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English that Works: Unsettling Literacy Sponsors in Adult Literacy Education

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Abstract: This paper documents how neoliberal literacies function as an insidious form of inclusivity and multiculturalism that reinscribe monocultural assimilation so that immigrants may become U.S. citizens. Nondominant "new citizens" are assimilated into low-paying jobs rather than divested from oppressive conditions. Drawing on archival data from the California Adult Education (CAE) Oral History Project, this paper analyzes 12 oral history interviews to query how neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s influenced adult education by delimiting the possibilities of literacies. To address this question, one focus of analysis centers on the directionality of power from literacy sponsors, that is, those responsible for designing and implementing neoliberal policies aimed toward the rapid acquisition of functional literacy, to the literacy sponsors who teach within the framework dictated by neoliberal policies, and ultimately to the nondominant students which the analyses reveal are assimilated into these very literacies. Reducing literacy to mere functionality delimits the possibilities of leveraging literacy across multiple spaces. Neoliberal literacies here are understood as literacy frames and ideologies undergirded by neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s. By modeling neoliberal policies, this study finds that educators employed practices that racialize students, shrink opportunities for critical thinking, and reduce the potential of literacy to functional forms.
Keywords: Assimilation, adult education, literacy sponsors

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Well, you know,
downtown L.A., people work-
there's a lot of hotels there.
People get off maybe at midnight.
They're still a little bit awake,
so they were willing to go to school for a couple of hours.
The problem was getting teachers.
[both laugh]
So it didn't last as long as it could have.
[both laugh]
Not too many teachers want to teach from 2:00 A.M. to 4:00 A.M
[But] people were actually going to class.
It was just amazing.

—James Figueroa, Director of Adult Education at Los Angeles Unified School District,
oral history interview excerpt from Adult Education Archive of California[2]

Historically, through various iterations of Americanization, the powerful [from big-time donors to policymakers and the range of administrators and teachers who carry out their missions] have used literacy as a tool for colonization, exclusion, and eventually selective inclusion under a vested interest in control. Prospective citizens need to be created, vis-à-vis adult education, with specific constitutions related to the interests of the state and mediated through various literacy gatekeepers—*even though* the expansive potential of literacy education lies in its ability to empower learners with tools for critical engagement and personal transformation (Freire, 2000; Gee, 2004; hooks, 1994). Ideally, literacy education could foster not only fundamental reading and writing skills but also the capacity to question one's social reality. However, this paper argues that literacy education has often been constrained by an underlying focus on basic skills to socialize learners into menial employment rather than embracing the transformative potential of literacy education.

To explore this tension, this historical study seeks to understand the following: how do the ideologies from neoliberal policies take hold among adult education administrators and teachers? I draw on archival data from the Adult Education Archive of California[3] to examine how the forms of literacy employed in citizenship programs sustain the aims, ideologies, and practices of traditional approaches to literacy. The Adult Education Archive of California, at the time of this research, is an archive that has not been previously cited or utilized in existing academic literature, presents a rich opportunity to study the historical antecedents of ESL citizenship classes. Specifically, this paper centers the neoliberal policies of the 1970s to 1990s to show how these policies shaped the organization of adult education. One interviewee from the oral history project described these neoliberal policies as the "earthquake of adult education," a metaphor not used lightly by Californians.

[2] Excerpt is quoted directly from James Figueroa's (2001) oral history interview transcript on p. 80. The author's added emphasis is indicated by the arrangement and bolding of the text.

[3] The Adult Education Archive of California contains materials related to adult education programs in California. It includes archival data such as policy documents, program reports, oral history interviews, and administrative records. Originally located at the California State Library in Sacramento, the archive was recently relocated to Stanford University.

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For example, with the passage of the federal Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, which included a new requirement for 40 hours of English language classes to be eligible for the U.S. citizenship exam, the need for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes in California tripled between 1986 and 1990[4] (West, 2005). In response, adult education administrators responded in creative ways; sites in Los Angeles offered ESL classes spinning like a carousel across the 24-hour day, with some classes taking place from 2:00 AM to 4:00 AM. Educators made room for their students' work schedules in seemingly impossible ways, and yet these very accommodations came together so urgently and efficiently around functional models of literacy. Functional models of literacy, as described by Mike Rose, focus on practical skills and basic reading and writing abilities required for everyday tasks, often at the expense of critical thinking and broader engagements with literacy (Rose, 1985). This functional model of literacy was effective in providing the knowledge necessary for low-wage employment despite the law's mandate to create English fluency. This form of literacy, often characterized as utilitarian or vocational, also serves to socialize people to conform to the needs of menial employment, eerily reminiscent of schools becoming "mere factories to train the workforce" (Giroux, 1988, p. 93) with no critical thinking, civic literacy, or historical memory.

Neoliberal policies reshaped adult education such that learning goals were driven by welfare-to-work legislation and immigration reform; these vestiges remain in adult education, especially ESL citizenship classrooms. In 2025, ESL citizenship classrooms teach English and prepare students for their naturalization interview to become U.S. citizens. While citizenship programs are thought to prepare immigrants for civic participation, this study demonstrates how well-intentioned educators, often operating within the constraints of policy mandates, inadvertently reinscribed literacy as a tool for social control rather than liberation.

To understand how neoliberal policies influence those regulating literacy, one productive approach is to examine the role of literacy sponsors. Deborah Brant (2001) defines literacy sponsors as "agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain an advantage by it in some way" (p. 19). Literacy is an evolving social and historical construction, a social practice that moves through institutions according to stated and unstated rules shaped by institutional sites and events. These sites, such as schools, libraries, and workplaces, and events, like educational programs and policy implementations, shape how literacy is taught, learned, and practiced (Luke, 1994). Literacy is both a resource and a commodity, and literacy sponsors set the terms of access to literacy. Thinking about access to literacy according to the social contract set explicitly or implicitly by the sponsor helps us see how literacy practices operate in differential economies.

I analyze the ideologies of literacy sponsors to understand how ideologies (Kroskrity, 2010; Silverstein, 1996) about literacy and their interplay with neoliberal policies, influence teaching practices. Using data from the California Adult Education (CAE) Oral History Project, which is housed in the Adult Education Archive of California, this analysis was derived from a project conducted between 1992-2002 that interviewed twenty-nine educators.–Although this paper understands all twenty-nine educators interviewed as literacy sponsors, I want to emphasize that they were merely working under the conditions set forth by the more powerful literacy sponsors—those designing neoliberal policies. The emphasis on literacy sponsors from the most powerful literacy sponsors to the least powerful literacy sponsors—the very organization of this paper—speaks to the directionality of this power. For those of you outside the field of literacy, we could also think with Nicholas De Genova (2005) by framing powerful literacy sponsors as akin to the

[4] Enrollment numbers show that the most significant impact was during 1988-89 and 1989-90 school years.

superintendents of state power and less powerful sponsors as akin to what Michael Lipsky (1980) terms 'street-level bureaucrats,' who implement policy at the ground level.

Together, their interviews capture seventy years of service, and their experience with literacy reveals important changes across the history of adult education in (West, 2005, p. v). The participants of the CAE Oral History Project included twenty men and nine women whose roles spanned from teachers, administrators, program coordinators, federal project directors, and leaders of professional organizations within the realm of adult education. Participants were interviewed by researcher Linda L. West and Cuba Z. Miller whose own ideologies come through in the oral history interview conversations. These interviews were conducted to capture and preserve the diverse experiences and perspectives of those involved in adult education. This data set allowed me to examine how neoliberal policies influenced teaching contexts and limited the possibilities of literacy learning by tracing educators' ideologies as the unit of analysis. In analyzing the oral history interviews, I used critical discourse analysis (CDA), a theoretical and empirical approach that focuses on the role of language in society and its intersection with discourse, ideology, and power (Fairclough, 1995, 2010; Gee & Green, 1998). I documented the intricate ways in which language use maintains and reproduces unequal power relations by using literacy as a tool of socialization. Two of the twenty-nine educators interviewed were *exceptional* students of ESL adult education classes who went on to take for-credit community college courses, attend four-year universities, and eventually become teachers and later administrators of the same ESL programs they attended years earlier. The term exceptional is italicized to consider how notions of exceptionality imply that through notions of working hard, one can transcend socio-economic barriers. Aside from these two former ESL students, no other former students are included in the archive. Because the oral history project only includes educators with long, successful careers in adult education, another poignant omission is that of teachers who left the profession.

These omissions poignantly remind us of how the archive is created, whose very sources are produced by power and maintained by power (Hartman, 1997; Lowe, 2015; Trouillot, 1995). While it is possible that logistical constraints such as time or funding limitations also played a role in these omissions, the selective nature of the archive still reflects broader dynamics of power. Given the relatively small number of interviews from the CAE Oral History Project, it is likely that many categories of educators are not represented and it is hard to know who and why left the profession. Even though it's clear ESL citizenship students at the time were not included in the project, without more background on how the interviews were collected and the selection criteria, it is difficult to draw comprehensive conclusions about inclusion and exclusion. My own selection was intended to provide insights into the impact of these reforms on adult education and my choices also reflect bias and constraints.

I drew from eleven of the interviews in the archive, strategically selecting eleven educators who worked during the height of neoliberal reforms in California. Among them, my primary focus centers on three educators who served as teachers during the implementation of these policies which illustrate the way literacy is reduced to notions of functionality in the classroom based on neoliberal reforms happening outside the classroom. Rather than aiming for broad representativeness, this selection foregrounds the directionality of power between the powerful literacy sponsors and the least powerful literacy sponsors to show how structural forces shaped teaching contexts and pedagogies. This approach resists the assumption that a higher *n-value* inherently yields a fuller picture and instead emphasizes how deep engagement with key narratives can teach us about how structural forces inscribe themselves onto pedagogy and practice. Additionally, this study does not intend to generalize across all adult educators but instead traces how policy directives—the restructuring of adult education through immigration reform,

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Proposition 13, and welfare reform—materialized in everyday teaching practices. I acknowledge that oral histories are shaped by memory and positionality. Rather than treating them as neutral accounts, I consider how these oral histories are embedded within larger ideological and institutional histories—specifically, these very policy directions outlined above. These policies functioned as the very "earthquake" in adult education, fundamentally shifting the purpose of ESL citizenship classrooms from sites of learning to instruments of labor-market integration and social control.

Materials from the California Adult Education (CAE) Oral History Project provide insights into the meanings, ideologies, and understandings of literacy during this period of neoliberal reforms that continue to shape literacy and citizenship education for prospective U.S. citizens. By analyzing the discourse in the oral history interview as part of a series of social practices guided by ideological understandings of literacy, I argue that adult education does not meet the needs of its students but rather the desires of more powerful literacy sponsors. I use the term neoliberal literacies to name the worldviews and underlying ideologies that present literacy as a neutral technology free of racialized exploitation. I advance the concept of neoliberal literacy, which is an insidious form of inclusivity and multiculturalism that reinscribes monocultural assimilation and functions so that immigrants may become U.S. citizens to assimilate into low-paying jobs—but not allow them to question their own oppressive working conditions. My analyses demonstrate how the ideologies from neoliberal policies trickle down into adult education, promoting a moral imperative for English monolingualism vested in nation-building. The current citizenship exams for prospective U.S. citizens are based on the standardized exams used in welfare-to-work initiatives outlined in this paper (*CASAS History*, n.d.; West, 2005). Educators' discourses reveal how they see their students as Other, and literacy is reduced to a racialized notion of functionality, with the goal of teaching English so that students can function as workers. This paper contends that neoliberal literacy reinscribes racialized understandings of nondominant communities and reduces the expansive potential of literacy as a social practice. This study contributes to scholarship on literacy education by tracing how citizenship programs have historically functioned as mechanisms of labor socialization rather than sites of empowerment. These findings have implications for rethinking contemporary approaches to citizenship education in California, particularly in ensuring that literacy programs fulfill the desires of their students (which go beyond desires of civic participation!) rather than reproducing inequities.

There are two parts to this paper. The first part provides the historical context of literacies to show how literacy has functioned as a tool for socializing people into ideologies and sensibilities. In the second part of this paper, I trace the influence of neoliberal policies on literacy instruction and citizenship classes through the actions of literacy agents. Drawing on Brandt's (2001) notion of literacy sponsors, I use sponsorship conceptually to analyze the neoliberal forces that promote and/or constrain literacy. The second part of this paper is organized to emphasize the directionality of power from the more powerful literacy sponsors, those responsible for designing and implementing neoliberal policies aimed towards the rapid acquisition of functional literacy, down to the less powerful literacy sponsors, those who work within the framework dictated by these policies, and ultimately to the nondominant students who are assimilated into these ways of being. I begin my analysis of the archive with the neoliberal policies taking hold to examine how the actions and decisions of the more powerful literacy sponsor structure the way less powerful literacy sponsors teach literacy. I then transition to a close reading of the interviews with less powerful literacy sponsors to capture how literacy and citizenship come to be understood through the lens of neoliberal ideology.

Part 1: Historical Context of Literacies

To contextualize the analysis and findings, this section begins by providing a concise overview of dominant understandings of literacy to illustrate their ongoing influence on contemporary literacy practices. I begin by contextualizing dominant understandings of literacy within the legacies of colonialism and their subsequent impact on remedial education and reductive forms of literacy vis-à-vis the literacy myth. The literacy myth, as defined by Graff (1987), underscores that literacy inherently leads to individual and societal progress, often ignoring the complex factors that influence literacy acquisition. I then distinguish between what came to be known as the autonomous model of literacy and the ideological model of literacy. Though literacy theory is not limited to these two models, touching on both models underscores the distinctions between viewing literacy as a collection of individual skills based on certain, often deficit, assumptions about nondominant communities and recognizing the sociocultural aspects of literacy. These sociocultural aspects, as highlighted by Barton and Hamilton (2012), shed light on the underlying ideological assumptions that shape dominant understandings of literacy and challenge the deficit perspectives often imposed on non-dominant communities.

Great Divide theories of literacy, the canon of literacy studies, touted significant differences between literate and "nonliterate" people and their communities. These scholars emphasized the differences—writing versus orality, modern versus traditional, and educated versus uneducated (Collins, 1995, p. 75)—in the cognitive and cultural development of literate "civilizations" over "nonliterate" peoples. Jack Goody's (1986) influential role in writing in societal development highlighted the transformative effects of literacy on social organization and cognition. Greenfield and Bruner (1966), for example, suggested that oral language relies on context for communication, while written language requires that meaning be made clear and independent of any immediate reference. Olson's (1977) work also associated literacy and education with cognitive growth by linking logical competency to literacy. Goody and Watt (1968) privileged the development of alphabetic literacy and credit the rise of Greek civilization as a historical example of the transition toward literate society and the development of political democracy. This body of scholarship supported the dominant belief that literacy leads to higher—more civilized—forms of thought (Goody, 1986, 1987, 1988; Goody & Watt, 1963; Havelock, 1963; W. J. Ong, 1982). This definition of literacy reinforces a deficit perspective on non-dominant communities and devalues other forms of literacy present in these communities (Gee, 2008; B. V. Street, 1993).

Literacy Myths and their Epistemological Codes

To further contextualize how Great Divide theories of literacy were informed by colonial legacies and continue to inform policy decisions, this section discusses how the grandiose assumptions concerning literacy—"a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility" (Graff, 2010, p. 635)—forms the literacy myth. The literacy myth becomes a "master myth[5] of our society" (Gee, 2008, p. 51) by guiding the way we make sense of our (distorted) realities through the teaching of literacy. A more critical perspective on the global spread of English and literacy, however, reveals its ties to colonialism, linguistic imperialism, and globalization (Sonntag, 2003).

[5] I draw from Sylvia Wynter (1992) who conceptualizes master myth as the beliefs, values, and ideologies that serve the foundation of our social structures and institutions. These dominant narratives, master myths, establish hierarchical power structures that maintain the status quo at the expense of nondominant peoples.

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Within the formation of the new state, through colonialism and slavery, racialized subjects were shaped, in part, through literacy. Literacy practices "function through a politics of rehabilitation and inclusion/exclusion that have always upheld dominant ways of knowing/being" (Truman, 2019, p. 111). Otherness, beginning in medieval times, came to be mapped onto new areas of the world and "new" people with an inside/outside relationship of accepted and not accepted values. With literacy upholding dominant ways of knowing/being, literacy preserves our Empire's master myths. Master myths refer to the dominant narratives—the stories—reinforcing the beliefs, values, and ideologies set by the dominant group that serve as the foundation of our social structures and institutions. Textbooks, for example, impose a narrative that uplifts the U.S. state as a "nation of immigrants" rather than one of racial and cultural domination (Wynter, 1992).

Missionaries, administrations, and other colonial agents wrote grammars and textbooks based on the constructions of language in *their* image and for *their* agendas rather than the local languages used in context (Isichei, 1995; Renck, 1990). With the invention of languages, an ideology of languages was created. These inventions carry material effects that determine how languages are understood, how language policies have been constructed, how education has been pursued, and how people come to identify with linguistic labels (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005, p. 139). A study considering language and identity discrimination among Puerto Ricans found that English continues to be associated as a language of work, school, and economic advancement, whereas the speaking of Spanish, their mother tongue, often leads to further racialization (Martinez, 2022). Ideology is inscribed into language, which functions as a code of membership and delimits a shared behavioral contract among speakers, guided by the epistemological codes that govern our lives and the grammars of order (Wynter, 2000, 2003) held together by the same stories that justify the continual Othering process. Master myths protect the state apparatus and its stories, used to colonize and enslave and later rehabilitate and reform nondominant communities towards "progress" through literacy. As in this study, these myths are reproduced in the classroom to remediate prospective citizens to align with *their* agendas.

The application of the alphabet to colonial contexts extends to non-dominant communities in schools, workplaces, and communities whose life circumstances are thought to improve when adopting the literacy practices of the dominant group (like those in ESL citizenship classrooms). From the middle of the 19th century, the American school system has acted as a powerful source of assimilation for both immigrants and the children of immigrants. Over time, literacy sponsors have implemented policies to address the "literacy crisis." The Immigration Act of 1917, for example, used literacy tests to ban immigrants over the age of 16 who were deemed illiterate, with an exception made for laborers. Businesses in the agriculture sector challenged the literacy requirement, and eventually, the Immigration Act of 1924 modified the Act of 1917 to focus on exclusion in the form of national origin quotas (successfully excluding all immigrants from Asia) (Urciuoli, 1994). After World War I, Americanization took the form of naturalizing immigrants by providing classes in the English language and promoting literacy and knowledge of civic affairs (King, 2002). These ideologies around progress and socialization towards said progress shaped notions of remediation around literacy. The belief in literacy as a tool for societal improvement and individual advancement reinforced the idea that acquiring English literacy was essential for integration and success in American society.

The Role of Remedial Education

Building on these historical perspectives, common-sense notions of literacy, as revealed in this archival study, have aligned with ideologies of the Great Divide and continue to persist in adult

education. Through ideologies of remediation, the teaching of literacy continues to be imbued with discourses of difference and deficit views of nondominant students that motivate interventions to "fix" individuals for their future success (Gutiérrez et al., 2009). Characterizing learners as remedial is "to be substandard, inadequate, and, because of the origins of the term, the inadequacy is metaphorically connected to disease and mental defect" (Hull & Rose, 1989, p. 171). The comparison of nondominant and dominant communities, often without empirical evidence, brings forth policy solutions rooted in fixing nondominant communities without attention to their practices of literacy but rather an overemphasis on the technical, utilitarian dimensions of literacy (Rose, 1985). Cole and Cole (2006) reexamine Jack Goody's writing on literacy as an autonomous causal agent and ground their examination on the social and historical contextual factors that propelled the Goody myth forward. In the early 1960s, in the aftermath of World War II and after decades of colonial rule, there was a consensus among international development organizers that former colonies should transition into industrialized societies and adopt the ways of life of more developed Western nations. Many, including the United Nations, believed that literacy would be instrumental in bringing about this transformation. Though Goody (1987) objected to the characterization of his work as one of technological determinism, the scholarly and social context of his writing invited these large-scale views (Cole & Cole, 2006). Remedial education remains a prevalent intervention strategy in the education of nondominant communities and continues to drive deficit understandings of nondominant communities, rooted in a long history of eugenics, and has continued pedagogical and social implications (Villegas et al., 2021).

New Literacy Studies (NLS), The Ideological Model of Literacy

Building on sociocultural studies of literacy learning, literacy studies took a social turn. By the 1980s, Great Divide theories of literacy were more widely challenged. Scribner and Cole's (1981) foundational work considered the organization and use of literacy in different social and cultural contexts. They examined the consequences of literacy apart from schooling among the Vai people in Liberia, a community that invented a syllabic writing system to represent their language and learned their writing system away from school. Instead of working down from developmental theories, Scribner and Cole began to work up from observations of how literacy was socially organized and used by the Vai. Their experimental activities were based on ethnographic observation, and these observations suggested appropriate tasks to test the applications of literacy. Their project showed that engagement in reading and writing does not have psychological consequences, but rather, these consequences are specific to activities with the Vai script and need to be understood contextually.

Informed by sociocultural views of learning and social practice theory, New Literacy Studies (NLS) considered literacy a social practice and examined literacy practices and literacy events as units of analysis and focus (Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Gee & Green, 1998; B. Street, 1984). A theory of social practice, for example, helps "account for the varied, problematic, partial, and unintentional production of persons through historical and biographical time, in a multiplicity of identities constructed and reconstructed through participation in social practice (Lave et al., 1992, p. 257). From this perspective, learning, integral to social practices, needs to be understood as part of the social and cultural context of the community rather than in isolated, abstract settings. People learn by becoming full participants and engaging in meaningful activities with their communities.

Building on this tradition, New Literacy Studies (NLS) emphasized that the teaching of literacy needs to be situated in the socially constructed nature of human practices and meaning-

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making systems where language constructs an identity within the speech community (Rogers, 2011). Literacy is tied to community values and connects people and their shared histories. NLS focused not so much on the acquisition of skills but rather on literacy as a social practice and the recognition of multiple literacies and their relations of power (B. Street, 1984, 2003). The notion of multiple literacies makes a distinction between "autonomous" and "ideological" models of literacy. The autonomous model supported the Great Divide premise that the introduction of literacy enhances cognitive skills and economic prospects. In contrast, the ideological model conceptualized literacy as a social practice, not a technical or neutral skill, where the consequences of learning literacy depend on the context of development. These models are particularly useful in this study as they help to situate the forms of literacy emergent in the literacy agents' ideological understandings surrounding their teaching of literacy to non-dominant communities.

In line with the ideological model, learning to read and write is no longer exclusively the acquisition of a set of cognitive skills but rather a socialization process through which students participate in recognized practices and take on sanctioned social identities. Literacy is implicated in broader sociocultural processes within cultural apprenticeship into a community's values, social positions, and identities (Sterponi, 2011). According to insights from this work, students bring their histories into the classroom, and teaching should build on this difference by drawing on students' history of involvement with literacy (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) rather than the standardized 'one size fits all' approach to teaching literacy.

Neoliberalism Funding the Literacy Myth

While Great Divide theories of literacy faced increased scrutiny in the 1980s, by the 1970s, the economic landscape had undergone significant transformations that aligned with the autonomous model of literacy. By the 1970s, when interest rates turned negative, capitalist classes used the economic principles of neoliberalism to restore capital accumulation for elites (Harvey, 2005). The shift towards a human capital model contributed to the stigmatization of those who relied on the welfare state while praising the "hard worker." Citizenship, within this neoliberal schematic, is defined as the civic duty of the individual to reduce their burden on society and "to be an entrepreneur of her/himself" (A. Ong, 2003).

Through colonization, exclusion, and now selective inclusion, the elite have used literacy as a tool to maintain dominance and exert control over the masses. The neoliberal turn cut financial support for vulnerable populations, engaged in private contracting for greater profit, reduced state involvement in public institutions (Hall, 2011), and used literacy to "empower" people by encouraging them to rely less on the state. Neoliberalism was expansive enough to incorporate civil rights era gains for racial and gender representation. Neoliberal multiculturalism becomes a way for the state to regulate difference rather than challenge its underlying systems of power with multicultural world citizens on the one hand and Others dispossessed by their own monoculturalism on the other hand (Melamed, 2006). Models of incorporation, whether it be the salad bowl or melting pot metaphor, serve the interests of dominant groups by focusing on the homogeneous common good and disregarding the individual accommodations needed by heterogeneous immigrant groups; with refugees, "this obscures their actual socio-political circumstances and erases their historical experiences" (Berray, 2019, p. 142). Neoliberal multiculturalism also promotes the myth of the U.S. State as culturally pluralistic when it is racially and culturally hierarchical (Wynter, 2003). Further, citizenship is a sociocultural process of "subjectification" (Ong, p.16, 2003) whereby local authorities and mediators (like literacy sponsors) act as experts of subjectivity (Rose, 1985) to manage and reform prospective citizens. As my study will show, the

teaching of neoliberal literacies becomes a covert way to shape nondominant, new immigrants—to teach the values of English and citizenship—towards becoming self-sustaining citizens, even if that means working multiple low-wage jobs.

I argue that the teaching of literacy can serve to standardize and regulate peoples' belief practices for the interests of dominant groups. Economic elites use literacy to exploit nondominant communities for purposes of capital accumulation, and critical scholars assert that the economic elites have learned how to wield literacy as a tool to maintain social order (Gee, 2008; Graff, 1987; Luke, 1994). For non-dominant communities, literacy does not necessarily act as a catalyst for economic advancement, but rather literacy can inculcate values and behaviors into the general population so that their labor moves along large-scale economic development for the further, asymmetric benefit of elites (Graff & Duffy, 2008). Literacy is used to evaluate whether a person can function in society based on whether they can encode and decode meaning according to the terms set by the dominant class (Truman, 2019).

Despite advances, schooling has used literacy as a colonizing tool (Battiste, 2013; Patel, 2015) and I focus on how schooling uses neoliberal literacy, a set of skills necessary for the workplace. Neoliberal literacies still uphold dominant ways of knowing through this very politics of rehabilitation for non-dominant communities. With neoliberal literacies, inclusion only functions to ensnare nondominant communities in low-wage work. Exclusion manifests through the assimilating forces of this constant overarching rehabilitation. This very rehabilitation through education operates within a strategy of pluralization rather than a questioning of the inventions of language, literacy myths, and master myths.

Part 2: From the Powerful to the Less Powerful Literacy Sponsors

Powerful Literacy Sponsors

While literacy theory in the 1980s moved away from the autonomous model of literacy, this change did not influence the intent of the more powerful literacy sponsors. The neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s embody the autonomous model of literacy despite the strides made in literacy theory. *Dear reader*, isn't it peculiar that the progress made in literacy theory did not trickle down to the policy level? Is it because progressive scholars were not able to shape public policy? Is it because the more powerful literacy sponsors, like the academy itself, exist to protect capital accumulation at the expense of the poor? Will the university ever be able to "reproduce a labor force that understands itself as not only unnecessary but dangerous to the development of capitalism" (Moten & Harney, 2004, p. 104)?

I turn to the neoliberal policy taking hold—passed down from the more powerful literacy sponsors with insidious agendas. Table 1 presents a timeline of events and policies that were referenced in the oral history interviews during the neoliberal era, each of which is further described below, showing how the policies influenced adult education by creating an apparatus designed to reform immigrant and refugee populations through welfare-to-work reforms that shaped curriculum.

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Table 1

Timeline of Key Events and Policies Referenced in Oral History Interviews

1975	Vietnam War Ends - 1975: "First wave" of Vietnamese refugees, after U.S. exit from South Vietnam, through President Ford's initial evacuation of 140,000 refugees who were educated and spoke English. - 1978-mid 1980s: "Second wave" of Vietnamese refugees who were considered uneducated and did not speak English.
1978	Proposition 13, a California ballot proposition that limits property taxes, forced adult education in California to rely on funding from the state government (which did not fully compensate for the loss of revenue from property taxes) as well as funding from the federal government.
1983	Reagan's Adult Literacy Initiative
1983	The Federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) provides support services, job training, and education necessary to 'enable' low-income and unemployed persons to prepare for economic self-sufficiency. It was later renamed Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN).
1985	The Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training program (JOBS), a welfare-to-work program that replaced the Work Incentive program (WIN) of 1967.
1986	Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).
1992	California Adult Education Accountability and Assessment CASAS, a standardized testing system developed to sort adult education students, becomes formally part of the Immigration and Naturalization Service testing program.

Addressing the U.S.-Made "Refugee Crisis"

Powerful literacy sponsors targeted Vietnamese people, "a people fleeing from the only war the United States had lost," for these education programs so that they could transition from refugee to worker. Refugees are part of "the violent legacy of war and social upheaval" (Espiritu, 2006, p. 410). Throughout the oral history interviews, the resettlement of Vietnamese people in the United States is described as "a flood," "an influx," and most often, "a crisis." The construct here represents Vietnamese people as passive recipients of U.S. generosity while insidiously omitting the active role of the U.S. state in inflicting and sustaining the "refugee crisis" (Espiritu, 2006). Concomitant with the first wave of neoliberalism in the 1980s, the U.S. state's "generosity" intended to combat communist ideology (Harvey, 2005). Although neoliberalism itself advocated reducing the role of the state, economic initiatives depended on state-imposed neoliberal reforms with strong government action. The federal government supported refugee resettlement with grants to school districts (Ratini, 2019; West, 2005). Linguistic, behavioral, and cognitive assimilation was the perceived solution to the U.S.-driven "refugee crisis" so that assimilated Vietnamese people would enter low-paying, exploitative, entry-level occupations.

Proposition 13

Proposition 13, a California ballot proposition passed in 1978, limits property taxes and future increases to property taxes and requires a two-thirds majority of the state legislature to increase any state tax or pass a new tax. Prop 13 benefits homeowners and commercial property owners at the expense of low-income communities. In step with the conservative, anti-government

ideologies of the 1970s, Prop 13 limited the amount of revenue that local governments could collect from property taxes, which contributed to a reduction in funding public services like infrastructure, healthcare, and education (Mathews, 2010). California's public school system went from being one of the highest funded to one of the worst-funded in the U.S., from 18th in 1978 to 45th in 1983 (Henke, 1986). Schools were forced to cut programs and services, increase class sizes, and lay off teachers.

The oral history interview of Ronald K. Attebery (1992), an adult education administrator, discussed the impacts of Proposition 13 on enrollment and the kinds of classes that adult schools could offer. Attebery (1992) explained that their enrollment went from 120,000 to around 50,000 to 60,000 enrollees; "the communities that suffered the most" were the areas that "had the lower economic group[s] and a lot of ethnic people because people couldn't afford to pay" (p. 37). Attebery (1992) remembers a time when adult education could pay local community members to bring "Black, Indigenous, Mexican American, and Anglo students to school (p. 7)." Robert E. Ehlers (1995) added that "when Prop. 13 came and we got only 50 percent of the revenue limit" (p. 42), they hired only part time teachers as opposed to full time teachers. Prior to Prop 13, adult education offered a wide range of courses. Due to Prop 13, adult education in California had to rely on funding from the state government, which did not fully compensate for the loss of revenue from property taxes, as well as funding from the federal government. The federal government, however, would exclusively fund classes related to job training and learning English, limiting adult education offerings and effectively instrumentalizing language as a necessary skill for low-income immigrants.

Literacy as an Autonomous Tool

In 1983, United States President Ronald Reagan announced plans for a national Adult Literacy Initiative:

> Let us today resolve to roll up our sleeves and get to work, because there's very much to be done. Across this great land, let those of us who can read teach those who cannot. Let the lights burn late in our classrooms, our church basements, our libraries, and around our kitchen tables—wherever we can gather to help others help themselves to the American dream.

The program was rolled out with the following alarm, "Conservative estimates are that 23 million Americans, one in five, are functionally illiterate…*"* (Reagan, 1983, para. 10). These initiatives are part of the regime of racial liberalism, an effort to resolve problems of inequality through measuring, monitoring, and reforming non-dominant communities (Aggarwal, 2016). These initiations—cloaked as reform—reproduce the myth of illiteracy and further racialize non-dominant communities. I argue that these initiatives tell nondominant communities that the way they move through the world needs perpetual reform. The neoliberal policies below also show the inherent contradictions embedded in neoliberalism: the neoliberal promise of less government is reliant on more government for control.

Welfare to Work Legislation

Neoliberal policies from the federal government shaped adult education programs. Two major federal initiatives aimed at welfare reform—The Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) in 1983 and the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training Program (JOBS) in 1985—thrust the California adult education system into job training. Additionally, the Reagan Administration

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amended the federal Adult Education Act to reflect the shifting of responsibility to the private sector and non-paid volunteers to sustain public goods. JTPA established Private Industry Councils (PICs) to facilitate coordination between private employers and public education (West, 2005). Reagan couched this shift within the federal National Adult Literacy Initiative, which raised public awareness of *adult illiteracy* only to promote collaboration between public and private sectors.

In California, the federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) of 1983 was administered largely by the Employment Development Department and partly by the Department of Education to provide support services, job training, and education necessary to 'enable' low-income and unemployed persons to prepare for economic self-sufficiency. The California version of JOBS was an *educational* initiative that specifically targeted welfare recipients - fittingly, it was later renamed Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN); "The phenomenon of long-term dependency on the welfare system by unskilled and unemployed persons with children had reached troubling proportions; in many families generation after generation was on welfare" (West, 2005, p. 62). These ideologies are powerful—"generation after generation" on welfare while generational wealth grows exponentially—and become a hegemonic process of subject-making. From industrialization to neoliberal capitalism, adult education in the U.S. creates a citizen/worker subject with "desirable" qualities for the accumulation of capital and generational wealth (Leonardo & Vafai, 2016).

Immigration Reform

Alongside neoliberal reforms came a predictable—always racially motivated—rise in public anxiety concerning unauthorized immigrants, which led to the standardized development of naturalization materials for ESL citizenship classrooms and adult education classes to teach English and qualify students to become U.S. citizens. In 1986, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Characteristic of the *Era of Enforcement* (Kibria et al., 2014), the law penalizes employers for knowingly hiring undocumented workers, and it led to the plastering of those giant E-verify posters we have all grown to recognize, with the American flag blurred in the background and a phone number to snitch on your co-workers (*E-Verify*, n.d.)The law provided a limited path to amnesty, a five-year program in which all unauthorized immigrants present in the U.S. since 1982 were allowed to apply for temporary and then legal status if they met oddly specific conditions (e.g., prove their unbroken residence in the country since before January 1, 1982; persons who had worked in agricultural jobs for at least 90 days between May 1985 and 1987).

Over 50 percent (1.6 million) of the amnesty applicants across the U.S. lived in California, and the majority were Spanish speakers from Mexico (West, 2005). Once an applicant was able to establish one of these conditions for citizenship, applicants were given a temporary residence card, valid for 30 months; during those 30 months, applicants had to demonstrate knowledge of basic English and U.S. history and government. Applicants could either pass a test or attend an approved class for 40 hours, during which they would earn a Certificate of Satisfactory Pursuit. Only then were applicants eligible to graduate from temporary to permanent residence (West, 2005). This fast-paced mandate for English acquisition speaks to the temporality of the acquisition itself. Powerful literacy sponsors assume that the acquisition of English literacy is achieved linearly from illiterate to literate rather than seeing literacy for what it is: an ongoing social practice.

With the passage of the federal Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, particularly the 40-hour class requirement, the need for ESL classes in the CA tripled (especially in the 1988-89 and 1989-90 school years). Patricia L. Rickard (1998), Executive Director of the Foundation for Educational Achievement of San Diego Community College District, described it as the

earthquake of adult education in California, "to have that large of a number of people-many, who were *functioning* at beginning levels of ESL, seriously, tremendously impact our ESL programs in California" (p.121). Adult education centers responded with ESL classes running in three-hour blocks across the 24-hour day—"People get off maybe at midnight. They're still a little bit awake, so they were willing to go to school for a couple of hours" (Figueroa, 2001, p. 80). This 24-hour carousel successfully helped "California's 1.6 million undocumented immigrants adjust [to legal status]" (Rickard, 1998, p.121).

With adult education struggling with funding, especially due to Prop 13, and ESL students needing the 40-hour class requirement, Lois E. Hotchkiss (1995) describes how adult education began looking to ESL students as a stable form of income. Hotchkiss (1995) referred to this as a "siren call" where the administrators want to get more "bang for their buck" and "when everything is based on A.D.A[6]., to put in a program that will attract students" (p. 43). With ESL classes,

> If twenty of the ESLs [ESL students] disappeared within the month, there would be twenty more replacing them. You would have the same number of bodies, so [they] were earning the same amount of A.D.A., but [they] were not doing ... what I would consider a good job of education. (Hotchkiss, 1995, p. 43)

Hotchkiss (1995) points out that the government may view this as a success since the classes are always full, but this revolving door does not provide quality education. Despite the increased number of classes, Vietnamese immigrants and Latino immigrants were competing for access to English classes for their dreams of transitioning to permanent status. Ronald K. Attebery (1992) explained how Latino immigrants would complain that Vietnamese immigrants were taking their seats in English class, and James A. Figueroa (2001) spoke of "physical fights between Mexican students and Vietnamese students because of lines. There would be yelling matches and shouting" (p. 18). The ethnic tensions between Mexican and Vietnamese immigrants reflect the need for legality and citizenship that the Immigration Reform and Control Act created across immigrant populations and the lack of adequate funding for adult education to manage this very need. At the same time, James A. Figueroa (2001) speaks of Black Angelenos who argued that if their Spanish-speaking neighbors were "learning English, we want to learn Spanish. Why can't we learn Spanish? How come they get ESL for free and we can't get Spanish for free? I just want to learn to communicate in this community" (p. 66). This speaks to the possibilities of adult education—to learn a new language to connect with your new neighbors—possibilities that were foreclosed due to limited resources and the focus on functional literacy as a means of assimilation. Figueroa (2001) speaks to the materialization of neoliberal multiculturalism whereby inclusion into ESL is only to benefit the state's need for labor, not for Black Angelenos to build community with their Spanish-speaking neighbors. The state facilitates the competition between ethnic groups for limited resources rather than one of connection between new neighbors through language.

Influence on the Organization of Adult Education

Prior to 1983, attendance in adult education programs was voluntary, but after 1983, to receive government assistance and/or acquire 40 hours of English class for citizenship, adults were now required to attend adult education classes (West, 2005). This attendance requirement speaks to the way that the state seeks to control literacy practices by pushing adults into specific

[6] Average daily attendance (ADA), meaning that California districts do not receive funding for students on days they are absent.

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educational programs. The attendance requirement itself is part and parcel of the politics of rehabilitation inherent within neoliberal literacies, whereby the arbitrary number of hours seeks to shape prospective citizens into low-wage work. Likewise, adult education programs with employment components were required to place students into jobs. JTPA programs were run by the Employment Development Department, and refugee programs were run by the Department of Social Services. This jurisdictional oversight matters because it shows how the goals and expertise of the program would focus on employment and not education.

Along with the introduction of mandatory attendance for refugees receiving welfare and immigrants on a path to amnesty, adult education also began to implement standardized testing. Students were expected to check a box of passing an exam as part of their rehabilitation. The CASAS Vocational Committee developed the Employability Competency System (ECS) and other placement tests for welfare-to-work programs (like JTPA and GAIN). The standardized testing developed in California through CASAS would later develop into the first standardized naturalization exam used at the federal level to naturalize all prospective U.S. citizens. By 1992, CASAS was formerly part of the Immigration and Naturalization Service citizenship testing program. CASAS administered its Basic Citizenship Skills Examination to thousands of immigrants who wanted to become citizens across 224 public and nonprofit agencies (*About CASAS*, n.d.; *CASAS History*, n.d.).

Reframing Literacy, Reframing the Archive

Understanding the historical context of the literacy myth shows how the literacy myth continues to benefit those in power. Understanding literacy as a social practice undermines or contradicts the hegemonic notion that claims to introduce literacy to the poor, "culturally deprived," and "illiterate communities" will enhance their cognitive skills and thus improve the economic conditions that "created the illiteracy in the first place" (Street, 2003, p. 1). The autonomous model of literacy continues to perpetuate deficit notions about the cognitive potential of nondominant communities, frames the way we study literacy, and guides policy solutions related to literacy (Gutiérrez et al., 2009). Adult education is part of this socialization process. During the 1980s, the more powerful literacy sponsors implemented a series of neoliberal reforms to control, assimilate, and shape nondominant communities away from state aid, and those reforms structured the way less powerful literacy sponsors teach literacy.

The Less Powerful Literacy Sponsors

The less powerful literacy sponsors help us see how these neoliberal policies appeared in classrooms of adult education. The less powerful literacy sponsors are merely working under the conditions of the more powerful literacy sponsors who have set the terms of the order, who have told them to teach literacy so that nondominant community members can quickly exit welfare programs, who have told them to teach English to the worthy immigrant so that they can become U.S. citizens. Dear reader, this continuous reminder is not meant to excuse the ignorance of less powerful literacy sponsors but to contextualize the way power operates so that we may critique power, not individuals, no matter how hard neoliberalism may try to get us to do the latter.

Thinking of People Expansively

To think of people expansively (especially those we cannot interview) and consider larger themes that extend beyond the realm of this paper, I build identity portraits to intimately capture the educators included in the Oral History Interview Project. I've selected these specific people because they were teachers at the time neoliberal reforms took hold in classrooms. This heuristic is also a way to assuage my own growing fears that to "neatly" capture our "findings", we capture nothing by omitting the messiness of what we find—the inconsistencies, the things for which we cannot code. Lastly, identity portraits help humanize the less powerful literacy sponsors in the context in which they are forced to work. Below I include identity portraits of those whose interviews I draw from the most to provide context for the perspectives of the educators.

Identity Portraits

Ms. Acela (Chela) Gonzalez has a kind face; the corners of her lips curl into an ever-so-subtle but warm smile. Her hair is short, simple, unadorned, and curled at the ends, lying delicately over her face. Her voice is young and pleasant, a bit hesitant and anxious. Ms. Gonzalez grew up in Mexico; she was one of the exceptional ESL students who went on to become an ESL teacher and coordinator for the Metropolitan Adult Education Program in San Diego. Her father passed away when she was two years old. Then her mother started trying to immigrate to the United States, "So it was what happens to a lot of immigrants, they want a better life" (p.1). When she was 6 or 7 years old, her mother was finally able to get papers to immigrate to the U.S. Her mother needed to prove that she made enough money to support her daughter before being able to bring her to the U.S. In the meantime, Ms. Gonzalez grew up in a government boarding school for children who did not have parents or whose parents worked far away. She was 14 by the time her mother was able to make enough money to bring her to the U.S. Chela describes her former self in the same way she describes her students—"not functional." Ms. Gonzalez says she is very open with her students and enjoys having genuine conversations with them, "I am very honest with them as to what the expectations are in the United States, as far as socially, and they want to know. And I think that certainly has helped in my teaching, in that I know what I wanted to know and what embarrassments I went through when I was an ESL student when I arrived" (p.34). Ms. Gonzalez hauntedly explains how "she never felt she had enough English," alluding to the always-becoming-and-never-becoming part of the American Dream. Interviewed November 30, 1995, by Cuba Z. Miller.

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Ms. Autumn Keltner is a white woman from San Diego, CA. She has a no-nonsense haircut of the 50s with furrowed brows and a squinty smile that shows her two front teeth. Her voice sounds confident, nasally, and warm all at the same time. Her career as an adult educator spans across three distinct phases: an instructor and coordinator with San Diego Community College District, a consultant with the Amnesty Education Office for the California Department of Education, and a research associate with the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System. Ms. Keltner describes her students as "delightful" and "caring" people who "had a variety of different kinds of jobs and were hoping to get ahead in life" (p. 4). She helped design Project Step-Up, a precursor to workplace literacy programs for new entry-level jobs. Ms. Keltner tells us that when the Feds asked her to submit ESL students' reading scores, she would write the following in her reports, "Give me [an] appropriate test to test the ESL students and I will give you a report." Ms. Keltner then played an integral role in the development of CASAS testing systems that would later become the framework for the federal naturalization tests for new immigrants. Interviewed April 16, 1999, by Cuba Z. Miller.

Ms. Aryola Taylor is a Black woman from Los Angeles, CA. Ms. Taylor has a classic beauty, her smile is elegant, and she loves plants. Her voice is strong and kind; you can hear the empathy and the care in her words. She is a fierce advocate of basic literacy as a fundamental right for all people, especially "native English speakers" (p. 2)—her Black students. She says illiteracy is "everybody's business" (p.3) and advocates for student recruitment: "There was a story that there were one hundred sheep, and ninety-nine were there but one was lost, and the good shepherd went for the one" (p.5). She even applied for grant funding to be able to do more recruitment. Ms. Taylor doesn't like the term illiteracy; she says it suggests a person is ill when they are not. She believes workplace literacy addresses the needs of the employer more than the student with other needs. And yet, she believes, "Many of the social ills in our nation have as their roots the fact that many people don't have literacy skills" (p.2). She sought out professional development to be a better teacher for her students. She describes her students as "dedicated, very conscientious," noting that even though many of her students were working in the evening, "They came on time." She says as her students learned more, they grew empowered and took control of their own education. And she loves this. Interviewed October 27, 1995, by Cuba Z. Miller.

These identity portraits suggest some of the contradictions in the archives: the way even conservative teachers resist the federal policymakers; the way nondominant teachers reproduce the

same oppressive conditions they lived through as students; the deep frustration of teachers who saw the resources allocated to their Black students diminish in the shift toward large-scale assimilation projects for other non-dominant communities.

In what follows, I show how adult education instructors during the 1970-90s—the less powerful literacy sponsors—responded to the neoliberal policies affecting their day-to-day lives. They made room for their students as their resources grew smaller and smaller in their precarious positions where their employment depended on meeting the benchmarks of neoliberal policies for continuous funding. They used their limited resources as intended by the more powerful literacy sponsors—they taught neoliberal literacies to rehabilitate their immigrant students. Rather than question the assimilative arc of their literacy mission, they folded in line with the literacy myth. Literacy sponsors racialized their students based in part on their alphabet. Literacy was understood through the autonomous model, and it was reduced to notions of functionality. As nefariously intended by the more powerful literacy sponsors, the possibility for counter-hegemonic thought grew smaller and smaller—even as ongoing movements in the 1970s were growing counter-hegemonic thought—this affects citizenship.

"These People": Racializing Students Based on their Perceived Literacy Practices

Analysis of the oral history interviews using CDA shows how literacy teaching reinscribed racialized understandings of nondominant communities and their literacy practices. In much of the oral history interviews, considerable time is spent discussing the "influx" of Southeast Asian refugees. Ms. Chela Gonzalez (1995), for example, explained that the "first wave" was "highly educated people who had come from pretty high socioeconomic levels in Vietnam (p. 50); much of the focus lies on the "less educated" and "incomprehensible" refugees of the "second wave" (p. 54). Ms. Gonzalez (1995) said that classes became "very large," and staff development became "a must" to understand "a totally different culture" (Gonzalez, 1995, p. 61). Ms. Gonzalez (1995) underscored that "Hmong and the Cambodians were not literate" and that students who were not literate had "not been seen" in an ESL classroom prior to this time (p. 61). Teaching consisted not only of teaching an alphabet that "Asian languages did not have,[7]" but also "some of the most basic bathroom habits" and "even the type of clothing that is appropriate for outside the home" (p. 62). Ms. Gonzalez (1995), as a successfully assimilated immigrant from Mexico turned adult education educator, comes from this very process of othering and others her own students. Ms. Gonzalez (1995), like so many others, reproduces the dominant view of Vietnamese people as Other, as markedly different from Americans, and even significantly different from "Hispanics" assimilating into America. The racialized differentiation of Asian immigrants from Latino immigrants itself positions Asian immigrants as un-assimilable and Latino immigrants as sub-assimilable based on a Latin alpha-numeric alphabet that connects English and Spanish.

Ms. Autumn Keltner (1999), like several other teachers, echoed much of Ms. Gonzalez's (1995) sentiments about the racialized understandings of Vietnamese refugees. Ms. Keltner (1999) described her students as "mostly Cambodian fishermen and/or Lao Hmong hill people" who were "pre-literate" and "did not even have much of a written language to learn to read their own language" and "had not even been exposed much to print material in any way" (Keltner, 1999, p. 33). Ms. Keltner, who worked in San Diego, emphasized that "Hispanics," their largest group of students, were "uncomfortable and left for a period of time" due to "real tension with Southeast

[7] Khmer, Laotian, and Vietnamese also have French colonial alphabets alongside indigenous or Sino-influenced writing systems.

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Asians" (p. 37). Both Ms. Keltner (1999) and Ms. Gonzalez (1995) expressed that the majority of "these people" [Southeast Asian immigrants] never reached an intermediate level of basic competency and thus continued to struggle with high unemployment. While acknowledging the "shock to [refugee] lives," Ms. Keltner (1999) emphasizes the "coping skills" of teachers who now needed significant "professional development activities to help those teachers not only cope with the culture and the cultural differences but the teaching differences" (pp. 35–36). This did not need to be the case. Anglocentric bias[8], a focus on the literacy experiences of white Europeans while systematically ignoring the literacy experiences of nonwhites, characterizes the histories of literacy in North America (Greene, 1994). Like many others, both Ms. Keltner (1999) and Ms. Gonzalez (1995) subscribe to neoliberal literacy by upholding dominant ways of knowing rather than questioning the colonizing powers of language.

Unfortunately, whatever professional development they received did not contradict the deficit, colonialist understandings of literacy commonly documented in the archive. Understanding and contextualizing the literacy practices of non-dominant communities can expand "literacy instruction, curricula, materials design, and teacher training while also promising a more inclusive account of the history of reading and writing in the United States" (Duffy, 2007, p. 103). By emphasizing that Vietnamese people have no alphabet and no language, educators reproduce what Veronelli (2015) calls the "coloniality of language," where they reproduce "the colonizer's imagination of the colonized as having no language, that is, no Eurocentrically valorized expressivity (p. 119)." And yet, colonized populations' subordinate positions prevent them from accessing the forms of legitimacy associated with the mastery of European languages (Fanon, 1967). As a neoliberal literacy, the colonizer's alphabet becomes a means to an end to assimilate non-dominant peoples into a racial fabric that needs their labor while reforming the perceived differences.

A Functional Curriculum Outside of "Critical Thinking"

The insidious ways in which teachers as literacy sponsors reinscribe racialized understandings of nondominant communities extended to the teaching of functional notions of literacy. The earthquake of these policies and its subsequent association of literacy with notions of functionality standardized curriculum had a serious—and I would argue intended—effect on "critical thinking."

VESL

The mass enrollment of refugees into adult vocational training programs led to the development of Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL). VESL programs focus on teaching general language for the purposes of accessing and securing a job, and their curriculum was explicitly designed to support students in entry-level occupations (West, 2005). From 1979 through 1982, California used aid from the federal Adult Basic Education to address refugee student needs through (VESL) curriculum and cultural awareness. VESL curriculum focuses on teaching the general language needed to secure and maintain employment. Ms. Gonzalez (1995)

[8] To consider Anglocentric bias, conquered alphabets, and the power embedded in the archive I draw from Duffy (2007) who records a series of Hmong narratives addressing lost, stolen, and conquered alphabets. Duffy (2007) uses oral interviews with Hmong refugees to trace the literacy development of the Laotian Hmong whose language was not widely accepted until the late 1960s. Oral testimonies provides information about literacy that is absent from the archive.

points to the role of the state in educating refugee students and the ensuing pressure on adult education teachers:

> Well, okay, first the government brought the refugees, and then they were all of them on assistance, and then the American people were saying, "Well, where is our money going?" And then the government was forced to ... okay, you've got to train these people. And how can you train them if they don't speak the language? So then they started these VESL classes, Vocational ESL classes in electronic assembly and wafer production and all these different VESL classes. So there have been a number of changes based on the ... and because of the influx of the Southeast Asians and the refugees, yes. The amnesty program was another policy. (Gonzalez, 1995, pp. 63–64)

Ms. Gonzalez speaks to the way in which average, overworked citizens look to racialize the people they perceive as other and how the solution looks to adult education for assimilatory ends and how that led to curricular solutions. Ms. Keltner (1999) also explains how the "refugee crisis" motivated the Vocational ESL (VESL) movement,

> You had huge new populations in communities. They, for the most part, were not able to support themselves, so they were either being supported by a social service organization of some kind or were on welfare. And we needed to assist these students, this population, in getting jobs as rapidly as possible. So, one of the first things that happened was there was money available to set up intensive language programs. We had programs that ran five, six hours a day, five days a week, for refugees only, the Indochinese[9] Orientation and Employment Program in San Diego. (Keltner, 1999, p. 41)

Ms. Keltner (1999) ties the educational assimilation process to low-wage work with the goal of "getting jobs as rapidly as possible." Learning English becomes central to these assimilation efforts. Curricular materials under the punny-yet-ominous title *English that Works*. Although these efforts may provide some sort of material benefit, the problem lies in that access to English is granted *only* to function at a site of low-wage, exploitative employment without much possibility to exit and certainly not to question an exploitative employer. This is neoliberal literacy, teaching literacy only so that the student can meet the needs of the state for capital accumulation. In contextualizing the literacy sponsors' understanding of their students' literacy practices, we must consider the greater picture. Assimilating Vietnamese refugees who are here due to the actions of the despot state protects U.S. interests by continuing to fill exploitative jobs (Nguyen, 2019). After the U.S. intruded into a place that it did not belong, the state mandated forced assimilation through adult education classes, a move considered essential to "protect[ing] the interests of the American public" (Espiritu, 2006, p. 13).

Competency-Based Adult Education (CBAE)

From welfare and immigration reforms, adult education established a competency-based adult education (CBAE) curriculum. CBAE is defined as an educational framework that promotes the practical needs of adults. While VESL focused on teaching non-native English speakers within a vocational context, CBAE included non-native English speakers to improve their employability. The 1988 amendments to the federal Adult Education Act focused on "the improvement of

[9] A colonial term used to refer to refugees of the Vietnam War.

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educational opportunities for adults who lacked the level of literacy necessary for effective citizenship and productive employment" (West, 2005, p. 61). The legislation itself positioned students as lacking and the state as generous for providing something that is in their vested interest: to shrink the welfare state. By the 1980s, despite academic scholarship moving away from literacy as an autonomous tool (Barton & Hamilton, 2012; Gee & Green, 1998; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984, 2003), the CBAE curriculum defined literacy for functional ends. CBAE becomes a way to inscribe neoliberal literacy into curricular goals; although the names of these programs may change, its literacies still function to reform nondominant communities for the needs of the dominant groups.

For those pursuing citizenship through the IRCA, the CBAE curriculum became the foundation by which adult education programs in California would teach ESL citizenship classes. John W. Tibbets, who established the Center for Adult Education, explains,

> Later, of course, the Amnesty Act [IRCA] allowed many people who had been in this country and had not become legalized to become legal, if they were to register, and had been in this country a number of years. And so a new program was developed and similar needs were found for that population. Many teachers didn't know how to combine the teaching of ESL and the teaching of citizenship skills and U.S. history, those sorts of things together, and so a new kind of curriculum began to be developed. And the competency-based program served as the model for developing those new programs as well, so it's had a long-range effect in a variety of programs, particularly in California. (Tibbetts, 1994-1995, p. 42)

The colonial language ideologies present in CBAE and its extension to the teaching of citizenship take us further away from the notion of empowered communities. Adult education, like K-12, provided a common language and narrative of the history of the United States with school curricula and instruction acting as forms of assimilation. With a mandated, standardized curriculum, the role of the teacher is reduced to classroom manager, whereby the pedagogical practices are reduced to a market-based conception of the learner as a consumer of information (Giroux, 1992). Neoliberal literacies rehabilitate nondominant communities to functional ends in areas of low-wage work.

No Room for Critical Thinking

Ms. Gonzalez (1995) explains how the 40-hour requirement dramatically increased student enrollment and affected the potentiality of critical thinking. Ms. Gonzalez (1995) explains:

> They had their five years, but they still maybe had gotten their forty hours for amnesty, but maybe had not been able to continue going to school, and still didn't speak English or didn't understand it. And here they want to get their citizenship, but they don't have the language, yet. And the impact was that we've had to change some of our classes from ESL to ESL citizenship, and teach ESL while doing the citizenship, because the students are not the citizenship students that we used to know, where they would go to a citizenship class because they already spoke English and understood and read and wrote… It's changed the way the ESL citizenship classes are held, are taught at a much lower level of English, with not as much information as before, maybe more facts and just not a lot of critical thinking as to why

> policies are made, because the level of understanding and comprehension is not there. (Gonzalez, 1995, p. 66)

Ms. Gonzalez (1995) and several other interviewees emphasize the perceived deficits of their students as opposed to the structures in place (e.g., the arbitrary requirement of 40 hours in such a short period). In this context, normative framing of ESL students as the "problem" begins with racial/ethnic group categorization, not language practices (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006). Freire reminds us that pre-critical thought is still a potential part of a whole toward counter-hegemonic action (Freire, 1987). Adult education students are uniquely positioned to think against power because they live through these material conditions in their day-to-day lives. And yet, Ms. Gonzalez (1995) speaks to how neoliberal policies shrank the learning space of ESL citizenship classes. The standardization of the adult education curriculum created a classroom space rooted in facts devoid of meaningful literacy practices. Neoliberal literacies give the illusion of choice, agency, and freedom for students to gain independence from the welfare state and pursue their own entrepreneurial pursuits, while neoliberal literacies produce a worker that can be exploited, a worker that doesn't question the very capitalist oppression guiding their lives.

Literacy Campaigns "to Function"

In Reagan's literacy campaigns and the archived interviews, literacy is seen as an autonomous tool reduced to notions of functionality. Mr. James Parker (2001) discusses the results of the Adult Performance Level study of 1975, which led to the reauthorization of the Adult Education Act in 1978. The Adult Performance Level study and its attendant legislation mandated educational programs that help adults acquire "basic skills necessary to function in society. A functional definition, if you will, of literacy" (p. 7). Mr. Parker (2001) says this became the "law of the land" in adult education where "a number of states, including California, has moved very strongly into functional literacy or functional aspects of basic skills" (p. 7). Neoliberal literacies view literacy as an autonomous tool that reinscribes the literacy myth and fails to capture the potentiality of literacy education. The objective was to force the recipients to secure and retain employment to exit the welfare system (West, 2005). Mr. Tibbetts (1994) describes the shift this caused in adult education,

> There was a great thrust to try and educate immigrants as they came into this country, particularly because people realized that if we don't have a functionally competent immigration population-being a large percentage of our population-then California as a state is not going to be a very competent state. So [of] the different programs that you have mentioned, the GAIN program, was designed to deal with our welfare population, which was increasingly large in California, a lot of single mothers particularly, but also immigrant persons who came in who were ending up on welfare. [There was] the need to get them into the mainstream workforce, [but] it was very difficult, particularly since the wages that they could earn would not support their children. (Tibbetts, 1994-1995, p.40)

The infiltration of neoliberal literacies into adult education reinforces neoliberalism's goal of restoring class power (Harvey, 2007). Regarding neoliberal policies, "human interests are abandoned whenever they threaten the values of the market" (Freire, 1998, p. 93). This speaks to the interest in reducing literacy to mere notions of functionality to move further away from critical thought. By the 1990s, "the assets of the top three billionaires were more than the combined GDP of all developing countries" (Harvey, 2007, p. 31), and education was used to "deal with the welfare

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population," despite knowing full well that their wages "would not support their children" (Tibbets, 1940, p. 40).

Although Tibbets and his colleagues are aware that wages are not enough, they comply without interrogating these policies. Tibbetts' (1994-1995) second point on the need for the population to "become productive, to become workers, and to learn English as fast as they could" (p. 41) is indicative of "linguistic instrumentalism" an ideology that language skills lead to social mobility and economic development transforming language into monetary or symbolic value (Kubota, 2016). English language access and instruction continue to be promoted for purposes of employment opportunities (Vafai, 2014). Language learners and their teachers see English as the way to a better life that will allow access to social mobility and opportunity, but the advertised benefits of social mobility and economic development do not always translate into material advantages; instead, they often contribute to increased social stratification (Phillipson, 1998; Sonntag, 2003). The approach to immigration is part of the focus in welfare reform vis-à-vis job training to make neoliberal subjects respond to a surveillance and regulation approach to learning and, in turn, receive the benefits of a functional life.

The emphasis on functionality highlights the ideological success of Reagan's illiteracy campaigns and how these insidious ideologies get taken up. Ms. Aryola Taylor (1995) shows how these ideologies intersect with citizenship,

> TAYLOR: I guess my point is: Yes, it does take our whole community in order to raise people's literacy levels. Because when we don't do it, we see the effects of [illiteracy], in terms of persons who are getting public assistance, we see it in terms of our correctional institutions, we see it in terms of children on the street who come from abusive families, we see it in poverty. We see it in so many different ways. The NALS Study[10], if you just look at the results, and I haven't read it detailed from cover to cover, but all the way through it people who were scoring at the lower levels of the NALS test were making less money, were either unemployed or underemployed, more apt to be getting public assistance, not involved politically, not voting.
>
> WEST [Interviewer]: Not taking advantage of citizenship.
>
> TAYLOR: [Not] taking advantage of citizenship, thank you. We show that right along. So what else do we need to tell us that literacy is important to the very fabric of our society, that much of the root of what we are experiencing stems from people not being able to take advantage of what they see on television because they don't have the skills to? So what are we going to do when we get into the year 2000, when you have millions of people who can't do simple math or write a decent sentence? (Taylor, 1995, p. 68)

Ms. Taylor (1995), as a literacy sponsor, correlated illiteracy with poverty, abuse, prisons, and public assistance. Although Ms. Taylor (1995) advocated for more literacy resources for all

[10] National Adult Literacy Survey, a nationwide study of adult literacy conducted by the Educational Testing Service and released in 1993. More than 26,000 persons sixteen years and older were assessed at five levels of complexity. Approximately half the adults tested scored in the two lowest categories, demonstrating low levels of literacy that would limit their use of print to learn, achieve goals, and function in society. The lowest literacy levels were found among those who were immigrants, had fewer years of education, had a disabling condition, were older adults, or were incarcerated.

students, especially her Black students, she nevertheless reinscribes the literacy myth. Ms. Taylor (1995) speaks to the proliferation of the myth of the culture of poverty. There is a vested interest in blaming poor families for perpetuating cycles of poverty even for Ms. Taylor (1995), a Black educator, who wants to see her Black students succeed and see them "take advantage of citizenship" too. Neoliberal ideologies also run deep—"taking advantage of citizenship"—is reduced to educating students as consumers "to take advantage of what they see [advertised] on television", which *includes* politicians.

When public education succumbs to market economies, we shift to consumer accountability as mediated by the educational market as opposed to democratic accountability as mediated by the whole community (Grace, 1997). Without this public sphere, citizens cannot challenge the neoliberal myth of citizens as consumers (Giroux, 2003). Realizing Reagan's dreams, literacy comes to be defined through the autonomous model as the point at which people begin to *function*. This word *functioning* appears above: Mr. Tibbets (1994) expresses the need for a "functionally competent immigration population" (p. 40), and Mr. Rickard (1998) explains that their students were barely "functioning at beginning levels of ESL" (p. 121). And we see how functional definitions of literacy affect classroom curriculum. This concept of *function* is indicative of neoliberalism's economization of political life and noneconomic spheres where political elements of democracy (e.g., freedom and universal equality, as well as those specific to this project, language, and literacy) are converted into economic elements (Brown, 2015). The following excerpt from Ms. Holda E. Dorsey (1995) captures how these issues travel through time.

> So now [Proposition] 187 has created a completely brand-new group of people who feel the pressure of becoming citizens. Amazingly enough, it's not necessarily these people who became legal permanent residents during amnesty; a lot are people who have been here for thirty, forty, fifty years. And you say, "My gosh! How could you be in a country for those many years and not learn the language?" Well, it wasn't needed. They didn't even internalize that they needed it. But now it has become a matter of necessity.
>
> WEST: They see a reason: they need to vote. [Chuckling]
>
> DORSEY: They have a reason. Absolutely. They need to vote. You said it. Some people say, "Oh, it's because they want the services." It's not the services. It's being able to vote and have control as to the decisions that affect their lives. So, it's kind of interesting. It's going to be fascinating what happens when all these people do become citizens and vote and start voting.
>
> WEST: And start voting. Things will change.
>
> DORSEY: Things are going to change. It might not be comfortable for others, but things are going to change. (Dorsey, 1995, pp. 139–140)

Ms. Dorsey's (1995) ideology of literacy, citizenship, and social change differs from that of a citizen as a consumer, but it still operates within pacifying state logic that assumes "things will change." Prop 187 was a 1994 ballot initiative that sought to establish a state-run citizenship screening system and prohibit undocumented people from using non-emergency health care, public education, and other services (Thurber, n.d.). The law was passed as a referendum, and 58.3% of Californians supported it. The day after the law was passed, a federal district court found the law unconstitutional. Latinx communities organized in the most powerful of ways; some were even motivated to become future voters. Ms. Dorsey (1995) discusses the pressure "of becoming citizens" to vote. They needed to overcome a series of bureaucratic hurdles, learn a number of U.S. history "facts," and they needed to read and write a given sentence like "George Washington is the

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father of our country[11]" to become citizens. Ms. Dorsey (1995) is optimistic, "Things are going to change." The literacy crisis after the literacy crisis reinforced an autonomous model of literacy, and things have not changed as much as they could have.

Discussion

The neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s had a lasting effect on adult education and continue to shape the way we come to understand literacy learning. The lens of sponsorship makes visible the directionality of power from the powerful literacy sponsors to the less powerful literacy sponsors to students. Within this power differential, each student brings their own history into the classroom. And these histories of displacement and violence are exerted by the very state assimilating them into this new imaginary. The powerful literacy sponsors design and implement neoliberal policies to expedite literacy acquisition for Vietnamese refugees and Latino immigrants to work in low-paying jobs. They generated a scarcity of resources, which led to ethnic fragmentation between Vietnamese refugees and immigrants from Latin America rather than coalition building between these two non-dominant communities. Such policies bring significant influences over the less powerful literacy sponsors, educators who find themselves navigating the constraints imposed by these policies in their teaching contexts. The concept of neoliberal literacies sheds light on the pervasive ideologies that permeate literacy learning vis-à-vis seemingly neutral neoliberal policies such as welfare-to-work reforms. Through oral histories, I illustrate how educators, though positioned as literacy sponsors, were themselves constrained by policy directives that prioritized workforce integration over critical engagement. The findings underscore how well-intended educational programs can reproduce structural inequities when operating within policy frameworks designed for social control rather than empowerment. Consequently, teachers modeled the neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s—they racialized students based on their perceived literacy practices, shrank spaces of critical thinking, and reduced literacy to notices of functionality.

This archival study is part of a larger study that examines the classroom practices and ideologies of ESL citizenship classes (Villegas, 2022). Although relying on archival data limits an understanding of contemporary practices, by historicizing these policies, this study reveals the ideological forces behind California's structuring of literacy education for citizenship and how California's approach ultimately informed other states and the federal implementation of the current citizenship exam. While my ongoing research extends this work by observing and participating in current ESL citizenship classrooms, future research will collect oral histories from current ESL citizenship students to "talk back" to the archive. This work will challenge the "official" narrative (García & Yosso, 2024) by privileging the knowledge of ESL citizenship students. Notably, the California Adult Education Oral History Project did not include interviews with ESL students at the time, reinforcing the question of whose voices were considered significant in shaping the historical record. Addressing this gap is critical in challenging the hierarchies of knowledge that have long positioned policymakers and educators as the sole narrators of adult education. This study itself begins to fill that gap by tracing how neoliberal policies, rather than pedagogical concerns rooted in the local needs of the community, determined what counted as literacy, who had access to it, and for what purposes—ultimately shaping how citizenship itself was defined and enacted in classrooms by funneling students into low paying jobs.

In the oral histories of Ms. Gonzalez, Ms. Keltner, and Ms. Taylor, we see the challenges and frustrations as their classrooms shifted because of changing policies. We see the shallow ways

[11] Sample sentence used to test reading and writing in the U.S. Naturalization test for citizenship.

in which they responded to students who appeared worlds away from their immediate world, even as they shared the same world. And yet, I am reminded that the powerful literacy sponsors set the terms of order, and the less powerful literacy sponsors teach according to *their* codes—teaching a pacified version of history pacifies learners, whereby teaching a functional version of literacy allows learners to work in isolating, exploitative environments. Neoliberal literacies reduced language and literacy to racialized notions of functionality by assimilating nondominant communities—through English—towards pacifying ends without much room to engage critically, such as the 40-hour requirement of facts-based English class. Literacy became a tool for racialized control, and we see this play out in the formation of ESL citizenship classes.

And that's the point. The issue is not simply that policymakers have failed to reform citizenship education—it is that the system was never designed to be transformative in the first place. The same political and economic structures that reduced literacy education into workforce training for low-paying positions remain today, making any push for reform superficial unless it addresses the broader racialized economic order that underpins adult education itself. What would it mean to fully fund adult education—not as a means of assimilating immigrants into low-wage labor but as an infrastructure for workers' rights education, economic mobility, and true civic engagement? What would it take to train people not just for jobs but for jobs that pay a living wage? Without a fundamental reimagining of literacy education as a public good rather than a means of social control, these programs will continue to serve the interests of those in power rather than the *very people* those in power claim to uplift.

Literacy teaching needs to be read through these machinations of power. Literacy teaching necessitates reading the room, the very room in which power masquerades as functional notions of literacy, reductive notions of citizenship, and extractive notions of work. What would happen if powerful literacy sponsors took NLS seriously—or is it simply outside of their interests? What room is there for the less powerful literacy sponsors to take NLS seriously? Or have these trickle-down ideologies clouded that very possibility? While the autonomous model of literacy reinscribes notions of functionality, the ideological model of literacy emphasizes the way literacy is shaped by these very power structures. To take NLS seriously is to build our own power—to act on literacy itself—to work towards a counter-hegemonic order that breaks away from these dominant literacy practices and ideologies that question the unequal distribution of literacy opportunities and thus exploitation itself. And the way learners themselves draw on their literacy practices to their own ends, to participate, to negotiate these very power structures, and to connect with each other—like Black people who wanted to learn Spanish to connect with their new neighbors.

Literacy is socially and culturally situated and constructed. We do more with literacy than simply read and write. We do these things with each other. We communicate with each other beyond the grammar of extraction and exchange as proscribed by the relations of capital. Literacy connects us. Literacy builds our communities. Literacy preserves our histories. And yet, sinisterly, literacy defines our relations. Literacy can act on us to define our relations through the codes of extraction. When literacy operates in service of white monoculture, in service of capital, when it becomes an entry point into citizenship, into our hierarchical orders, literacy takes away from this very human connection. This teetering between control and connection lies in part with the literacy sponsor, a positionality which, in one way or another, we all possess; and, when we work under exploitative circumstances or more comfortable positions with impossible pressures to produce, we affect others in varying ways from the banal to the harmful.

Humans are valuable outside of their ability to contribute to capital accumulation. And perhaps understanding *this* helps us see how literacy is not a neutral tool—so much so that this perceived neutral tool *turns* on well-meaning teachers (*and/or* professors, administrators, deans,

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and even graduate student instructors/teaching assistants), too. Dear reader, let us consider the context in which we are also forced to work. Have not most of us, at one point or another, been forced to work—or will be forced to work—in unfortunate, exploitative circumstances that, in one way or another, brought out, or will bring out, the worst of us? Working conditions are designed so that we trudge along so that we do not imagine other possibilities, and so that we drift further and further away from what it means to connect, remake, and build together. How many times have we thought we were simply doing our best, and yet, like Ms. Gonzalez, Ms. Keltner, and Ms. Taylor, our best was in line with the wrong codes? Have we missed our chance?

Ms. Gonzalez, Ms. Keltner, and Ms. Taylor go along with these codes even as they may try to critique the code. The code functions to prescribe literacy sponsors into actions or reforms that perfect the code while pacifying them into a continual going-along-with-the-code while trying our best without being able to imagine an otherwise. Ms. Gonzalez grew up in Mexico, and like many immigrants, her family wanted a better life. They all worked hard. Her mother worked to make enough money to send for her daughter, who was waiting in a government boarding school. And Ms. Gonzalez teaches these very codes to work hard, learn English, and become functional. Ms. Keltner rolled her eyes at federal authorities asking for her student's reading scores without an appropriate measure, and yet she helped design a testing system to act as that very measure. Ms. Keltner created a tool that made the codes more effective and efficient according to the referent logic of measuring and controlling non-dominant communities. Ms. Taylor, who believes in the good shepherd who went looking for one stray sheep, advocates fiercely for basic literacy as a fundamental right for all people, not just new immigrants. Ms. Taylor believes so very deeply in education, in its emancipatory responsibilities, but she too, heartbreakingly, teaches to their code.

These less powerful literacy sponsors are well-meaning, good at their jobs, and they have done their best with what they were methodically given by the more powerful literacy sponsors, but they get stuck in the inability to see an otherwise (largely aided by the policies set by the more powerful literacy sponsors and the ideological power embedded in racializing their students!). They believe so fiercely in these codes, but these codes masquerade so deeply in order, control, and compliance. That is part of the deviousness of the code: it conscripts our imagination, hopes, and our ways of being and authors the deradicalized, depoliticized, and the going-about-ness worker. The codes contribute to the project of producing a docile immigrant figure away from any kind of radical possibility that might have otherwise existed in this curriculum.

The conceptual organization of sponsorship emphasizes how teachers were forced to work in this very limited context to force our attention to the structures around us. Codes traffic in oppression, but they are also a both/and, and there is always a possibility for an otherwise. What would it mean for Ms. Gonzalez to teach such that work is not the horizon of living and learning? Rather than teaching for the simple transfer of knowledge, teaching to co-construct knowledge with her students, to include their histories, and critically reflect on the structures surrounding their lives. How might Ms. Keltner work against these bureaucratic codes? What would it mean for Ms. Taylor to harness all her earnestness to encourage her students to use literacy for their own ends, to use literacy as a tool that names oppression, that makes demands for power? What would it mean for teachers to teach their students to imagine and work towards an otherwise, to teach literacies that can take us somewhere different?

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Notes on Contributor

Dr. Karen Villegas is an Assistant Professor of Teaching and Associate Director of the Dimensions of Culture writing program at the University of California, San Diego. Her work examines how the state shapes western education spaces to serve capital, conscripting learners into hierarchical orders through epistemological codes—codes rooted in the U.S. Empire's histories of colonization, genocide, and slavery. Specifically, her research analyzes citizenship and nation-building processes by studying the ideological conceptions of language and literacy practices in adult, English as a Second Language (ESL) citizenship classes. Karen's book project interrogates these codes by showing how they move through ESL classrooms—how students come to perform these codes, how they talk back to them, and how they gesture toward other possibilities.

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