important part of
her email by making it stand out more than the tiny font she used to talk about the games she played at site that day. Additionally, when the student reprimanded El Maga for letting her in on their gender she also used the tiny font, as though it were a secret.

**Student Email:**

Daer EL Maga i saw you with your beard. Why didn't you tell me that you are a boy?

We played Jango, computers and Taboo it was fun you know you shouldn't tell me that you were a boy you know.

LOVE

El Maga took this opportunity to ask the student to think about the gender-stereotype assumption that beards are for males.

**El Maga’s Response:**

There must be some mistake! For some reason you think I am a boy and say you seen me with a beard. I am neither a boy nor a girl - I am a wizard! Sometime I have a beard, this is true, but most of the time I don’t. I love to change my appearance regularly and I never look the same! That is the wonder of magic - I can always look different. But I have to ask a question, are beards only for boys? Can girls have beards? Can wizards have beards? Maybe you can write a story that tells about girls, boys and wizards and how they are different and the same. It would help me to understand what you think about beards and other things -- like glasses. Are glasses just for boys too?

In the reply, El Maga addressed the gender question by using the “wizards are different” explanation of being neither a boy nor a girl. The wizard then began to deconstruct the student’s assumption that if Maga had a beard they must be a boy. Once again employing the technique of metacognitive awareness, El Maga asked the student if beards were only for boys, or if girls and wizards could have them too. Furthermore, Maga asked the student to write a story explaining the differences and similarities between boys, girls, and wizards – really asking the student to
think about what makes up some features of gender. Finally, El Maga asked the student to think about “other things” that could possibly be gender-specific, such as glasses. By selecting something that is not socially or culturally considered to be associated with one gender or the other, El Maga was highlighting the heteronormative assumption the student had made.

What’s your relationship status?
Another topic that students brought up to El Maga that falls under the thread of heteronormative storytelling, is that of romantic relationships and El Maga’s relationship status – is El Maga married or does El Maga have a girlfriend / boyfriend. Although I coded these as a gender themed letters, I recognize that El Maga’s relationship status (and by association the wizard’s sexuality) is not the same as El Maga’s gender. However, the questions about significant others, marriage, and having kids are based on what students hear in the dominant discourse and fit into the social and cultural expectations of what is considered a traditional family structure, often conflating gender and sexuality (Valdes, 1995).

In the letter above the student had asked Maga a number of questions, including: “Where do you live? What’s your favorite games? Do you have a pet? Do you have a car? What’s your favorite color? How old are you? Are you married? What are the names of your friends?”

El Maga’s Response:
7. Are you married?

No, not married. But I have so many friends that I visit all the time (and friends who write write write to me - like you!)

El Maga diligently answered all of the student’s questions and, as with many responses, Maga did not commit to particulars. “I travel around earth visiting all of my friends ... I have so many favorites that it's hard to choose ... El Maga loves all the colors of the rainbow ... I'm so old that it's hard to know exactly ... I have friends all over the world, so that if I wrote out all their names, this message would be a million pages long!!!!!” El Maga doesn’t often commit to
“favorites” or other specifics, which does allow multiple people to play Maga. However, El Maga is good about explaining to the students some identifying features, such as being a hula-hooper and a moonbeam-chaser. Therefore, this leads to the question: does this hesitation to divulge personal details confuse or discredit the gender issue? One possibility is that students don’t see Maga’s gender as hybridity, but rather just another area of Maga’s identity that’s undeclared. What I am pointing to here is the issue of El Maga establishing a feeling of trust, versus distrust in the relationships built with students. El Maga’s responses to student questions need to impart a sense of trust.

In the following letter, the student also asked El Maga several questions, two of which focused on gender-themed topics.

**Student Email:**

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Elmaga where do you live?
Do you have kids?
Why is your name Elmaga?
Do you have a huban?
```

At the structural level, the student used brightly colored highlighting, and large bold font. However, these textual edits did not contribute to the composition as a means of drawing attention to the expression of the message. These questions were all common ‘getting to know you’ topics, but my focus is on “Do you have kids?” and “Do you have a huban (husband)?”

**El Maga’s Response:**

```
So many great questions! I live in cyberspace! It's pretty cool, and full of all kinds of hula hoops, castles, and surf boards! I can learn about practically anything in a short period of time! I don't have any kids, but I think of all the kids at El Pueblo as my kids and friends! Having so many friends is really great! As for my name, El Maga, El is masculine and maga is feminine, and since I'm sometimes a boy and sometimes a girl, and sometime both, El Maga is just fitting. What is a husband?
```
One of the goals promoted at El Pueblo Mágico is for students to become empowered and self-regulated learners. Maga modeled this positive trait when they wrote: “I can learn about practically anything in a short period of time!” Then El Maga went on to answer the student’s question about having kids, where they referred to the children at El Pueblo Mágico not only as their kids, but also as friends. I view this as one way in which El Maga is situated to draw out the affective dimensions of learning, by positioning themself as a peer and confidante, not just the patron of El Pueblo Mágico. In answering the question about having a husband, El Maga turned the question back to the student and asked what a husband is. As will be further discussed in the extended conversation case study, El Maga used this technique as a sort of metacognitive awareness to bring forth productive dialogue around topics they thought needed to be deconstructed.

Student’s Email:
A husband is a boy you marry ... Would you like a kid?

El Maga’s Response:
Thanks for clarifying what a husband is! How do you marry someone?

Student Email:
El Maga you get married by going to a church.

El Maga’s Response:
I don’t think I’ll be getting married, but I do enjoy learning about marriage!

In answering El Maga’s questions about what a husband is and how you marry someone, the student displayed his understanding that marriage is something that happens in a church. Although it appears to be a general comment about marriages customarily taking place in churches, the broader social and cultural narrative associated with this message is that unions between a man and a woman are allowed to happen in a church, whereas not all churches and religious denominations bless marriages between gay and lesbian couples.
Alternatively, in the next letter, the student experimented with the idea of non-binary, all-gendered terms like “giboyfriend” and “wizardfriend” instead of boyfriend and girlfriend.

Student Email:
Dear El Maga,
I do like pie! Pecan pie, ewww! I think I should be creeped out right now because you like it. How do you like Pecan Pie? It's gross! Anyway, today I made the background for my level on our Bears Night Out game. So, wanna hear what I did this weekend? NOTHING! I played computer, played games, and...stuff. Do you like cheese cake, a random question, I know! Also, just so you know, I'm typing this, not anyone else. That's because I'm epic. Where do you live, El Maga? Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend? Or a giboyfriend (sic)? Maybe a wizardfriend (sic). Who knows? You! [Student name], my friend, is staring at me right now. Anyway...

Sincerely,
The girl Who Just Ditched You,

As illustrated in the email above, this student was comfortable writing to Maga (“How do you like Pecan Pie? It's gross!”), had confidence (“Also, just so you know, I'm typing this, not anyone else. That's because I'm epic.”), embraced her sassiness (“Sincerely, The girl Who Just Ditched You”), and was imaginative and open to thinking of El Maga’s romantic relationships in terms that were not heteronormative.

El Maga’s Response:
Hey [student name]!!!
I do love cheesecake!!! I'm grossed out by the fact that you don't like pecan pie!! It's awesome that your game is going so well and it is easier awesomer (sic) that you got to relax for the whole weekend!!! Although...it is starting to be really nice outside...you should consider doing some outside activity. I don't have any boyfriend, girlfriend, giboyfriend or wizardfriend, but I do have a lot of regular friends!!! What you going to be working on today? I can't wait to hear from you!
Sincerely,
The Wizard that tries to keep you out of trouble,
El Maga

At the structural level El Maga used multiple exclamation points in five different places to compositionally express the matched exuberance in their response to the student’s animated email. El Maga replied by telling the student that they were “grossed out” that she didn’t like
pecan pie, mirroring the student’s own language, and didn’t have “any boyfriend, girlfriend, giboysfriend or wizardfriend.” However, El Maga did not specifically acknowledge the creative hybrid-gender terms the student had used. This was otherwise a spirited interaction that gave the reader insight into the relationship between the student and the wizard, and the enjoyment in their writing. With a dynamic relationship such as this one, El Maga was positioned to engage the student in a deeper dialogue about the non-heteronormative descriptors she used to ask about the wizard’s relationship status.

Students weren’t always putting the onus on El Maga to answer questions about Maga’s gender and relationship status, but also asked El Maga to give advice about their young love too. In the following example the student and her friend were curious about “how you love.” Although in this case it would have been nice to be able to ask the student, since I believe they meant “who” because of the follow-up statement: “pleas say u dont like any one.”

Student Email:

In the letter above the student used many heart emoticons, along with smiley faces, following her confession about liking a boy. The heart emoticon is generally accepted to mean love (but is not limited to romantic love). She also inserted many other emoticon pictures – 40 of them! – and finished her email with her own version of the “roses are red, violets are blue” poem. In this letter, the student communicated to El Maga that she trusted the wizard by confiding about her crush and asking to know whom El Maga likes in return. In El Maga’s reply they assured the student that she can count on their discretion and asked to know more about the boy. In doing so,
El Maga validated that the wizard and student were positioned, not just as peers, but also as friends.

El Maga’s Response:
Thanks for telling me about [student name]! Your secret is 100 percent safe with me! What do you like about [student name]? Is he a good roller-skater? (I really like roller-skating). Once I hear about what it means to "like" someone, I can better answer your questions. I have so many friends! Like you and my dragon and my wizard friends. Is that what you mean??

Once again El Maga made an effort to facilitate metacognitive awareness by inquiring about what it means to “like” someone. El Maga then proceeded to give examples of friends they liked, to help the student explore the concept. Unfortunately, the student didn’t respond to this line of inquiry and the conversation shifted to another topic.

Importance of Gender Identity for Elementary School Children
This issue of gender came up more often than any other particular question students had for El Maga, about who the wizard is, and how the wizard identifies. Emotions are part and parcel with issues that are as important to someone’s identity as gender. As with other emotionally charged issues, our feelings regarding this topic, and how it relates to our identities, are learned. Much like how Hochschild’s feeling rules and de Sousa’s paradigm scenarios explain how we learn repertoires of emotions, through socialization and personal experiences we learn the culturally constructed roles of gender. As Taub [n.d.] explains,

At school, children learn a repertoire of practices, and invent many of their own, for marking themselves as properly gendered, discernible to themselves and their peers as unambiguously boy or girl. They learn that girls play in the doll corner and boys play with blocks; boys run on the playground and girls skip. They also learn the social consequences of confusing these boundaries and so they regulate their behavior and that of their peers carefully … The promise of the Fifth Dimension is its potential to
encourage children to think beyond this division, to see it as something less natural or fixed, and to imagine alternatively gendered worlds. (Learning to Perform Gender section, para. 2)

The discussion of gender at El Pueblo Mágico is similar in many ways to how it is discussed in other contexts. As mentioned before, El Maga is framed to start the dialogue around this topic, yet since the wizard is invisible to the students, they can’t use other indicators (e.g., hair, facial features, clothing, voice) to help them identify what gender El Maga is (or they think Maga is). As a mediating artifact, the letters have come to embody the ideology of the environment and their function has been shaped by that context. Therefore, the letters are how the student explore and make sense of gender in this setting. Taub (n.d.) argued that “[t]he promise of the Fifth Dimension is its potential to encourage children to think beyond this division, to see it as something less natural or fixed, and to imagine alternatively gendered worlds” (section 2, para 3). However, I emphasize that this is a potential function of El Maga and it is incumbent upon El Pueblo Mágico organizers to articulate this message deliberately, and make it more explicit.

As I highlighted throughout this section, the question often asked about El Maga’s gender was addressed in various responses, with different messages associated. The first step in synthesizing the answers El Maga gives to student inquiries is deciding what the intention and purpose of having a hybrid-gender cyberspace wizard is at El Pueblo Mágico. Is El Maga there to disrupt the dominant discourse of gender binaries – male vs. female? Or, is El Maga’s gender ambiguity simply meant to be playful and a topic for problem-solving narratives in El Maga letters? Given how potentially emotionally consequential the topic of gender can be, and how children learn to participate in social relationships through language (Luke, 1995-1996), I argue that, with a little intentionality, a response can be deliberately designed to encourage students to
begin thinking of gender outside of the either/or limitations of boy or girl, without sending a
message that to not declare oneself as either is equivalent to not being human.

The Case Study of Loretta – Metacognition and Boyfriends

In the above data analysis, I provided an overview of the different kinds of topics Maga
has addressed regarding the potentially emotionally consequential theme of gender. In this
section I examine how topics like those develop along with a child’s relationship with El Maga
over an extended letter exchange. This is to demonstrate the significance of the robust
discussions children have with El Maga through the joint activity of letter writing, whereby the
dynamic interactions are shaped by the relationship of the participants as they contribute to the
solution of emergent problems. These extended exchanges are artifacts of the El Pueblo Mágico
activity system through which the students’ behavior is mediated and highlight how El Maga can
engage students in metacognitive awareness about the circumstances in which their thinking
occurs resulting in unveiling the affective dimensions of learning.

I selected this exchange primarily because of the extensive discussion the student and El
Maga had about what having a boyfriend means. This topic of conversation falls into my
category of gender, and furthermore, a personal story not specifically related to El Pueblo
Mágico, identity-associated, emotionally consequential subject matter. I was also drawn to this
email because of the structural compositional flourishes the student used to accentuate her
messages to El Maga. Loretta (pseudonym) used font, emoticons, and punctuation to express
herself through the visual presentation of her emails. The thread of messages consists of 13
emails that began on February 14, 2011 and the last letter sent was on April 26, 2011.

Comparatively, out of the 640 total conversations 27 other students had conversations with El
Maga of similar length, which makes an exchange of this extent a relatively infrequent, yet not
rare, occurrence. This timeline indicates that the student was a frequent participant at site and
wrote to El Maga consistently, sending emails 7 times out of the possible 12 weeks.

I have presented the email, followed by my analysis of the compositional expression and social and cultural content of each letter in the conversation, from both Loretta and El Maga. Each of Loretta’s emails to El Maga are numbered in the order she sent them, with El Maga’s corresponding response given the same number.

Loretta 1:

Dear El Maga,

My name is    I was here last year for el pueblo magico.

Guess what I got a awesome boyfriend and his name is ❤️

❤️Today he got me a bear that says ❤️ only love w❤️. I
was scaring    and    while we were playing, Jenga
and Operation!! We play guess who and I was cheating a lot

yield at me and I got mad!! Can you please send me

heart peace sings and I’ll send you more pics please please... Oh

yee your it!!

Compositional Expression Analysis
At the composition level of analysis, the reader may notice the font, heart emoticons, and exclamation points the author used in this email. The italicized font, along with the hearts, gives the email a romantic impression along the lines of a Valentine’s Day card, before the reader even delves into the content. Loretta carefully placed the hearts as bookends around her boyfriend’s name and the romantic declaration on the bear, accentuating who and what she was attaching her affection to. The use of exclamation points indicates excitement, emphasis, and a louder voice. The reader is visually triggered to identify this as an impassioned and sentimental letter.

Social and Cultural Content Analysis
At the content level of analysis, Loretta wrote that she was at El Pueblo last year. She
told El Maga this because they have already established a connection in the past. Following this, Loretta went on to share information with El Maga that confirmed her comfort with writing to the wizard. In this letter, the student shared with El Maga that she has a boyfriend. She started by saying “guess what,” which set up her news as a dialogic communication with the expectation of an answer from El Maga. When she wrote her boyfriend’s name and described the teddy bear he gave her she used the heart emoticons, which can be used to signify romance, love, caring, and affection. She also used the word “awesome” to describe him, expressing that she thought very highly about him. The email is dated on Valentine’s Day, which is culturally a very romance-oriented holiday. On the cultural level of analysis, the broader text in which El Pueblo Mágico is situated is in a society and culture that reinforces (heterosexual) coupling and romance, and that the emphasis on romance has a great deal of significance in women’s lives (Holland, 1990) (we even have a whole holiday dedicated to it).

The student also told El Maga she cheated a lot while playing a game, which made her friend yell at her, and in turn Loretta got mad. Again, writing to El Maga about this is an indication of the student’s comfort with El Maga and her repertoire of emotions. She shared not only that she did something considered wrong, but also the social and emotional repercussions of cheating while playing with friends. Such topics as boyfriends and cheating are often considered personal matters and Loretta shared with El Maga in an open and honest way. The student encouraged El Maga to write back, reinforcing the dialogic format, by asking for Maga to send her “heart peace sings (sic)” and tagging El Maga at the end of the letter with “Oh yea your it!!” as if they were playing a game where they took turns writing and responding to each other.
El Maga’s Response 1:

I love your font! It is gorgeous!! I don’t have such pretty fonts. That makes me sad. :( But, hearing from you makes me happy! :o) Welcome back to El Pueblo!!

Now, what is this I hear about a boyfriend? I don’t know what a boyfriend is, can you tell me? Why would a boyfriend give you a bear with a heart? What does that mean? Please tell me more about boyfriends because I don’t understand.

Why were you cheating when you were playing the game? What do you mean that ______ yelled at you? What happened? Did you talk to her about it? I’m sure she was a little upset that you were cheating, too! Maybe you should talk to her about that and think about how both of you can show respect for each other. It makes me sad when my friends are mad at each other but I know that you will work it out and you will do great!

Here are some heart peace signs for you!!! I like dragons, can you draw me a dragon?

And - YOU’RE IT!!!

Compositional Expression Analysis

At the composition and structural level, El Maga’s email is very plain in comparison to Loretta’s. El Maga did use several exclamation points, demonstrating excitement about hearing from the student. Additionally, El Maga applauded the student for her technological savvy by saying “I love your font! It is gorgeous!! I don’t have such pretty fonts. That makes me sad.” I should note that El Maga did use two different fonts in the email (whether or not the author is aware of the font change), and two basic emoticons in the first sentence. Maga’s Gmail has the same capabilities as the student’s, so the plain font was either an intentional choice on El Maga’s part, a gap in Maga’s technological skills, or perhaps a result of returning to finish the email at a different time than originally started. This means that given the same capacity to express oneself using the structure and composition of the letter, El Maga chose to use plain text, and asked nine questions of the student instead. El Maga used emoticons to highlight feeling sad “: (“ and excited “:o”, but did not use the Gmail images of animated emoticons like Loretta did. This could be because El Maga did not know how to insert emoticon images in Gmail, or had another unknown reason for not using them. With the limited use of emoticons and edited text to guide the reader, El Maga’s message is expressed solely by words, through the wizard’s numerous questions.
Social and Cultural Content Analysis
When reading the content of the email, El Maga continued the dialogic nature of the conversation by asking the student to explain what a boyfriend is. El Maga positioned themself as less knowledgeable by writing “I don’t know what a boyfriend is, can you tell me?” and they used this opportunity to get Loretta, positioned as the expert, to talk about the cultural practice of having a boyfriend. This aligned with how El Pueblo Mágico organizes the community of learners, with who is most knowledgeable changing depending on the situation. It also provided Loretta the opportunity to participate in the social practice of learning through dialogue with another community member. Through this questioning, “Why would a boyfriend give you a bear with a heart?” and “What does that mean?” El Maga and Loretta opened up the social, cultural, and moral significance of having a boyfriend so that they could examine this together.

After inquiring about Loretta’s boyfriend, El Maga turned to the other subject the student brought up, asking about why she was cheating and what it meant that her friend was mad. El Maga didn’t scold or reprimand Loretta, but rather encouraged dialogue between the two friends about the event and urged the student to reflect on her own actions. El Maga presented themself as caring and nurturing, at times using emotional terms of sad and happy to reflect the expression of emotion as an accepted cultural practice. Additionally, El Maga mentioned that the other student is a friend as well by saying that Maga is sad when friends are mad at each other.

Through the process of asking the student so many questions, and El Maga sharing their own feelings, the wizard was revealing their values, and the ideology of the El Pueblo Mágico learning ecology. Throughout this conversation, El Maga continued to help the student learn how to participate in social relationships through language, doing so through the practice of El Maga letter writing as one form of emotional socialization at El Pueblo Mágico.

At the end of the letter El Maga wrote “Here are some heart peace signs for you!!!” but
failed to attach / paste them into the email, perhaps once again demonstrating being unschooled technologically (at least in Gmail). Again, this could be on purpose – Maga positioning themselves as the novice – or a genuine mistake. El Maga also asked Loretta for a drawing of a dragon, and finished up by marking her as “it” in their game of email tag. This signified a shared responsibility in writing back and forth, while developing a playful, caring, and nurturing relationship.

Loretta 2:

dear el maga,

me and played battle ship and kept winning me 😆. But i kepted dropping the blocks of jenga it was soo funny 😄. Oh yes and a boyfriend is a boy and a girl liking each other 😄. I did talk to and she said it was ok 😄. This day getting to much energy 😊. I’ll send you a picture because I cant draw a dragon. Ill talk to you next time 😊

Compositional Expression Analysis
In the next email reply, at the composition level Loretta continued to use font alterations (e.g. bold) and animated emoticons, as well as inserted a picture of a dragon per Maga’s request. In doing so, the student added a visual component to her letter, making it colorful and substantial beyond the text. This is inviting to the reader and demonstrates effort on her part to engage in the practice of El Maga letter writing. She used a frowning face emoticon (𒂐𒆠) when she wrote about her friend beating her at battleship, a smiley face emoticon (😊) when she described how funny it
was playing Jenga, a heart (❤️) when she explained a boyfriend being a boy and girl liking each other, a grinning face emoticon (😊) to match how her conversation with her friend went, and a monkey (🐵) to symbolize a friend having too much energy. Each of these emoji assists in making her feelings visible, beyond just the text of the letter. On the other hand, the particular picture of a dragon she chose was scary and mean looking, with large teeth and a forked tongue. This is a departure from the mythical, but friendly, magical, but benevolent, cyberspace world of El Maga.

Social and Cultural Content Analysis
As for the content of the letter, Loretta shared what she did at the site that day, with whom she had played, as well as answered El Maga’s questions about what a boyfriend is, and if she talked to her friend. In just a few words and four animated emoticons, the student was able to tell Maga about playing with her friends and her associated moods. Revealed by her explanation of a boyfriend being a boy and a girl liking each other is a heteronormative assumption that romance occurs between two people of the opposite sex. As discussed below, this is not where El Maga left the topic.

El Maga 2:

Wow! That is a mean looking dragon. I hope all dragons don’t look like that - they would scare me! Do they all look so mean? Maybe you can make me a video or digital story about dragons and everything you know about them. That would really help me decide whether or not I should adopt a baby dragon.

So, you say that a boyfriend is “a boy and a girl liking each other”? So, is that like being friends or buddies? I have lots of buddies and we like to do lots of fun things together. Just today I was out with my good friend Wiz playing magicball. Is that what you do with a boyfriend?

I am glad to hear that you talked to ______ and that all is well. It is important to make sure that we are always being respectful with our amigos. We sometimes do things that may make them upset but it is important to take responsibility for that and show them that we care.

Battleship sounds like fun! Why do you think ______ kept winning? Did you ask him what his strategies were? Could you use his strategies to win? Could you teach me so I can beat Wiz — Wiz always wins!

Well, I better be going. I have a lot of magic to catch up on. I hope you had another great day at El Pueblo and that I hear from you again soon! Oh, and can you do me a favor and tell me how you got those cute little faces and hearts and things in your letter. I need to be able to do that!!

Newts and Noses,
El Maga
**Compositional Expression Analysis**
In El Maga’s reply, there are no visual or structural flourishes. It appears very plain, without emoticons, and no eye-catching punctuation. However, at the very end of the email, El Maga did ask Loretta how she “got those cute little faces and hearts and things in [her] letter. I need to be able to do that!!” Here, El Maga has positioned Loretta as the teacher who has something she can share that Maga would like to learn.

**Social and Cultural Content Analysis**
Looking at the social and cultural context of this letter, it is important to remember that El Maga’s role is to be imaginative, playful, mediate learning, provide feedback and new challenges to students, and encourage students to develop identities as empowered, self-regulated learners. This is demonstrated in this reply by El Maga’s farewell, “Newts and Noses” and when Maga asked the student to create a digital story about dragons to help Maga decide whether or not to adopt a baby dragon. El Maga continued to promote learning through play and metacognition by asking Loretta seven questions in one letter, including if she knew what her friend’s strategies were, why she thought he kept winning, and if she could teach Maga how to beat Wiz. By again positioning Loretta as the expert, and aligning themselves as peers, El Maga was creating a connection with the student, building upon their relationship, and establishing trust. In this way, El Maga is afforded the capacity to draw out the affective dimensions, e.g. trust vs. distrust, anger vs. fear, joy vs. sadness, and surprise vs. anticipation (Plutchik, 1991) of the activity system.

El Maga also returned to the subject of Loretta’s boyfriend. El Maga again pursued the question of what a boyfriend is as a guide to help her think about her definition in another context and what it means to “like” somebody. El Maga was trying to help the student understand that friends and buddies can be two people of the opposite sex, or same sex, liking
each other. This was a way of helping Loretta begin to recognize her own heteronormative beliefs.

Towards the end of the message, El Maga followed up on the subject of Loretta talking to her friend about getting mad, and reiterated the importance of “amigos” and taking responsibility for one’s actions. Here, El Maga used the Spanish word “amigos” which is a common term at El Pueblo Mágico. As mentioned before, in addition to meaning friends in English, “amigo(a)s” is the idiom used to identify the undergraduate students who participate in the after-school club. El Maga may have been using Spanish as a reminder to the student of Maga’s linguistic abilities, or as a way of emphasizing the importance and benefits of the social arrangements - the community - of El Pueblo Mágico and the values deemed important at the after-school club. By referring to Loretta and her friend as “amigos” El Maga was mediating the children’s learning by promoting the values of the program, the idea that everyone at El Pueblo Mágico is on the same level, and respect is important.

Loretta 3:

🌟Dear El Maga🌟,
I don’t think a boyfriend is a buddy, I think it is more. They are more than friends. We played Just Dance and I kept winning. I made the ❤️hearts❤️ and other shapes by clicking on a button with a little 🌟yellow🌟 smiley face on it. And then you click on it, and there are a lot of different options. I had a really good day and I am going to go home and play Just Dance 2, which has more songs on it. My favorite song on the game is Keisha, tick tock. Have you heard of that song? What is your favorite song?
Talk to you soon!!!!!
P.S. ur it again

Compositional Expression Analysis
Loretta continued to decorate her letters with emoticons of various shapes and colors. This is in part because she explained to El Maga how to insert emoticons into the email. The student used animated shining stars (the animation doesn’t show up above in the screenshot of the email) around the salutation “🌟Dear El Maga🌟” which implied she thought Maga was special, a hero/heroine, or otherworldly. The student also showed excitement with several
exclamation points following her closing “Talk to you soon!!!!!” indicating her enthusiasm for hearing back from Maga. Without these forms of compositional expression, the letter would still convey the message of the text, but it would not have the same visible emotional tone of joy and anticipation.

**Social and Cultural Content Analysis**
As is often the case, the student did not reply to all of El Maga’s questions or requests in her response, although she did address the subject of what a boyfriend is. The expression “more than friends” is a commonly understood manner of describing a relationship that (typically) includes romance and affection of a degree exceeding friendship. This denotes Loretta’s understanding of the term ‘boyfriend’ as meaning more than a boy who is a friend.

The student shared with El Maga about playing Just Dance, having “a really good day,” and going home to play Just Dance 2. Loretta also shared with Maga her first ‘favorite’ of this conversation, her favorite song on Just Dance 2, Kesha’s “tick tock”. She asked if Maga had ever heard of the song, and what Maga’s favorite song was. In this exchange Loretta created a hybrid discourse by bringing in a pop-culture reference, which is something highly valued at El Pueblo Mágico. In doing so she demonstrated her knowledge of the values held at site and tried to draw Maga into them. From the community of learners perspective (Rogoff, 2003), Loretta seemed to be playing the role that Maga had been playing, shifting the traditional expert-novice positions, and demonstrating her learning through changes in participation. Throughout the conversation, the student engaged in a dialogic discussion with El Maga, rather than just a monologic question and answer structure. Loretta closed her email by saying “P.S. ur it again”, bringing back the playful game of tag between herself and Maga.
El Maga 3:

I think I found that button. 😊😊😊 I didn’t know about it before so thank you so much for teaching me. I love to learn new things and I especially love to learn them from my friends!!

If a boyfriend is not a buddy or friend, what is it? I am a little confused. We don’t have boyfriends here so I am not sure what it could be. Why is a boyfriend different than a friend? What do you do with boyfriends? How do you know if you have one? I guess I really am unsure and need your help understanding.

So, you played Just Dance, how fun! How do you win in a dance game? Since you have Just Dance 2 at home, you must be an expert. Maybe you could use that expertise to make your own dance. Check out Move+Mixer if you haven’t already. Make a dance for me — I am not very good at dancing.

As for favorite song, hmmmm… I don’t really have one. I had one a long time ago that was about a Wizard and a Dragon. But I don’t remember it. One of the other citizens wrote it for me. But I can’t find it anymore! That makes me sad.

Well, I better be flying off. I have an appointment with a friend. I can’t wait to hear more about what you are doing at El Pueblo!

Newts and Applesauce!

Compositional Expression Analysis
For the first time in this correspondence exchange, El Maga used emoticons in the email, and gave Loretta credit for teaching Maga how to do it. Maga took this opportunity to talk to the student as an equal, a friend who was more knowledgeable about a skill. As mentioned before, this is consistent with the 5th Dimension practice where El Maga and undergraduates are positioned as familiar companions with the children in the after-school program, rather than being situated as more powerful hierarchically.

Social and Cultural Content Analysis
At the social and cultural content level of analysis, El Maga used the emotional terms “love” and “sad,” once again embodying the affective dimensions of learning by utilizing Dutro’s (2011) reciprocal process of witness and testimony. Maga also modeled experiencing joy when learning new things from friends. Through socialization, by means of the joint activity of El Maga letter writing, the wizard was able to facilitate the students’ development of a repertoire of emotions. El Maga continued to question Loretta about what a boyfriend is. “If a boyfriend is not a buddy or friend, what is it? I am a little confused …” Up until this point in the discussion, El Maga’s approach was one of gently trying to get the student to engage in metacognition
around her heteronormative assumptions. However, this section of the discussion shifts from a subtle nudge towards a more determined approach to encourage the student to reflect on the meaning of having a boyfriend. El Maga asks the questions: *What do you do with boyfriends?* And, *How do you know if you have one?* These questions were very focused on the action elements of boyfriends, rather than the emotional features, perhaps shifting how to get Loretta to think about the topic.

**Loretta 4:**

Dear el maga, como estas
nice finding the little button A boyfriend is a girl and a boy like each other they 😘 kiss in the mouth 😘
It's like going to dinner with a girl called a date. Yes im a expert at both just dance and just dance 2.U should play it really fun.Well time to go home see you next time

**Compositional Expression Analysis**
The student chose pink font and used heart emoticons. For her, it appears, boyfriends had a positive association. She intentionally chose cheerful emoticons to enhance her description of what a boyfriend was: purple font and hearts portrays romance, something that is expected and valued when it comes to boyfriends and girlfriends. As with her first letter to El Maga, Loretta used the hearts as bookends when she wrote: “*kiss in the mouth*” the same way she bookended her boyfriend’s name and what the teddy bear he gave her said.

**Social and Cultural Content Analysis**
Loretta begins her email using English and Spanish, which is the first time in this conversation that she demonstrated her language hybridity, another highly valued practice at El Pueblo Mágico. She then congratulated El Maga on finding the emoticon button, reaffirming her shift in change of participation in the community of learners, and answered the wizard’s questions about boyfriends. She used the dominant discourse of describing a boyfriend as a girl and a boy liking each other, kissing, and going to dinner on a date. Loretta also confirmed that she was an expert at Just Dance and Just Dance 2. She described the games as “*really fun*” and encouraged El Maga to play. Here she was sharing the feeling of joy with her friend, mirroring
El Maga’s expression of emotions, and inviting El Maga to join.

**Loretta 5:**

From first glance at this email, the reader can tell that Loretta was upset with Maga for not replying to her last letter. The devil emoticon (😈) bookends around the word “mad” make visible the emotion Loretta was feeling from El Maga letting her down. In this email the student also used the crying emoticon (😢) - the tears are animated and do not appear here, but do appear in the original letter above) to bookend her sharing the feeling of being really “sad” because she would not be at El Pueblo Mágico the following Monday. Finally, in her closing, Loretta used all capital letters asking El Maga to please write back, with exclamation marks in bold red, and two frowning emoticons ())),) bookending her “bye.” Her compositional expression throughout this email made her feelings of anger and sadness, her embodied performance of emotion, clearly visible to the reader and more powerful than text alone.

**Social and Cultural Content Analysis**

Loretta began her letter by telling El Maga she was really mad because the wizard had not written back, but then she said that it was okay, once again displaying her repertoire of emotions. The reciprocity of the exchanges helped to foster Loretta’s trust in Maga, and, just as Maga told Loretta when they were sad because she wasn’t getting along with an amigo, Loretta told Maga she was mad because of this breach in their social contract, a arrangement established by the norms of a pen-pal relationship – writing *and* responding. However, she quickly showed that she felt no resentment toward the wizard and moved on to ask about El Maga’s gender, where she also promised that she wouldn’t tell anyone. This speaks to her view of their
friendship, how much she valued the relationship, and that she wanted El Maga to trust her.

Loretta then continued to express her emotions, reproducing Maga’s practice of testimony and witness, by sharing how sad she was, and how much she wished for El Maga’s to reply.

El Maga 5:

So sorry that I didn’t get back to you last week! I was so busy helping mis amigas paint their casa. I love helping my friends and when they need my help there is no way I can tell them no. But, I was sad that I missed your email and I am very sorry that I made you so mad. Do you forgive me?

I am sorry to hear about ____. Why is she going to be gone? I know it is hard when our friends are gone and it makes us sad. I hope that she is not gone long and will be back next week.

I am glad that you are planning on helping ___ with her digital story! That is wonderful and very fun. You can share this story at the Spring Into Summer even on May 12. On that day I hear that all of the parents and friends are being invited to a special party to celebrate all the wonderful things you have done at El Pueblo. Is there anything special you want to share with them? Do you have any ideas about how you might share?

Hmm -- as for your boyfriend thing - I am not sure that this is something that kids your age do - do they? I thought that was something that grown-ups did only. How old do you have to be to have a boyfriend? I'm confused!

Well, I hope you had a great day and are having lots of fun! I can't wait to hear about your digital story!!

Pickles and Porcupines!

Compositional Expression Analysis

In this email response El Maga did not use any noteworthy compositional expression that enhanced the reader’s understanding of the message. Given the playful and mischievous nature of the wizard, this lack of emotional animation in letters is a missed opportunity to magnify these characteristics of El Maga and mimic the illustration of feelings that Loretta’s compositional expression provides, particularly after she had taken on the role of expert and taught El Maga how to insert emoticons. Up until this letter the compositional aspects of expression were developing dialogically through the exchanges, calling attention to the room for learning and modeling from one another and adapting to embody new forms of social participation.

Social and Cultural Content Analysis

El Maga began the letter by apologizing to Loretta for not writing back the week before in recognition of the social contract of their pen-pal relationship. Maga shared that they had been busy helping friends, an important trait valued by the wizard, yet was sad to have missed
Loretta’s email and felt bad about making her mad. As discussed before, children learn how to participate in social relationships through language, and the practice of El Maga letter writing is one form of emotional socialization at El Pueblo Mágico. Here, El Maga demonstrated the value of helping friends when they need it, apologizing when one lets friends down, and asking for forgiveness – relationships are, after all, bidirectional. Following their apology, Maga engaged in the practice of witness and testimony by letting Loretta know they understood how hard it can be when friends are gone, and that hopefully it wouldn’t be for long; sharing in the sadness as a way of drawing out and supporting the affective dimensions of her letter.

In continuation of their previous conversation, even though Loretta did not bring up her boyfriend in the most recent email, El Maga responded to her explanation that a boyfriend was when a boy and girl liked each other, they kissed in the mouth, and went on dinner dates. El Maga’s tone was one of concern that this behavior was too mature for Loretta, and asked her to think about whether or not it was behavior for children. In this way, El Maga seemed to be assisting Loretta with the metacognition of how society views significant others as for adults “only”. Following the thought provoking questions, El Maga wrote: “I’m confused!” indicating that they needed Loretta’s assistance to understand. This was the second time the wizard confessed confusion about “boyfriends” in this extended exchange, emphasizing how they genuinely wanted Loretta to thoroughly think about and explain the concept to Maga.

Loretta 6:

_Hola como estas_  
Yo estoy muy bien hora i played el wii yo sola con otros niños but it was so boring.Mi amiga y yo no teníamos amigas,El viernes vamos a un paseo donde van las amigas al a escuela.Yo al te perdonó about last week. Sorry that i didn't write much ya me tengo que ir te ablo next week porta te bien!!!!

Hello how are you  
I am really good now i played the wii alone with other children but it was so boring.My friend and i we did not have friends.Friday we will go for a walk where the amigas go to a school. I do forgive you about last week. Sorry that i didn't write much i already have to go i will talk to you next week behave well!!!!!
Compositional Expression Analysis
At the structural level of this email, the first noticeable editing decision Loretta made was to write in a bright pink font. The second significant form of expression was Loretta’s decision to code switch between Spanish and English. This is significant because it highlights her hybrid-linguistic identity, something that is valued at El Pueblo Mágico, yet potentially emotionally consequential in other contexts.

Social and Cultural Content Analysis
Up until this letter, Loretta wrote almost exclusively in English. This transition seems unrelated to what had just come previously in El Maga’s letter, unless the wizard’s use of “mis amigos” or the mention of her parents and friends were enough to inspire her to write in Spanish. What she wrote spoke to the ongoing development of her relationship with El Maga. (In order to keep the integrity of her code switching, I marked the words originally in English in italics). To begin with, she wrote “Hola como estas” which translates to “Hi how are you” with the casual use of the tense that is used for peers, rather than adults, teachers, or strangers. She continued on to write “I am really good now i played the wii me (feminine) alone with other children (masculine) but it was so boring. My friend (feminine) and I don't have friends. On Friday we are going on a walk where amigas (referring to the undergraduates) go to school. I do forgive you about last week. Sorry that i didnt (sic) write much I already have to go I will talk to you next week behave well (or be good, a command directed at El Maga)!!”

In alignment with the morals and standards that El Maga had expressed throughout their conversation, Loretta forgave El Maga, acknowledging her care and concern for their friendship. Given that she recognized she didn’t write much, it is evidenced that accepting El Maga’s apology was privileged in this letter, over answering the wizard’s questions about boyfriends and age-appropriate behavior.
El Maga 6:
Hello!

I am so happy that all of you citizens came to El Pueblo! I had so much fun writing you and hearing all about the creative projects you were working on with your amigas and amigos. I can’t wait to see you all back next fall! And to you 5th graders I hope you have a wonderful time in middle school---- maybe you can even come back and be helpers at El Pueblo Magico!

Don’t eat too many worms and honey over summer vacation!

Lizards and lollipops,
El Maga

Social and Cultural Content Analysis
Rather than send Loretta a personalized letter in response to her last email, El Maga’s next communication is via an end-of-semester letter sent to the entire club. This plain text, mass email, without any compositional forms of expression, represents the low level of energy and limited time that sometimes constrained El Maga, and the otherwise thoughtful, witty, dynamic, and purposeful letters written to citizens of El Pueblo Mágico. Even in this short email, however, El Maga invited the 5th graders moving on to middle school to come back and be helpers at the after-school club – a valued practice in this community of learners.

Loretta 7:
Hi im at my house i got bored and i cried all day because i miss my amiga i wish el pueblo magico was not over till to weeks...well i see you next time in el pueblo magico!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Compositional Expression Analysis
Loretta continued to use her bright pink font, 36 exclamation points, and a smiling, hugging animated emoticon. However, not all of her email was filled with cheer and excitement.

Social and Cultural Content Analysis
In this sincere email to El Maga, Loretta shared that she had been bored at home and cried “all day” because she missed her Amiga and wished that El Pueblo Mágico had not ended so soon. She then enthusiastically said: “see you next time” and ended her email with a hug; a perfect way to summarize the friendship they had established.
**Summary**
In this extended exchange, El Maga endeavored to assist Loretta with metacognitive awareness around her thinking about boyfriends, and her heteronormative assumptions about romantic relationships. While at times this theme seemed to dominant the discourse, the conversation between El Maga and Loretta was more multi-layered than just the back and forth about what a boyfriend is. Loretta also wrote about talking to a friend about cheating and how they worked things out, she taught El Maga about inserting emoticons into the emails, she wrote about being an expert at Wii Just Dance, helping a friend with her digital story, and asked El Maga about being a boy or a girl. Her final email was written with code switching between Spanish and English.

In addition to providing a rich dialogue to read as insight into the relationships El Maga can develop with students, this extended conversation also helped me address my research questions. How were the affective dimensions of learning expressed in children’s letter writing to El Maga? Throughout this extended conversation both Loretta and El Maga illustrated the reciprocal process of “testimony and witness” (Dutro, 2011), sharing their feelings about people and events with one another, both positive and negative, and responding to the stories told.

How were the affective dimensions of learning expressed in children’s letter writing to El Maga? Loretta demonstrated the powerful use of “embodied performance of affect” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2009) through her compositional forms of expression, making her emotions visible, while simultaneously teaching El Maga about inserting emoticons into the wizard’s own emails.

How were the affective dimensions of learning taken up in El Maga’s responses to children’s letters? Through the socializing practice of this extended conversation, El Maga helped Loretta’s development of a repertoire of emotions, by communicating to her what morals and values were important to the wizard and the ideology of the El Pueblo Mágico learning ecology. What
evidence, if any, is there of how children’s expression of the affective dimensions of learning changed over time? As a consequence, Loretta displayed learning as change in participation in the community of learners (Rogoff, 2003), and her knowledge of the valued practices at the after-school club, engaging in hybrid discourse drawing El Maga in, and hybrid language practices.

**Reflections on Gender Identity**

This chapter examined the theme of gender as one of the problem-solving narratives identified in the practice of El Maga letter writing. Throughout this chapter I analyzed the email correspondences between students and the wizard using Critical Discourse Analysis. With this analytical perspective I was able to address my research questions and illustrate the ways in which the affective dimensions of learning were revealed through the production and engagement with Gmail letters at El Pueblo Mágico in three ways. First, through both the short examples as well as the extended conversation case study, El Maga letters revealed how emotions acquired meaning from being situated in the social, cultural, and ideological contexts of El Pueblo Mágico. Second, the affective dimensions of these letters, as expressed by the compositional expression, allowed us to see qualities of a situation in a way that we might otherwise miss. Finally, El Maga’s method of fostering metacognition through abundant questions, also called attention to how emotions (and relationships) were co-constructed linguistically, and produced, employed, and reproduced through the discourse. My methodological approach of analyzing letters in two distinct levels, compositional expression and social and cultural content, allowed me to visibly see the affective dimensions of the letters, as artifacts through which the students behavior was mediated, as well as understand the broader social and cultural circumstances in which their thinking occurred.
CHAPTER VII
DISCUSSION

In this study I examined the mediating artifacts of Gmail letters at the El Pueblo Mágico after-school program to document how the affective dimensions of learning were made evident in the practice of El Maga letter writing. Understanding the affective dimensions of learning in after-school programs and how they play a role in the learning environment and children’s lives in schools, is particularly important, because learning environments, whether situated in classroom contexts or after-school settings, have emotions in play all the time. In the El Pueblo Mágico activity system, the social participation, mediated by games, technologies, hands-on joint activities, and El Maga letter writing, created a space of ongoing learning and interaction without the same student-teacher roles and boundaries of a classroom. In this playful environment, the communication between students and El Maga adopted a more informal tone and texture, which allowed students to express themselves in an ingenuous manner.

I analyzed the El Maga letters to help me understand how Maga mediated the students’ development of a repertoire of practice they could use to express and understand feelings around potentially emotionally consequential issues. El Maga’s role included mediating children’s learning by promoting the values of the program and encouraging students to develop identities as self-regulated and empowered learners. In this way conversations with El Maga provided an opportunity for me to examine the intersection of cognition and emotion because of the opportunity children had to write about their feelings in regards to the developmental and social context of El Pueblo Mágico, as well as look at how the responses the children received from El Maga engaged those issues. In this study the affective dimensions of learning were understood as the expression of emotion as a cultural practice, and as such the affective component of thinking was not analyzed separately from the cognitive. I examined emotions not as a “thing” or an
object of analysis, but rather as a practice in which students engaged, whereby emotions were socially and culturally constructed. The students’ development of repertoires of emotions were facilitated by their participation in the practice of El Maga letter writing. How El Maga is framed, with a hybrid identity as deliberately all-gendered, sustaining cultural and linguistic differences, and ambiguous identity and personal characteristics, is what made letters to El Maga so significant in relation to my research questions. In this study I have drawn attention to El Maga’s ability to encourage the development of a repertoire of emotions by means of modeling the wizard’s morals and values in responses written to student letters. In this endeavor, El Maga intentionally used the strategy of bringing into play the social ideology of El Pueblo Mágico.

An affordance of using the written language as my data source was that in today’s modern society, so much communication between people occurs through methods of text (e.g., email, text messages, Facebook, Twitter). Therefore, the study of interactions between people via text is an important course of action in current day research. “Indeed, powerful though it is as a means of engaging participants in a joint activity, dialogue in the oral mode has one serious disadvantage as a medium for knowledge building: it leaves no record of what has been jointly constructed” (Wells, 2000, p. 70). As more methods of communicating electronically via text are invented, the ability to express oneself adequately may also be improved21. El Maga letters functioned as part of social relations in this expanding technologically communicative world, supporting emotional bonds between Maga and the students, and making space for the intersection between emotions and cognitive learning to happen electronically. Additionally, having the written communication between El Maga and the students preserved online allows for

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21 In February of 2015, Apple announced that the next update of emoji will include tiny cartoon people, as well as thumbs up / thumbs down, in six different skin tones. The emoji update will have around 300 new emoticons, including same sex couples.
reflection on the El Pueblo Mágico activity system, as reading through emails from the same period of time paints a picture of what was happening at the after-school club during that time.

In the following section, I discuss the answers to my research questions. I review what I learned through my analysis and conclude with a discussion of their implications for the design and practice of El Maga letter writing, and future research.

**Research Question 1:** How were the affective dimensions of learning made evident in El Maga letters?

**Evidence of Affective Dimensions**
In addressing my research questions regarding how the affective dimensions of learning were made evident in children’s letters to El Maga, I looked at the social and cultural content of the emails they wrote. The letters covered a wide variety of topics, where children drew upon social and cultural categories, both within the context of El Pueblo Mágico as well as their broader community and home lives, to tell stories to El Maga about their daily activities and the associated affective dimensions. In these letters, students shared their emotions, feelings, moods, and attitudes as they intersected with their daily activities, and El Maga letters revealed how emotions acquired meaning from being situated in the social, cultural, and ideological contexts of El Pueblo Mágico. As a mediating artifact, the letters have come to embody the ideology of the environment and their function has been shaped by that context. The letters were *how* the students expressed their feelings around experiences at El Pueblo Mágico and in the larger community of the school and at home, and explored and made sense of issues, like gender, in this setting. As my analysis demonstrated, the affective dimensions of these letters, as expressed by the structural and compositional dimensions, allowed me to see qualities of a situation in a way that I might have otherwise missed.
Research Question 2: How were the affective dimensions of learning expressed in children’s writing?

Compositional Expression
In addition to telling El Maga stories that were infused with their emotions, moods, attitudes, and feelings as they intersected with learning for the students, in Gmail letters students played with fonts, colors, text size, inserting pictures, and emoticons. Although this appeared at first to be simply a visual component to the letters, at the analytic level it also represented how students chose to express themselves when such composition tools were available. Goodwin and Goodwin (2000) argued that the “embodied performance of affect” is demonstrated through intonation, gesture, body posture, and timing. In this study, the choices students made about the structure of their emails and the way through which they expressed themselves compositionally acted similarly. With the absence of body language and prosody in written communication, emoticons, punctuation, text styles (italics, bold, all-caps) served to draw a reader’s attention to the mood, tone, and tenor of the student’s non-verbal communication. Students demonstrated the powerful use of “embodied performance of affect” through their compositional forms of expression, making their emotions visible to the reader.

Research Question 3: How were the affective dimensions of learning taken up in El Maga’s responses to children’s letters?

Repertoire of Emotions
The problem-solving letters students wrote to El Maga acted as mediating artifacts and allowed for an open, candid, and productive development of emotional skills. El Maga encouraged students to write about their daily activities, challenges they were facing, and friends they were making. In doing so, a safe and exploratory environment was created combining
playful imagination with problem-solving narratives whereby writing was not just about the acquisition of literacy skills, but it also involved meaningful participation in the valued cultural practices of the community.

Through El Maga letters I was able to consider the individual thinking processes of the students as they related to the cultural contexts and the social interactions of the community members. El Maga used the students’ experiences in the community to give their knowledge, their repertoire of emotions, meaning within the context of El Pueblo Mágico. The development of a repertoire of emotions, viewed as a form of knowledge, was not discovered by the students, but constructed by El Maga and the children, contingent upon their interactions – between each other and the broader social context – as they interpreted the world through their correspondence. In this way, the practice of El Maga letter writing reinforced the expression of emotion as a cultural practice because it was a repeated, culturally normative action shared by the community, which brought together thinking, doing, feeling, and becoming (Miller & Goodnow, 1995). Whether consciously or subconsciously, El Maga used three main methods for drawing out the affective dimensions of learning and assisting the students’ development of a repertoire of emotions: metacognition, witness and testimony, and modeling feeling rules and paradigm scenarios.

**Drawing out Affective Dimensions through Metacognition**

El Maga used the method of asking students questions about what they wrote: activities they participated in, stories they told, and feelings they shared, as a way to engage them in metacognition about their own thinking processes so as to empower them as self-regulated learners. El Maga’s method of fostering metacognitive practice through asking questions, also called attention to how emotions, and the students’ relationships with Maga were co-constructed linguistically, and produced, employed, and reproduced through the discourse of their
conversations. As demonstrated by the case study of Loretta, Maga would continue to push the students’ thinking by repeatedly inquiring about topics they brought up, even asking new questions about answers given to the wizard’s questions in a previous email.

**Reciprocal Process of Witness & Testimony**

Throughout conversations, both the students and El Maga illustrated the reciprocal process of “testimony and witness” (Dutro, 2011), sharing their feelings about people and events with one another, both positive and negative, and responding to the stories they each told. This was made possible by the dialogic nature of the practice of El Maga letter writing, evidenced by the mutual exercise of writing back and forth. This exhibits one way in which the affective dimensions of learning were taken up in Maga’s responses to children because the El Pueblo Mágico ecology was deliberately designed to recognize learning as a social process, whereby knowledge is constructed through collaboration (e.g. dialogue) with participants in an activity system.

There are, however, also student letters that went unanswered and topics the students brought up that Maga overlooked in the wizard’s responses. The role of playing El Maga is a rewarding, but challenging task. Taking the time to read and carefully write responses to all of the student emails can be incredibly time consuming. In today’s hustle and bustle many people have a tendency to quickly read emails and respond with the same speed. If we are to think about El Maga as not just a letter writing practice, but also support the value the practice can have for the students, then we must encourage responders, *El Magas*, to carefully read and carefully respond.

**Feeling Rules & Paradigm Scenarios**

El Maga modeled feeling rules and paradigm scenarios as a method for helping students develop a repertoire of emotions. From our own experiences, and through socialization with
others, we learn what emotions are associated with specific situations. These emotional practices, or sets of normal responses to events, are socially and culturally constructed and need to be reinforced in order to become part of one’s repertoire of emotions. For example, when the wizard would explain how they had felt in reaction to something a student wrote, they were in part demonstrating how their emotions functioned as moral and ethical evaluators. In other words, when Maga expressed their own emotions in reaction to a storyline in a student’s email, the wizard was revealing the social and emotional code that governed their feelings for that particular event.

Research Question 4: What evidence, if any, is there of how children’s expression of the affective dimensions of learning changed over time?

Changes in Participation in the Community of Learners

Through the extended conversation with El Maga, Loretta displayed learning as change in participation in the community of learners (Rogoff, 2003), by bringing in her knowledge of the valued practices at the after-school club, engaging in hybrid discourse drawing El Maga in, switching from the role of novice to expert, and using hybrid language practices. Other students demonstrated a shift in participation in the practice of El Maga letter writing when they acknowledged Maga’s feelings, participating in the reciprocity of witness and testimony, by apologizing for what they had written, or explaining their thinking. Returning to the view of emotions as cultural practices, the dynamic nature of emotions are continually shaping and shaped by people’s interactions with mediating artifacts, including one another. It follows then, that through the mediating practice of El Maga letter writing, students began to learn the socially constructed scripts of, and dialogue around emotions as Maga modeled them. This learning was
evidenced by the student’s change in participation over the course of a conversation with El Maga.

**Implications**

One implication of this study is the need to attend critically to the responses El Maga sends to students, specifically regarding the topic of gender, as it was found to be most prominent in my analysis. In the reflections section below I will discuss my thinking around the absence of other emotionally charged topics, such as race and religion. As a Fifth Dimension site, El Pueblo Mágico has the potential to be a space where children can learn to think beyond gender as a fixed binary system we use to define ourselves. In this study, the responses El Maga sent to students answering their questions about Maga’s gender varied from neither boy nor girl, to both, to “I’m not human because wizards are different.” I consider gender to be an emotionally charged topic because of the way our culture and society so strongly categorizes the sexes as opposites and treats anyone who doesn’t conform as “other” (Valdes, 1995). If we are going to use the opportunity of children’s discourse with El Maga to expand students’ thinking about gender, we need to be more purposeful in the message we convey. The El Pueblo Mágico team that ‘plays’ El Maga needs to compose a narrative about gender that aligns with a social justice view, valuing equality and diversity; gender as a spectrum, non-binary, and not fixed. This is especially important when we think about it in relation to the aim of the affiliated university course ecology, Educational Psychology 4411, to be a social design experiment that is oriented toward transformative social change. Such work has already begun at the University level with the initiative “A Queer Endeavor” (Leonardi & Staley, 2015), which is made up of four components: community support, LGBTQ teacher institutes, The School of Education, and a teacher cohort and inquiry group. Maga can then draw from that narrative when students write about gender themed topics. One way El Maga can continue to be more intentional about
discussing gender in this vein is to encourage students to think of themselves, not in terms of boys and girls, but as being a do-er of different activities, just as the wizard has in some Community Letters.

Thinking about how to shift the discourse away from gender binaries and heteronormative beliefs aligns with the School of Education’s commitment to equality, diversity, and social justice. Yet, as educators and organizers of El Pueblo Mágico, we must also recognize that there may be families whose religious or social beliefs are more traditional, and align with a religious indoctrination that takes a different view on the issue of gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. For the students who hear these competing discourses at El Pueblo Mágico and at home, church, or in their community, we must be prepared to recognize the tensions that may arise in their understanding of the issue, and see these as an opportunity for learning.

This dissertation has highlighted the need for acknowledging the behind the scenes work of “Team El Maga” and the importance of drawing out and paying attention to efforts made by the educators who organize the learning ecology of El Pueblo Mágico to nurture the existence of the mythical cyberwizard. Becoming more intentional about ‘being’ and ‘playing’ El Maga speaks to the need, and opportunity, for professional development or training, and reading around this type of role as an educator. One approach to thinking about ‘being’ and ‘playing’ Maga resembles teaching as improvisation (Sawyer, 2001; 2011). Therefore, another implication of this study calls for deeper thinking about who El Maga is and how we set up ‘playing’ and ‘being’ the cyberwizard.

Historically, El Pueblo Mágico has shifted who takes on the role of being El Maga to fit the changing needs of the program. At the inception of the after-school club the site coordinators responded to children’s letters, followed by Amigas (students in the affiliated University course
EDUC-4411) taking on the responsibility, and now one Learning Assistant is playing the role of El Maga. In the framing of this Fifth Dimension program, the organizers of El Pueblo Mágico recognize that tensions and contradictions are part of any activity system, and they are the generator of change, encouraging researchers to transform and renew as necessary. Shifts from handwritten artifacts, to Gmail, to iRemix, and back to the current approach of handwritten letters are another example of such reworking at El Pueblo Mágico over the years. With this readiness to transform and renew as necessary, I advocate for deeper thinking about who Maga is for two reasons. First, to promote a conversation about what topics we want the practice of El Maga letter writing to be leveraged to encourage. Second, we need to consider if drawing out the affective dimensions of learning is an affordance of El Maga letter writing that should be supported and encouraged. If so, that requires further understanding of the best ways to do so.

Future Directions
The findings in this study suggest three areas for future studies looking at the questions:

1) How do we provide professional development for El Magas? How can we do this with greater intention?

2) What model works best - site coordinators, Amigas, Learning Assistants? Should we have many El Magas or just one at a time?

3) And, what are the affordances and constraints of these various models?

If we are going to examine how the practice of El Maga letter writing can be reorganized to purposefully encourage conversations about topics that are potentially emotionally consequential, and position El Maga as the facilitator of repertoires of emotion, we must also begin to understand the answers to the questions above. These areas of future study could even
be imagined to extend beyond the scope of El Pueblo Mágico to include other Fifth Dimension clubs.

**Reflections**

I began this dissertation by asking myself at what point in a child’s education could we be learning about how to talk about emotionally charged topics of gender, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, and linguistic backgrounds. I chose to study the practice of El Maga letter writing as a way to view those topics, issues that were potentially consequential emotionally, in a natural, unstructured, and low-risk format with young children, ages 7-11 years old. What I discovered was the presence of gender in these conversations, but a lack of other emotionally charged topics. For all of the times students asked El Maga about their gender, they never asked about Maga’s race / ethnicity, or religion. Perhaps this is because El Maga is intentionally designed as an all-gendered wizard, with a hybrid masculine and feminine name in Spanish. Otherwise the students were not given any physical descriptors of Maga. For me, this finding has brought two reactions. First, I see the discourse around gender as timely given the climate of change regarding marriage equality in the United States. Yes, let’s get kids talking about this in a safe, exploratory environment! Second, I wonder if we should therefore be intentionally encouraging discourse around race, especially given the racial tensions prevalent in the country at a time when the news brings to light the number of teenage boys from non-dominant backgrounds killed by white cops. However, then I began to wonder: are these children in fact too young, too innocent to draw into conversations about race, and should we instead allow the issue to arise naturally in their writing. Or, will that leave us once again with college-age students struggling to discuss race and ethnicity in a productive way?

Another goal of this study was to participate in an ongoing conversation about how sociocultural theories of learning can continue to grow to incorporate the affective dimensions of
learning in a comprehensive way. Since feelings are central to learning, the study of emotions should attract critical attention and be incorporated explicitly into theories that focus on learning as a social process. Thinking about emotions as a cultural practice affords us, as educators, the ability to view the affective dimensions of learning, not as something to be identified, labeled, and managed, but rather as natural, reoccurring, and culturally normative aspects of students’ participation in learning communities and activity systems. Furthermore, being aware of the affective dimensions of learning will allow us to see the qualities of students’ knowledge more prominently, as we understand the social and emotional context in which their learning occurs.
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