

SCHOOL LITERACY AS A CATALYST: A PORTRAIT FROM MULTILINGUAL,  
LOW-EDUCATED HOMES IN TURKEY

by

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the catalyzing effect of school literacies to initiate changes in the two multilingual and un- or under-schooled families at a period of time when the focal children started school in Turkey.

My research draws particularly upon four interrelated theoretical perspectives. First, the sociocultural-historical theory emphasizes the social, cultural, and historical basis of social interaction and literacy activities (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). The ecological theory promotes the idea that literacy and literacy activities are determined by overlapping social and cultural niches (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2000; 2005). Finally, I focus on the applications of critical approaches to literacy studies, such as critical pedagogy theory (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and the sociocritical literacy framework (Gutiérrez, 2005; 2008; Gutiérrez, Rymes & Larson, 1995) to argue for links between social power and literacy and literacy activities.

As for the methodological approach, this study can be defined as a case study using ethnographic techniques (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participatory observations both in the homes and in the school. Data analysis includes discourse analysis to identify salient themes about how language is used to perform social identities and social activities (Gee, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The findings point out that, first, the religious literacy skills in one focal family were recontextualized to make some connections with school, which was not a familiar domain for the family. Second, I provide evidence for the ways in which school-based abilities determined the categories of identity as forms of favorable and unfavorable self-definition for the focal participants, providing the focal children with a space to challenge the authority of their parents. This qualitative study is an attempt to understand how focal participants took positions, and

negotiated their identities with one another based on their abilities to read and write. My study will shed light on the educational experiences of children, together with their families, who are marginalized as a result of having little or no formal education and speaking minority languages.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, B. D. Koçbaşı Demir. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 4-5 was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H13-02425.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

A number of studies have suggested that learning to read and write starts long before formal schooling, and that throughout the pre-school period the child should be expected to gain mastery in the appropriation of stable thematic, compositional, and stylistic knowledge of print (Kamberelis & Bovino, 1999; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004). According to studies in this field, literacy development is an emerging process (Teale & Sulzby, 1986) and children acquire skills as a consequence of their engagement with various activities in their social context (Heath, 1982). Purcell-Gates (1996) states that literacy learning constitutes social development, since engaging with literacy is a social and cultural activity. The knowledge that is associated with reading and writing, as socially embedded activities, includes mastery of various social practices related to the use of print (Purcell-Gates, 1996).

Although the classroom may be viewed as the main formal environment that fosters the development of literacy, classroom contexts are not the only setting where children participate in literacy activities. It is argued that home/community literacy experiences have a determinant role in children's success at school. Children begin to learn about written language, its functions, and its social value during their initial engagement with print in their homes and communities. Researchers (Heath, 1982; Purcell-Gates, 1996; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007) argue that a mismatch between literacy practices at home and at school increases the risk of children's educational failure. As a consequence, they argue for the need to understand precisely how discrepancies between literacy practices at home and in school are reflected in young children's literacy development (Heath, 1983). Kamberelis (1999), for example, calls for highly contextualized multiple-case studies to explore the socio-cultural-historical dimensions of literacy development among young children coming from various social contexts.

## **Statement of the Problem**

In a number of studies about children's education in Turkey (e.g., Aksu-Koç, Erguvanlı-Taylan, & Bekman, 2002; Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası, 2010; KONDA, 2006), it has been mentioned that there are scores of children coming from linguistically diverse families who begin school without any knowledge of the Turkish language. Despite the overwhelming importance of this issue, to date no research has been carried out on how people from various social contexts respond to the enabling and constraining influences of school literacy on their daily life. In response to this research gap, for this dissertation I have conducted a qualitative study to understand the educational experiences of children, together with their families, who are marginalized as a result of having little or no formal education and speaking minority languages.

## **Purpose of the Study**

In this study, the focal homes and school were taken as two interacting contexts. The focal families were recruited from a low-income area of İstanbul, Turkey where most of the families have migrated and are either of Turkish origin or other ethnic groups. Both of the families are multilingual and lacking much formal education. The adults in the focal households either did not go to school at all, or they had negative and abortive experiences with school, due to social, economic, and cultural obstacles. Through participatory observations and interviews, both in the homes and the school, I first provide small-scale social and educational portraits of these two focal multilingual families.

The second aim of this research is to observe the connections between home and school from the perspective of a non-dominant<sup>1</sup>; i.e., multilingual and under-schooled, social group. In both of the focal families, the starting of primary school by the focal children initiated a radically restructuring of the ecological environments of their families. Hence, this study is an attempt to observe how multilingual, un- or under-schooled families and their children undertake the requirements of the school during their first year of school.

Furthermore, this study aims in particular to show that literacy activities are evolving social systems sensitive to significant transformations. In other words, the primary concern in this study is the observation and analysis of what happens to the literacy resources, attitudes, and perceptions about literacy, and the family processes when the child is exposed to a different setting, a Turkish national school. Based on the home data, primary attention is directed to both the focal children themselves, and on the ways in which the transition to school is reflected in the individuals, the activities, and the mutual relations in the family.

Finally, my motivation in this study is to explore how focal families from non-dominant groups appropriate their cultural resources as they participate in different ecological systems. When the focal children started first grade, I contend that formal schooling produced a new configuration for the families. That is, the language, discourses, and ideology brought from school are argued to restructure the perceptions and values established in the focal families towards the larger society and the local community. Teachers who work in non-dominant communities also develop a social positioning affected by surrounding interactions, and take a stance. In this respect, it is also my aim to understand how focal families' and focal teachers'

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work, the term “non-dominant” is used to refer to the more common terms such as “minority” and “diverse.” Following Gutiérrez (2008), it is believed that the term “non-dominant” indicates issues of power relations stronger than the traditional ones like “non-mainstream.”

moving in and out of various boundaries strengthens, broadens, and disrupts their attitudes and social positioning towards one another.

Throughout this study, together with social and historical perspectives, a “cultural perspective” is taken on, with the purpose of attending to the cultural context of the literacy activities of children and their families. According to Rogoff and Morelli (1989), working with people from a different cultural and social background enables researchers to become aware of implicit cultural assumptions when activities in a different community are missing from those which one expects or carried out differently. Furthermore, the general theory suggested by many literacy studies is mostly based on either Western families or marginalized communities living in Western societies. Working with different communities in different sociocultural-historical contexts, a researcher can find differences as well as similarities across cultures. This pursuit provides important insights towards a broader picture of human activities around language and literacy. Hence, the ultimate purpose is to gain a more complex understanding of how people appropriate cultural concepts such as literacy, language, and schooling as they operate across different settings like home and school. To this aim, this study is based on the three research questions stated below:

1. What kinds of messages related to literacy, multilingualism, and schooling do the focal children receive in the two different immediate contexts (i.e., home and school) during their first year of school?

2. How are the relationships among the focal participants reconstructed when they are confronted by messages about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling?

3. Do school literacies act as a “catalyst” to initiate changes in the focal families; if so, in what ways does this occur?

## **Research Context**

In this introductory chapter, I provide information about the regional, social, and historical characteristics of Turkey as my research context. Turkey, officially known as the Republic of Turkey, is situated where the continents of Asia and Europe meet. The democratic, secular, and unitary system<sup>2</sup> of Turkey was established in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk after the fall of the Ottoman Empire due to the Empire’s defeat at the end of the World War I. Turkey has multicultural population of 77 million as of 2014. Almost 68% of its population is between the age of 15 and 64. Turkey has a relatively young population, with 24% under the age of 15. Since 2005, Turkey is a candidate country for membership in the European Union<sup>3</sup>.

**The larger context of Turkey.** A historical understanding is believed to be essential before trying to undertake any study on language and literacy use in Turkey. Thus, my ultimate initial aim in this chapter is to build a historical understanding of the issues, such as multilingualism, migration, and education, the three defining concepts of this study, in the Turkish context.

Turkey is divided into seven geographic areas: Marmara, Aegean, Black Sea, Central Anatolia, Eastern Anatolia, Southeastern Anatolia and the Mediterranean. Due to the unitary

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<sup>2</sup> A unitary system is a system of political organization that contrasts with a federal system. In a unitary system the governing power is occupied by a centralized government. Although there are differences in practice, most of the nation-states are unitary systems (Retrieved on June, 2016, from Encyclopedia Britannica Online: <http://global.britannica.com/topic/unitary-system>).

<sup>3</sup> Results of Address Based Population Registration System, 2007-2014 published by TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute)

system of the Turkish Republic, these seven areas do not have any administrative power. Turkey is governed by a parliamentary representative democracy. The head of the administration is the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, situated in the capital city, Ankara. The biggest and the most crowded city in the country is Istanbul, the site of my research. Istanbul's population density is 2767 people per square kilometer, whereas the population density in Turkey is only 101 people per square kilometer in total<sup>4</sup>. Although the Muslim population in Turkey is the majority, the constitution of the Republic of Turkey defines the country as a secular state, where the state and the religion are separate.

The globally accepted determinants of economic power of a country, such as “gross domestic product” (GDP) and “purchasing power parity” (PPP)<sup>5</sup> identify Turkey as the 17<sup>th</sup> biggest economy in the world, following Canada and Spain. Turkey is considered to be one of the emerging and developing countries in Europe<sup>6</sup>.

**The languages of Turkey.** The number of different languages spoken in Turkey is not known currently. The details will be provided in the discussion of the current socio-linguistic situation in Turkey. Since the home languages of the focal families in this study are Kurdish and Turkish, I will first introduce these languages with some basic information. The regional and social characteristics of both languages will be discussed later.

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<sup>4</sup> Address Based Population Registration System (ABPRS), 2007-2014 published by TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute)

<sup>5</sup> GDP derived from PPP calculates the value of all goods and services produced by a country in a year. It estimates the per capita income relative to the cost of goods, services, and inflation rates in a given country.

<sup>6</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF). Retrieved on October, 2015, from IMF website:

<http://data.imf.org/?sk=b5cda530-07b8-46c6-b829-1827df8b49c7&sid=1416841686596&ss=1415653805125>.

The only official language of Turkey is Turkish, spoken by 85% of its population (T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Strateji Geliştirme Başkanlığı<sup>7</sup>, 2010). Turkish<sup>8</sup> belongs to the Altaic language family, together with the 66 other Altaic languages such as Korean and Mongolian. Today there are about 200 million Turkic speakers around the world (Katzner, 2002). Unlike Turkish, Kurdish belongs to the Indo-European language family. It is a continuum of the Western Persian languages. The number of speakers of the Kurdish language was estimated to be around 20 million in the early 1980s (Hassanpour, Sheyholislami, & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012). A more recent study done by KONDA (2006) estimated the number of Kurdish speakers in Turkey as approximately more than 8 million. Both Turkish and Kurdish spoken within the territories of the Republic of Turkey are written with Latin script (also known as Greco-Roman script).

**The issue of language policy in Turkish history.** In this section, I review the language policy found in Turkish history starting from the Ottoman Empire with a particular focus on the status of languages in education (for a detailed review of language planning efforts see Dogañay-Aktuna, 2004; Eraydın-Virtanen, 2003; Yağmur, 2001).

The Ottoman Empire was one of the biggest empires established by the Turks, and survived more than 600 years (between 1299 and 1922)<sup>9</sup>. Language and ethnicity were not the distinctive criteria that distinguished peoples living in the Ottoman territories. Rather, it was the

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<sup>7</sup> Republic of Turkey, Ministry of National Education, Strategy Development Department

<sup>8</sup> The earliest known Turkic written records are the two monuments called Orkhon inscriptions in Mongolia dated back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The stories in the form of epic legends depicted in these inscriptions were the legendary stories of Turkic people in Central Asia. They are also known as "Turkic runes" or "runiform." According to some accounts, Orkhon scripts might have driven from variants of the Aramaic alphabet or from the ancient Chinese scripts.

<sup>9</sup> To see a map for the territories under the rule of the Empire see the following link:  
[http://www.conservapedia.com/Ottoman\\_Empire](http://www.conservapedia.com/Ottoman_Empire)

religious affiliation of the nations that affected peoples' social positioning in the Empire.

Although the rulers of the empire were of Turkish origin, the Turkish language was not used as a language of education at any level throughout the country<sup>10</sup>. Instead of Turkish, Persian for literature and Arabic for religious education were reinforced, taught, and used. On the other hand, non-Turkish ethnic groups were allowed to use and teach their languages in their schools.

Turkish was the language of daily communication among Turkish communities. When the proportion of Turkish speakers diminished as a result of the Empire's expansion over the Balkans and the Middle East, the Ottoman court did not take any measures to improve its status, allowing Turkish be considered inferior to other languages until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this respect, Nancy Dorian (1998) contrasts Ottoman multilingualism with the Western monolingual-oriented legacy over the conquered territories. According to Dorian, what was common in European legacy had been the bias in favor of monolingual environments in which multiple indigenous languages living peacefully in one setting were not seen feasible. Although European colonialism attempted to establish its own languages as a high-standard form of speech, this was not the case in the Ottoman history. Ottoman ruling powers did not embark on the ideology of "standard language dominance" until the spread of nationalistic ideas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the wave of nationalism affected the Ottoman Empire in two ways. First, several ethnic groups living within the Ottoman territory rebelled against the Empire to seek their independence. To prevent the dissolution throughout the territories, the policy of one common language and a common identity was implemented by the Ottoman rulers. Moreover,

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<sup>10</sup> The only exception to no-Turkish education was the Enderun school. It was a special school to train people for the administrative positions in the Ottoman Court. Although the medium of instruction was Turkish in the Enderun school, people from Turkish communities were not allowed to enter to Enderun.

Turkish intellectuals were affected by nationalistic ideas that led them to focus on the Turkish language. Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman intelligentsia tried to elevate the status of the Turkish language. First, they simplified the language by eliminating borrowed words from Arabic and Persian. In 1876, Turkish was declared as the official language of the Ottoman Empire, followed by regulations to make learning Turkish compulsory in all primary and secondary schools. According to those regulations, minority groups were permitted to learn their languages, in addition to Turkish at primary and secondary levels. The ultimate aim was to create a common Ottoman identity through a common Turkish language to be imposed on nations under the Ottoman rule. It was hoped that integration would develop among nations in the periphery, who had fought to gain their independence against the Empire. However, these regulations did not have the desired effects. Rather, they gave impetus to language movements that accelerated national revolts in the Balkans.

Kandiyoti and Cole (2002) argued that the nation-state, and thus nationalism, arose in the Muslim world as a consequence of colonialism when the colonial borders were imposed from the outside. Similarly, in Turkey's case, colonialism was an external cause in the construction of Turkish nationalistic discourse during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When the First World War started, the Ottoman Empire entered the war as an ally of Germany. However, it lost the war by default when Germany was defeated. As a result, England, France, Greece, and Italy invaded the Ottoman territories. Resistance forces organized and led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (who was a commander in the Ottoman military during the war) fought against occupying countries, and the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923. The motto of the new republic was "one nation and one language under one flag." After Turkey gained its independence from those colonial powers, it seemed fundamental to unite under a common Turkish national identity as a means to

protect the country against colonial hegemony. In Turkish nationalistic discourse, the unity of Turkish and the establishment of a national identity were believed to have saved the country at the end of World War I. Instead of the idea of ethnicity, Turkish national identity is expressed through the notion of citizenship in Turkey's Constitutions: "In Turkey, from the point of view of citizenship, everyone is a Turk without regard to race or religion" (Article 88 of the 1924 Constitution). In practice, this statement is reflected in the practices that absorb the various ethnic groups into one identity. The Turkish language has become a fundamental unification tool for absorption-oriented policies.

All the efforts concerning the Turkish language and education were referred to as the Turkish Language Reform, one of Ataturk's key reforms. It had basically three aims: (1) to break all the ties with the Ottoman past, (2) to strengthen Turkish unity, and (3) to catch up with the modern world of the West. First, the Arabic language, which was related to religious practices, was banned and the religious schools were closed. Turkish was then accepted as the only official language in the country. The Arabic script was changed to the Latin script (also known as Greco-Roman script) in a very short time, approximately three months, because the use of Arabic script was seen as the cause of the low literacy level among the Ottoman population. Before the reform, the literacy level was so low that only 10% of the population was able to read and write. Therefore, the radical changes in the script were relatively easy to accomplish. As a result of language reform, most of the Arabic and Persian words were eliminated from the vocabulary. The new Turkish words were either imported from the spoken language or created through several linguistic operations such as compounding, semantic expansion, and loan-translations. After having created a "genuine" Turkish language, it was stated in the Turkish constitution that, "No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish

citizens at any institutions of training and education” (Article 42). However, this statement binds only citizens who were not recognized under the Treaty of Lausanne<sup>11</sup>.

The decision about which groups constitute ethnic minorities in Turkey came from treaties such as the Treaty of Lausanne, signed by the government of the Turkish Republic. Based on the Treaty of Lausanne, signed in the 1920s, non-Muslim minorities such as Jews, Armenians, and Greek Orthodox people gained the privilege of setting up their own schools and using their own languages for instruction. On the other hand, other languages of minority Muslim ethnic groups, for example Arabic, Kurdish, and Laz (people from the Caucasian area) were not recognized in any international documents<sup>12</sup>. As a result, there have not been any regulations about the education of children whose mother tongue is one of those “unrecognized” languages.

To conclude this section, I reemphasize that in the case of Turkey’s nation-building history, the Turkish language has been rendered as almost sacrosanct in the society. Any discussions about language policy in Turkey are loaded with ideological connotations and emotions that make discussions about it difficult at best. Academic resources on different languages in Turkey are limited, and reliable up-to-date information on people and their language use is not available. However, if equal access to education and successful outcomes are to be attained in the country, first, the real needs of children from different backgrounds

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<sup>11</sup> At the end of World War I, Turkey signed the Treaty of Lausanne with the Allies of World War I (i.e., the British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania and the Serb-Croat-Slovene) in July 1923.

<sup>12</sup> In the Treaty of Lausanne, inhabitants were classified based on their religious affiliations rather than linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. For example, the population exchanges between Turkey and Greece was made according to peoples’ religious identity. As a result of the Treaty, Greek speaking Muslim people living in Greece were exchanged with Turkish speaking Greek and Turkish Christians living in Turkey (Zürcher, 1995).

should be recognized and addressed by the policy makers and practitioners in education. The main step in such policy improvement attempts is to have “powerful, rigorously theorised, grounded, and documented observations and analysis of the contexts for language, literacy, and education” (Luke, 2003, p. 132). Acknowledging such a public policy standpoint, in the following section I will discuss a few studies to illuminate the contexts of language use in Turkey.

**The current socio-linguistic situation in Turkey.** It is difficult to define the current sociolinguistic situation in Turkey since the political conditions have always been sensitive in regards to ethnic minorities. Only the three censuses conducted in 1927, 1965, and 1985 provided official information about ethnic minorities in the country. According to the 1927 census, there were 14 linguistic groups at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The percentage of people who spoke languages other than Turkish as their mother tongue made up 14% of the total population (Dündar, 2000). Based on the 1965 census, Turkish speakers (estimated at 46,278,000 people in 1965) were the largest group, followed by Kurdish speakers, with a population of almost eight million (Grimes, 1996). Grimes stated that the number of languages spoken in Turkey was 42, based on the 1965 census.

Questions about mother tongue and racial origin were omitted from the official censuses after 1985 as the debate on the existence of ethnic groups in Turkey heated up in the political and public arenas. Although the existence of ethnic minorities has always been a disputed issue since the constitution of the Republic of Turkey, the armed conflict between Turkish military and the separatist Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) groups in the southeast had deleterious effects on the linguistic rights of any minority population living in Turkey. After the clashes, any claims of different ethnic groups were taken as a threat to the Turkey’s unity more seriously than ever. It

was not until the Turkey and European Union (EU) negotiation proceedings that different ethnic groups were recognized in public spheres.

While trying to ameliorate difficulties in its internal affairs, Turkey applied for EU membership in 1987. However, it took twelve years for Turkey to get recognized as a candidate for full membership at the Helsinki summit of the European Council in 1999. Among many criteria for EU membership, the European Council expects the candidate country to have achieved the “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities.”<sup>13</sup> When Turkey started negotiations with the EU in 2005 for full membership, it became necessary to first enact regulations to recognize the existence of, and then to improve the conditions of, different ethnic groups in the country. During the negotiations process between the European Council and Turkey, the Turkish government has been forced to liberalize the language policy in the country. Starting in the beginning of the new millennium, the liberalization in the Turkish language policy underlies the impetus for many of the recent studies and publications on the different linguistic groups in Turkey.

In 2006, a pioneer study published by an independent Turkish research and consultancy organization called KONDA<sup>14</sup> provided current information about the socio-linguistic composition of Turkey. According to KONDA’s study, 23.98% of the population (almost 18 million people) declared an ethnic identity other than Turkish. People of Kurdish origin (15.6%) were still the largest ethnic and linguistic minority group, followed by Arabic-speaking people

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<sup>13</sup> as stated in the Bulletin of the European Community, 6/1993, at I.13

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.konda.com.tr/index\\_en.php](http://www.konda.com.tr/index_en.php)

and Muslim immigrants from the Balkan and Caucasus areas (e.g., Abkhazians, Adjarians, Albanians, Arabs, Assyrians, Bosniaks, Circassians, Hamshenis, Laz, Pomaks, and Roma)<sup>15</sup>.

Since the Kurdish population has been the largest ethnic and linguistic minority group in the country, many pioneering studies have focused on Kurdish speaking people. Apart from their large numbers, Kurdish people have been the only ethnic group in Turkey who have partly avoided linguistic shift and maintained their language because of several demographic and socio-historical factors particular to them (Yağmur, 2001). Oran (2000) identified two main reasons behind their distinctive condition:

(1) Kurdish people have been living as concentrated groups in the same geographic space (i.e., east and southeast parts of Turkey) for centuries. Compared with many other ethnic groups who immigrated to the country quite recently, Kurdish-speaking groups can be considered indigenous.

(2) Since their living areas are geographically remote, their integration into the economic system of the country had been difficult and occurred later. Moreover, due to their geographic remoteness, it has been possible for them to maintain their way of life.

Because of the reasons mentioned above, Kurdish people have been the most active group in demanding for their linguistic, social, and cultural rights since the beginning of the republic. Their struggles to maintain their identity and culture gave rise to various occasions of revolt, such as local rebellions of Kurdish tribes in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, and fighting of armed PKK groups against the Turkish government since the 1980s. Apart from that, starting in 1990,

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<sup>15</sup> Based on KONDA's study the proportion of different language speakers in Turkey is as follows: Turkish 84.54%, Kurdish/Kirmanjki 11.97%, Zaza/Zazaki 1.01%, Arabic 1.38%, Armenian 0.07%, Greek 0.06%, Hebrew 0.01%, Laz/Lazuri 0.12%, Circassian 0.11%, Coptic 0.01%.

Kurdish politicians have been active in the political arena to bring attention to the Kurdish situation in the Republic of Turkish Parliament. Consequently, there are more studies that have focused on social, linguistic, and political conditions of Kurdish speaking groups in comparison to other linguistic minorities.

Bourdieu's distinctive emphasis (1991) on forms of symbolic power is useful here to understand the unfavorable conditions of minority groups in Turkey as opposed to the mainstream Turkish language and culture. According to Bourdieu (1991), socio-historical conditions establish some forms of language and literacy practices as dominant and powerful while putting powerless groups and their abilities and knowledge in an inferior and marginal position. To maintain and reproduce their dominant position, powerful groups set up social institutions, such as the system of education, based on their own resources. The concept of "capital" indicates that the resources of powerful groups are also represented as having greater exchange value or capital in the market. Social groups whose social dispositions are different than those of the powerful groups do not have the powerful codes to transform their resources into an asset that has fair exchange value in the social market. As a result, they yearn for the mainstream practices. Taking up Bourdieu's perspective, two aspects of social positioning of minority groups in Turkey merit discussion here: (1) language shift and maintenance tendencies, and (2) educational circumstances experienced by linguistically diverse groups.

**Language maintenance and shift.** In Turkey, speakers of minority languages are free to use their first language (or L1) at home, in their communities, and in informal public places. However, since Turkish is the only official language, all people are served in Turkish in schools, hospitals, and courts. The ability to read and write in Turkish is extremely important for participation in social life, better job opportunities, and, hence, upward social mobility. In this

regard, it would not be wrong to assert that finding a better living standard in Turkish society is the main motivation for people from different ethnic groups to give up their L1 and adopt Turkish. Besides, the Turkish state urges all peoples in the country to learn and communicate in the official language, Turkish. Compulsory education and compulsory military service have been two basic institutions to contribute to this end.

Since the beginning of the republic, education has been carried out in Turkish and in the languages of non-Muslim minorities that were recognized in the international treaties. In addition, “modern foreign languages” such as English, German, and French, are taught as second languages in a number of schools<sup>16</sup>. Although any languages other than Turkish are still not allowed to be taught in schools as “mother tongue,” language programs were established in some universities under the “Institute for Living Languages.” The aim of these institutions is to educate academics who want to study the respective languages as an academic field. Furthermore, private courses have been set up throughout the country to teach people their heritage language.

In addition to schools, the military is another institution where linguistic integration is attained. Military service after the age of 20 is compulsory for all male citizens of the Republic of Turkey, regardless of their ethnic and/or linguistic background. Men are also taught practical skills, such as carpentry, construction and farming in military camps where they spend several months. There are also literacy classes that teach illiterate men reading and writing in Turkish (Yağmur, 2001). It should be noted that all the language and literacy training in the military are for men only, since women are not required to do military service.

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<sup>16</sup> The schools that teach through the use of modern foreign languages are of two types. One group is private schools, which affluent homes can afford. The other type is public (i.e., free of charge) which accepts students according to the results of national exams.

There are a number of factors that determine language shift patterns in minority groups. Gender has been regarded as one of them, as it shapes people's access to or participation in the institutions mentioned previously. Girls' enrollment rate in education is found to be significantly lower when compared with boys, especially in the countryside and in the eastern regions. The unequal access to educational participation is mainly related to cultural norms and social structures in the country. In many parts of Turkey, traditional gender roles that expect women to be the main actors in both care-giving and domestic chores lower girls' chance of getting a proper education (Smits & Hoşgör, 2006). On the other hand, men have the role of sustaining the family: in that respect, learning the dominant language is a must for them. Furthermore, in some groups women have the role of maintaining the heritage language and culture to pass on to the next generations. Women's access to the dominant language may also be limited, as their "place" is supposed to be at home or within the community (Burck, 2005). As a result, one in 25 women in Turkey does not know the dominant language, Turkish (Smits & Hoşgör, 2003). This percentage is even higher among the Kurdish population; that is, 24% of Kurdish women (nearly one in four women) do not know Turkish at all. Moreover, among the young female population (15-29 years of age), 59% of Kurdish women do not have primary school education (Gürsel, Uysal-Kolaşın, & Altındağ, 2009). These statistics indicate that due to language barriers, in addition to cultural and social barriers, a large proportion of women do not have the opportunity to learn Turkish and, thus, are not participating fully in social, cultural, and political life in Turkey.

Urbanization is another factor that affects language shift. When people from different ethnic minorities migrate to urban places, they come into contact with the dominant language more than they had in their villages. Because the dominant language has a functional

significance in urban life, being fluent in it becomes an asset for people who want to survive in the city. Compared with adults, the transition to the new language happens even faster among migrant younger people. Soon after children start school in the city, all interactions around them start to be mediated by the dominant language; hence a gradual transition from bilingualism to monolingualism in the dominant language takes place (Kamwangamalu, 2010). Similarly, Yağmur (2001) argues that in Turkey's case, language shift is more prevalent among the urban population than the rural population. Industrial development in big cities has pulled many people from villages to the industrialized centers in the western regions. In rural areas, people share similar linguistic and ethnic backgrounds that help them maintain their bonds to their identity. On the other hand, the social construction of urban areas is far from being homogenous, and includes many people from various social backgrounds. Additionally, in the face of industrialism, the only way to access social resources for upward mobility is to integrate into the mainstream cultural and linguistic norms of the society. Thus, people who have migrated to big cities tend to adopt Turkish more often than those who stayed in the Kurdish and Arab towns in southeastern rural areas. In this context, it is argued that Turkish functions as the lingua franca in public life when people from different parts of Turkey gathered together in city centers (Yağmur, 2001).

Starting a new life in cities accelerates the pace of language shift of the younger generation from various linguistic groups into the lingua franca, that is, Turkish. Education and Science Worker's Union (Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası, 2010) studied the rate of language shift in different linguistic communities. According to the survey, people who come from different ethnic groups do not prefer to talk to their children in their L1 as often as they talk to their parents. Seventy two per cent of bilingual people in this survey mentioned that they

talked to their parents in their L1, whereas only 27% of them stated that they use L1 to talk to their children. One study that is informative about language maintenance and shift patterns in linguistically diverse families was done by Aksu-Koç, Erguvanlı-Taylan, and Bekman (2002). This study mainly aimed at finding out language proficiency levels among pre-school children. The researchers sampled their research population in three migration-receiving cities: two cities in the east, and one city in the west. In this study, nearly half of the mothers stated that they spoke a language other than Turkish, Kurdish mothers being the majority in this group. The findings suggested that living in the west had an effect on the language shift decisions in Kurdish families. All Kurdish mothers in the west stated Turkish as the first language (L1) of their children, whereas the ones living in the eastern cities tended to identify Kurdish as their children's L1 more often than Turkish.

It is always more difficult for minority groups to maintain their languages in the absence of institutional support (Dorian, 1998). Unfortunately, the lack of detailed and sophisticated studies on language maintenance and shift patterns in Turkey leaves us only to speculate about the general mechanisms of language shift on tentative grounds. We do not have reliable data and comprehensive research on how particular groups respond to the general mechanism of linguistic absorption. Furthermore, as Dorian aptly stated, there is much more known about language shift than language maintenance patterns and strategies.

**Educational circumstances experienced by multilingual population.** Results of international literacy assessment tests like The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) demonstrate that students' literacy performance in Turkey are far from being satisfactory at primary and secondary levels. In all these tests, Turkey's scores have been below the average or significantly

lower than the participating countries in all areas tested since 2001 (Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Kennedy, 2003; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010). In the latest PISA tests, it is acknowledged that presenting the differences between countries' scores is not enough to capture the variation in students' performance within one country. Thus, PISA also categorized the scores according to the socio-economic backgrounds of students (i.e., level of parents' education, employment of father and mother, and the teacher/student ratio in the school attended) and reached meaningful conclusions in terms of the effects of home and school background on students' achievement. According to the PISA 2009 results, the percentage of students participating from Turkey who appear to be resilient<sup>17</sup> to the socio-economic disadvantages amounts to less than 50%. Although this percentage of resilient performers is similar to the OECD average, it is still challenging for a considerable proportion of students in Turkey to overcome socio-economic disadvantages and to benefit from social mobility opportunities guaranteed by educational achievement (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010).

In many policy reports and academic works published in Turkey, being a linguistic minority student has been defined as a disadvantageous attribute in terms of academic achievement. According to Gürsel, Uysal-Kolaşın, and Altındağ's (2009) study of educational attainment in different ethnic groups in Turkey, 46% of Kurdish people and 26% of people from other linguistic groups do not have a primary school diploma. As for the Turkish speaking population, 9% do not have a primary school education. When we look at the Kurdish population more closely, only 2% of people who speak Kurdish as their native language have university

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<sup>17</sup> The term "resilient" is used in PISA 2009 to refer to students who score among the top achievers despite their socioeconomic disadvantages such as coming from low educated families and overcrowded classrooms.

degrees, as compared to 10% from Turkish speaking groups and 7% from other linguistic minorities (Sosyal Politika Forumu, 2010).

Table 1.1: Level of Education based on L1 (in percentages)

	Turkish	Kurdish	Other L1	Total
No primary school diploma	9	46	26	63
Primary school graduates	66	45	56	15
Secondary school graduates	15	6	11	14
College/university graduates	10	2	7	9

As is apparent in Table 1.1, educational achievement of people whose L1 is not Turkish is below that of native Turkish speakers. The achievement gap becomes even wider when it comes to the Kurdish population. Although we do not have detailed information specific to the linguistically diverse population on hand, looking at statistical data about social conditions of different geographic regions may shed light on how multilingual populations have experienced education in Turkey. People who speak languages other than Turkish at home are mostly concentrated in the south-east and the north-east. Therefore, educational circumstances in the eastern regions may give us hints about the conditions of schooling that multilingual children experience in Turkey.

Given the indicators such as teacher/student ratio and literacy rates, eastern locations appear to be the most disadvantaged regions compared to Turkey's average (Sosyal Politika Forumu, 2010). Studies about social inequalities in Turkey mention that the high rate of poverty and the lack of state investment in education facilities in the eastern regions have been two

crucial factors that determine children's low success in education. Due to the impoverishment of the families, it is very common in southeastern villages for children to be taken out of the school and put to work in agriculture and animal husbandry from time to time. Because children's education is interrupted occasionally, the rates of school dropout are high in the region (Bakış, Levent, İnel, & Polat, 2009). The percentage of students who continue to the secondary school in the southeastern cities is between 40% and 50 % (Ministry of National Education, 2015).

In order to study the effects of social, cultural, and familial factors affecting educational attainment, Gökşen, Cemalcılar and Gürlelel (2006) conducted a survey called *School Dropouts In Turkish Primary Schools: Policy Towards Monitoring and Prevention*. This survey was based on fieldwork carried out in six cities, both in the west and in the east. One important finding is the proportion of dropout children who speak languages other than Turkish at home: 51.9% of early school-leavers were found to come from linguistically diverse families. This rate was as high as 85% in the southeastern cities, suggesting language-related issues are related to children's early school leaving.

The most recent studies have also revealed that a number of children start first grade with limited or no Turkish (Aksu-Koç, Erguvanlı-Taylan & Bekman, 2002; Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası, 2010; KONDA, 2006). In Aksu-Koç et al.'s survey (2002), 81.1% of first grade teachers reported that they had students in their class with some sort of language problems relating to comprehension and production. These children try to learn the language at the same time as they learn to read and write in Turkish in a literacy program designed only for monolingual Turkish children. The inability to communicate with their Turkish-speaking teachers in class hinders minority children's ability to build up a relationship with their teachers. Those children have also problems in understanding teachers' directions and instructions. As

they experience constant failure, their sense of belonging to school is critically damaged (Gökşen et al., 2006).

### **Current debates about educating bilingual children: A dilemma about L1 and L2.**

Personal accounts of primary school teachers, both monolingual and bilingual, and of adults living in the southeastern part of Turkey, shed light on various contexts of language use and literacy acquisition in linguistically diverse settings: [...] *a language that used to be mine was left behind. I feel sorrow. It's like choosing one out of two children* (Sabahat, female adult cited in Coşkun, Derince, & Uçarlar, 2010, p. 30).

In order to explore psychological, educational, and social needs of teachers and children in the region, Coşkun, Derince, and Uçarlar (2010) carried out interviews with Kurdish-Turkish bilingual teachers, Turkish monolingual teachers, and Kurdish adults who had suffered from language problems during their primary school years. The most salient problem mentioned by the interviewees was the lack of communication between Turkish speaking teachers who were assigned by MONE and students who started school with little or no competence in Turkish. All the informants said that they were not able to understand the teacher in the first years of primary grades and had serious problems in communicating even their basic needs to their teachers. Since they were forbidden to speak in their L1 in school, they had no choice but to stay silent during class hours and even at recess.

It is still commonly believed that maximum exposure to Turkish is the best strategy for teaching linguistically diverse students. The people who were interviewed in Coşkun et al.'s (2010) study also complained about the lack of special curriculum to meet their needs. They believed that Turkish-only literacy instruction has put minority children at a disadvantage in

comparison with their Turkish-speaking peers. Kurdish adults stated that they used to feel like “a parrot” in the primary school years because they used to repeat after the teacher without understanding him/her. The ones who managed to achieve higher education, however, have not managed to overcome the feeling of lagging behind of their Turkish peers. As they fall behind, they find it much harder to achieve in higher levels of education.

As it is often mentioned in the literature (e.g., Cummins, 1979), children, who have less than native-like competence in Turkish experience difficulties in understanding Turkish words used in literacy instructional texts. Since most minority children start school before reaching conceptual maturity in the language of instruction, it becomes almost impossible for them to link the Turkish words in the textbooks with their referents and connotations in the external world. As a result, even when minority students manage to acquire the technical skills of decoding and encoding in reading and writing in Turkish, they suffer from comprehension problems.

Many people in the Coşkun et al. (2010) study stated that after five or six years of schooling, their use of Turkish in daily communication with their friends started to increase gradually. On the other hand, the decrease in their L1 use resulted in a lack of interest in that language. Furthermore, they reported that in time, they developed negative attitudes toward their L1 and toward people who talked in that language. The personal account below presents an example of such an attitude:

*We have started to speak in Turkish. The first time I read a book and understood it, I became very happy; it felt like I have had a big achievement. I felt like I was a new person ever after. But you have lost all your ties to your language (L1). Our language is like a simple language, an outdated language. This was how it occurred to me. I considered my language as something like ‘birds’ language’, as if it didn’t have a meaning. [...] When everything came in Turkish, there was no value of Kurdish. (Ahmet, male adult, p. 49)*

The lack of communication between parents whose L1 is different from Turkish and teachers who do not know the community's language also has the effect of decreasing parents' participation in their children's schooling. Since parents are not able to communicate with teachers sufficiently, they are reluctant to attend family meetings in school. Because of language barriers, the minority families think that they do not have the necessary resources to help their children with their schoolwork. As is apparent in the following excerpt taken from Coşkun et al. (2010), in time, children switched to Turkish as a result of Turkish-only instruction, and parents started to experience communication problems with their children: *"When I talk to them [my children], they make fun of my Turkish. Our relationship is very bad. I can't get on well with them"* (Meryem, female adult, p. 74).

In the same study, the parents and the teachers working in the region stated that they held a supportive attitude towards their children's being biliterate in both Turkish and their home language. A number of families wanted their children to master Turkish since they believed that a good command of Turkish is a must for prosperity in the future. In addition, they considered having the language and literacy skills in L1 as essential for pedagogic purposes. Consider the following statement by a teacher who had experiences with this group of students:

*The child comes to a certain age as having a certain language. You attempt to change all the words that she had learned so far. She has her own world at six years of age, at seven years of age. She has her own world, because she makes relations with her mother, her father, and her surroundings [through that language]. You attempt to take it, make it nothing and start with a new language. Then her world falls to pieces. Pedagogically, it is harmful.* (Abdullah, male teacher, p. 63)

As is indicated in this excerpt, linking L1 and the language of instruction during the education processes is considered essential for children in early grades. Otherwise, when their

world, which is constructed through L1, is considered nonexistent, children experience a traumatic break with their world. According to many of the respondents in that study, the concern should be on the ways to prevent a sudden detachment from their L1 and to facilitate literacy development in two languages. The respondents also complained about the dominance of the Turkish-only approach in schools since minority children's submersion into Turkish has impaired L1 abilities while leaving them with an underdeveloped Turkish. This process of language ideology leads minority people like the ones mentioned in Coşkun et al. (2010) to shift to the dominant language with Turkish schooling while considering their L1 "*as something like birds' language, as if it didn't have a meaning*" (see Ahmet's account in Coşkun et al., 2010, p. 49).

**Migration and social exclusion among multilingual populations.** In addition to multilingualism, migration has been another factor that has had dramatic influences on the social fabric and conditions experienced by people in Turkey. Turkey is a country of emigration that does not have a significant international immigrant population. As of today, it is estimated that nearly 3.6 million Turkish nationals live outside of the country (Kirişçi, 2003).

In Turkey, multilingual migrant people are mostly internal migrants from the eastern regions of the country. Recent studies have revealed that one out of every three adults has migrated from his/her place of birth to another place in Turkey (KONDA, 2006). The big industrial cities in the west of Turkey, like Istanbul, with a population of over 14 million<sup>18</sup> and Izmir (population 3,868,308), are the top immigrant-receiving cities, according to the net migration statistics (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2009).

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<sup>18</sup> According to the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality (2016). Retrieved on October 2015, from its website: <http://www.ibb.istanbul/tr-TR/kurumsal/Pages/IlceveIlkKademe.aspx>.

In this section, the social conditions of internal migrants of different ethnic identities will be discussed. Special attention will be paid to the schooling of these migrants' children. In Turkey, two currents of internal migration are worth mentioning. The first flow was seen during the 1950s when economic conditions in Turkey led masses of people in the country to migrate from rural areas to big cities in order to find job opportunities and a better standard of living. Due to the economic underdevelopment in eastern Turkey, a considerable portion in this flow of population was composed of migrants from the multilingual eastern regions. The second flow from east to west resulted from the armed conflict between Turkish military and PKK in the southeastern part of Turkey, bordered by Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Compared with the first group of migrants who moved voluntarily because of economic reasons, this latter group of people, referred to as "internally displaced people" in the literature, evacuated their homes involuntarily either because of security reasons. It is estimated that around one million Kurdish people migrated to big cities in the west or to nearby regions during the 1990s (Adaman & Keyder, 2006). Although the government initiated "Return to Village and Rehabilitation" incentives in 1998 for people who wanted to go back to their villages, most of the internally displaced people (IDP) have not returned (for a detailed of an account on IDP see Yüksek, 2006). Studies about social exclusion stated that multilingual migrants from southeastern regions, especially internally displaced people, endure economic troubles with little or no social support as they were pulled away from their sources of livelihood. Their abrupt introduction to the competitive urban life left them with poor living conditions in slum areas, lack of social security, and high rates of unemployment. As a result, this group of migrants suffers from social exclusion more than the other migrant groups (Adaman & Keyder, 2006).

When the whole family migrates to a new place, children find themselves in a new environment where they have to go to school and must find ways to manage the demands of a new environment and the expectations of family. In the migrant families who have been trying to cope with deteriorating socio-economic conditions, children's education may put an extra burden on families' tight budgets, although primary and secondary educations are free for all. With hope of finding relief to their economic difficulties, some migrant families put their children to work in informal sectors, such as street trading or in the manufacturing industry. What should be taken into account is the fact that these working children mostly come from multilingual home environments where the parents' education level is also low (Gökşen et al., 2006).

### **Rationale for the Study**

Based on the sociocultural-historical context of my research area, there is strong evidence that thousands of families are trapped in adverse socio-economic conditions shaped by multilingualism and migration indigenous to Turkey. First of all, the majority of children from linguistic minorities live in educationally disadvantageous conditions that eventually cause them to get low achievement scores in schools. With the increasing concerns about relations between the acceptance of people's mother tongue and bilingual children's achievement levels in education, the debates around the right to education in mother tongue has escalated over the last thirty years. Almost all the public and political discussions in Turkey have polarized into two camps: those who defend "people's rights to have mother tongue education" for linguistically minority population and those who oppose it. Unfortunately, the debaters who have centered solely on linguistic rights of minority populations most of the time neglect the process of the acquisition of Turkish as a second language. Moreover, there is no educational model yet that

has been created for the educational needs of minority students in Turkey (Ayan-Ceyhan & Koçbaşı, 2009).

The dominant educational perspective in Turkey is based on traditional approaches to literacy education, a similar perspective to the one advocated in the curriculum framework called the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 in the United States. In this model, skills required for literacy development are assumed to be separate entities that can be taught in isolation. Skills and knowledge related to literacy are conceptualized as something to be transmitted from the teacher to the students in a highly regulated environment of a classroom. In addition, traditional approaches presume that children acquire reading and writing skills in a linear way with a similar developmental rate; therefore, literacy instruction is mainly provided with repeated practices of discrete skills in sequential steps. When a child fails in attaining the same pace of literacy development as her peers, she/he is readily identified as “at risk of failure.” No attention is paid to the social conditions resulting from being a migrant and/or a minority language speaker. As a consequence, any models of literacy education based on such traditional perspectives lead to misunderstandings about what particular groups of children need in order to be successful at schools (Larson & Marsh, 2005).

So far, what we know about educational attainment in linguistically diverse settings in Turkey is mainly based on statistical data that has been obtained through the use of large representative data sets. Although a few studies such as Coşkun et al. (2010) have tried to provide details about the educational experiences of non-mainstream children in the Turkish school system, most of the policy work focuses primarily on the drop-out rates and low scores of these children in national exams. While contextual and case-based studies about the factors that contribute to minority children’s disadvantaged conditions in education are lacking, a “deficit

hypothesis” has flourished in public and political discussions (Larson & Marsh, 2005). A deficit hypothesis, in general, assumes that children from marginalized groups, such as linguistic and ethnic minorities, immigrant families, and low-SES households, experience difficulties due to several inherent deficiencies, and cognitive and psychological failures, rather than social factors cause them to be low-achievers (Cummins, 1991). Rather than recognizing families’ social reality, some families from marginalized groups are simply regarded as “poor” in terms of the required skills to promote their children’s academic success. It is further assumed that the children of such families are determined to be low achievers in the future, as well (Auerbach, 1989). The dominance of such perceptions in Turkish society eventually reinforces the lack of interest in the ways in which people from different social groups experience literacy and illiteracy.

Unfortunately, attributing deficit characteristics to non-mainstream communities does not help to ameliorate their conditions. Therefore, instead of spreading prejudicial notions about students from certain ethnic communities such as, “*Romani students are lazy and are used to being spoon-fed,*”<sup>19</sup> literacy researchers have been interested in studying the reasons behind linguistically diverse students’ failure in mainstream educational contexts. The initial step in this pursuit has been “defining the community educationally and pedagogically” (Moll, 2000; p. 264). The “funds of knowledge” approach, initiated by Moll (1992), aims at incorporating families’ resources in children’s academic experiences over the long term. Such an interest has necessarily increased the number of qualitative studies. Indeed, quantitative studies can only provide information about the achievement level of linguistically diverse children; yet, the ways

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<sup>19</sup> This excerpt comes from a teacher interview mentioned in Ayan-Ceyhan and Koçbaşı (2009).

and to what extent social and linguistic backgrounds have an effect upon schooling are best examined through qualitative studies.

As already stated, migration contributes to linguistically diverse children's unequal access to education. Moving to a big city in the west mostly results in social exclusion for multilingual migrants who find themselves in slum areas of the big city. Migrant and multilingual populations are likely to be worse off as a result of unequal access, first, to beneficial educational opportunities, then, to academic achievement, and finally, to employment opportunities. As poor education leads to unemployment, the opportunities for upward social mobility remain beyond their reach. Child labor may only provide short-term relief of the economic problems of these multilingual migrant families; however, it contributes to the intergenerational reproduction of social exclusion in the long run (Sosyal Politika Forumu, 2010; Yılmaz, 2006).

To the best of my knowledge, there are no detailed studies about the ways in which educational processes are shaped in the context of migration and multilingualism in Turkey. Although several studies have been published in terms of social conditions of migrated and multilingual populations such as poverty, child labor, and social exclusion, no studies have attempted to explore how children from linguistic minorities experience schooling when they migrated with their families to big cities.

### **Significance**

Up until now, no research has been conducted on the literacy practices of families in Turkey and their experiences with formal education. Especially, the issue of how children from non-mainstream populations (i.e., migrant, low-educated and/or multilingual) experience

schooling has been left untouched. This study, therefore, provide insights about everyday literacy practices of marginalized families whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds are often unrecognized and even dismissed in formal education processes. This study also contributes to the understanding of the social factors that either enable or restrain children from monolingual and multilingual backgrounds to become fully literate adults. With this research, I argue that studying the literacy practices in homes marginalized in the face of migration and multilingualism is imperative in order to develop an understanding of marginalized children's disadvantaged conditions in the Turkish education system.

Although this research is not directly action-oriented, it aims at providing practical insights that will help literacy practitioners in developing literacy programs in Turkey. When looking through socio-cultural lenses, it is meaningful to study how the literacy skills are internalized, appropriated, and transformed in formal and informal learning contexts by non-mainstream children through various types of texts. In that way, developing literacy curricula that build on literacy assets that children bring from their homes to classrooms in Turkish context will be achieved (Purcell-Gates et al., 2007). In this respect, I believe that a study of the literacy uses in Turkey, where certain practices have been marginalized and excluded from the formal public places, provides valued insights to the field of literacy studies.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As with other qualitative case studies, this study also has limitations due to its conceptual framework and design. I discuss the limitations in three groups: (a) the qualitative nature of the study, (b) researcher bias, and (c) absence of men.

**The qualitative nature of the study.** The main limitation of this study is its sample size, being two focal families and therefore the results of my study should not be generalized to the entire population of migrant, low-income, multilingual families living in the Pınarcık community. In addition, the participants do not constitute a truly representative sample, since the participating families were not recruited through random sampling. I contacted the families who occasionally attended the Pınarcık Community Center and conducted my study with the people who committed to taking part for a whole school year. All the families that I met through the community center were already very interested in their children's education. They all reported their interest in their children's schooling as the main reason for participating in my study. Hence, the overall qualitative design of my study influences the applicability of its results (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). This study reports the cases of two focal families whose life contexts are particular in terms of their experiences with education, multilingualism, and literacy. Although small sample sizes contribute to the in-depth understanding of the phenomena being studied, the results and conclusions based on the data, are not generalizable; but they are transferable to other similar settings. Yet it is the reader who may decide about the usefulness of the study in similar contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

**Researcher bias.** Researcher bias and representation of the research population are especially important and require special focus in this study. As a member of the dominant social group (i.e., Turkish, and non-migrant) and a representative of highly valued academic literacy practices, it may be difficult for me to be fully aware of the implicit assumptions held by the dominant groups about other non-dominant communities' proper practices (Ogbu, 1982). Furthermore, the difference in the ethnic backgrounds between myself and the focal families may be a limitation, due to the cultural incongruence. Yet it is the researcher's responsibility to

represent the perspectives of the participants correctly. To overcome any bias of this sort, I kept a personal research journal in which I recorded my feelings, impressions and reactions about the social environment and the participants, including questions as well as problems. This helped me realize my own biases and become aware of potential gaps in my inquiry as I tried to validate my observations based on the data. My personal research journal also includes information on how each of the coding themes was developed to track my reasoning (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000).

Most importantly, during all phases of this research, I tried to be reflective about the kinds of “stories” I had in my mind about people from other ethnic and cultural groups. I was inspired by the brilliant TED talk of the African novelist Chimamanda Adichie called “The Danger of a Single Story”<sup>20</sup> (2014). In her talk, Adichie mentioned the dangers of representing people who are different from us with “a single story.” She states:

The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. [...] I’ve always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar. [...] Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispose and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. (Adichie, 2014)

In a sense, my motivation for taking up this study with un- or under-schooled multilingual families was to reject the single story that focuses on the drawbacks and ignorance of the non-dominant communities. Adichie continues, “When we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.”

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<sup>20</sup> Retrieved on October 2015, from [http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story#t-783025](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story#t-783025)

**Absence of men.** Another limitation of this study could be the absence of men in my observations. Although both of the households contain ten adult males in total, I could include only two of them in my regular observations. I was only able to observe the grandfather of the first focal child, Samet, and the father of the second focal child, Zilan<sup>21</sup>. I was able to conduct one semi-structured interview with the father of the first focal child Samet, which lasted for about two hours. Yet, since Samet's father rarely came home, he was absent during the periods I observed the family.

In the second focal household, I believe that the absence of men during my visits was due to cultural conventions. That is, in some families in the rural parts of Turkey, men and women sit separately due to the religious requirements about the organization of the daily life. For instance, at the birthday party of the second focal child, the women and the men gathered in separate houses for the celebration. Moreover, in addition to the focal households, I made three visits to the neighboring houses. In all those three visits, the men who were present at home did not look at me or talk to me even though we were sitting in the same room (enote-S1-2014-01-21).

## **Definitions**

There are key notions that guide both the rationale and the data collection phase of this study. These are “culture,” “literacy event,” and “literacy practices.” In this section, I first clarify the meaning of “culture.” Then, I discuss the concept of “literacy event.” Another key notion, “literacy practices” is defined and exemplified at the end of this section.

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<sup>21</sup> Samet and Zilan are pseudonyms for the focal children.

**Definition of “culture”.** Cross-cultural studies about human skills and behaviors have demonstrated that the patterns in people’s activities cannot be studied apart from their cultural contexts. Human activities diverge from one culture to another as a result of culturally determined arrangements (Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff & Morelli, 1989). Due to the fundamental role that the concept of “culture” plays in this research, I will elaborate on what is meant by “culture” in this separate section.

To begin with, I should state that although the participants in this study comes from the same neighborhood community (i.e., people living in Pınarcık, İstanbul) and from the same ethnic background (i.e., Kurdish families who migrated from Bahe), I don’t assume a static definition of culture in my research. As suggested in the field of cultural psychology, especially by Barbara Rogoff, culture is not equal to people’s ethnicity or nationality; rather, culture is defined as a process in which people participate (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). Similarly, culture does not exclusively refer to what people like shamans from remote areas of the world do, but it includes the daily life practices of any group of people with similar or contrasting backgrounds, such as students, professors, and researchers. It is not easy to notice and understand cultural processes, since cultural processes are based on tacit and unquestioned assumptions originating in one’s own community and practices. Furthermore, cultural processes surround people; therefore it is difficult to discover the existence of them. People are unaware of the subtlety of cultural ways of doing things until they discover the existence of different views, traditions, and technologies. Accordingly, adapting a cultural perspective is arguably critical in acknowledging that there is more than one way of doing things (Dyson, 2003; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003; Rogoff, 2003).

Furthermore, in accordance with the social theories of literacy, the definition of “culture” that I have adopted in my research is not a normative one. First of all, it does not imply a sum of clearly defined traditions that are shared by all members of a social group. In contrast, drawing from the Vygotskian (1962, 1978) theoretical approach, the understanding of “culture” as used in this study denotes “dynamic” and “practice-based” interpretations of “how people live.” Volatile circumstances in social life put people in situations in which they adapt their actions accordingly, by being creative, adaptive, or dismissive in the face of what is new to them. Such a concept of culture also makes room for different voices, orientations, and misunderstandings that exist side by side in cultural life (Moll, 2000).

Another concept essential to understanding cultural processes is the coherence among cultural practices in a community. Cultural practices fit together in a coherent way; as a result, it is impossible to separate their elements as independent variables. The differences between communities cannot be reduced to a number of elements such as migration, family size, and economic sources. In Rogoff’s (2003) words, “What is done one way in one community may be done another way in another community, with the same effect, and a practice done the same way in both communities may serve different ends” (p. 12). Hence, a complete grasp about different cultural practices requires a holistic view about many-sided relations that make a community function.

**Definition of “literacy events”.** The literacy event has been introduced as the main unit of analysis by Heath (1983). Heath (1982, 1983) asserts that a more complete picture of literacy use in different societies can be arrived at by studying various patterns and pathways that people from different social groups follow. However, the real challenge for researchers is to make literacies from various contexts visible and to search for how they build on one another (Purcell-

Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004). In this pursuit, the notion of “literacy events” is suggested to be an operational tool for analyzing the inner workings of complex social, cultural, and historical layers in which they are embedded (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Literacy events are observable episodes of literacy activities centered on a text. In other words, they are occasions in which people’s interactions revolve around print (Heath, 1983). The observation of literacy events focuses on the involvement of people in sociocultural activities around a text alone or with other participants. (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). This participation is made possible by cultural tools and artifacts transformed through generations. Heath (1982) clearly articulated the importance of maintaining an ethnographic stance in literacy studies. This is depicted in her understanding that:

Literacy events must ... be interpreted in relation to the larger sociocultural patterns which they may exemplify or reflect. For example, ethnography must describe literacy events in their sociocultural contexts, so we may come to understand how such patterns as time and space usage, caregiving roles, and age and sex segregation are interdependent with the types and features of literacy events a community develops. It is only on the basis of such thorough-going ethnography that further progress is possible towards understanding cross-cultural patterns of oral and written language uses. (p. 74)

**Definition of “literacy practices”.** The term “literacy practice” first appears in Scribner and Cole (1981). It refers to a “recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge” (p. 236). Literacy practices include non-observable social patterns of using print. They are shaped by the attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and social relationships among participants. They inform us of the functions, purposes, and meanings that literacy holds in a particular research context (Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich, & Kim, 2010; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 1996).

Defining literacy as a practice contributes to the understanding that literacy is a form of social participation, and, primarily, people are socialized within specific socio-cultural contexts through literacy (Street, 1984). By taking part in the shared practices of a community, people develop a sense of belonging and identity. Hence the term literacy practice includes ideologies, in the sense that it reflects participants' assumptions, ideas, values, and relationships. Furthermore, the larger context of interacting with written materials determined by social, historical, and cultural processes unfolds in literacy practices (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

### **Overview of the Chapters**

This dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2 presents the four interrelated theoretical perspectives that frame my research. First, the Sociocultural-historical framework related to learning and literacy defines linguistic and literacy activities as socially organized activities. According to this framework, these activities are determined by historical contexts and mediated by culture. Then, Ecological theory is used to argue that literacy and literacy activities are shaped by overlapping social and cultural niches. Finally, I examine the links between social power and literacy and literacy activities based on critical approaches in literacy studies, such as critical pedagogy theory and the sociocritical literacy framework.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the literature concerning the social, cultural, and historical nature of literacy activities. In particular, this chapter reviews the research findings from the emergent literacy framework, the cultural practice of literacy framework, family literacy, and, finally, studies of power and identity among multilingual populations.

Chapter 4 explicates the methodological design of my research. It consists of the description of the research participants and data collection in detail. Furthermore, the chapter

considers the choice of method of analysis appropriate for the qualitative nature of the study. It finishes with a discussion of the issues in critically analyzing the qualitative research.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings of this study. In Chapter 5, I present the profiles of the two focal children and their extended families with detailed descriptions of the households, migration backgrounds, and first and second language histories. I also describe the focal children's teachers with their personal literacy backgrounds and pedagogical approaches. This study specifically looks at a period of time when the focal children from un- or under-schooled families in Pınarcık started school. To understand any effects of school literacy in my research context, in Chapter 6, I analyze the interactions between school literacy and the home environment based on the three research questions stated previously in this chapter.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I discuss the findings of the study. I also present a set of educational and theoretical implications of the findings. I finish with recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework**

My research draws particularly upon four interrelated theoretical perspectives, encompassing: the Sociocultural-Historical perspective of learning and literacy (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory (1979, 2000, 2005), Critical Pedagogy theory (Freire & Macedo, 1987) and the Sociocritical Literacy framework (Gutiérrez, 2005; 2008; Gutiérrez, Rymes & Larson, 1995).

In this section, I first summarize the basic premises of the Sociocultural-Historical theory related to learning and literacy. Then, I continue with the Ecological theory, which promotes the idea that literacy and literacy activities are determined by overlapping social and cultural niches. Finally, I focus on the applications of critical approaches to literacy studies, such as critical pedagogy theory and the sociocritical literacy framework, to argue for links between social power and literacy and literacy activities.

### **Sociocultural-Historical Perspectives<sup>22</sup> on Learning and Literacy**

The theoretical principles defined in Vygotsky's writings (1962; 1978; 1994; 2011) have laid the grounds for sociocultural-historical theory, and Vygotsky is commonly referred to as the main figure behind the idea that culture brings about a transformation in people's activities (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Rogoff, 2003). Adapting the perspectives developed in Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, researchers have begun to question how cognitive abilities and ways of learning are shaped by learners' social, cultural, and historical contexts. In Vygotskian theory,

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<sup>22</sup> Although the terms "sociocultural", "cultural-historical", and "sociocultural-historical" are used interchangeably, I prefer to use the term "sociocultural-historical" (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995) to emphasize the social, cultural, and historical basis of social interaction and literacy activities in the Pınarcık community. I think the notion of historicity becomes vitally important when contextualizing my findings in the historical context of Turkey, as well as the social and cultural settings.

human activities are defined as social and cultural conducts, which emerge in the course of human history as people interact with the environment. Inspired by Vygotsky, Rogoff (2003) writes: “Humans develop through their changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change” (p. 11).

Regarding the application of sociocultural-historical approaches to the field of education and literacy studies, three major themes are discussed: (a) the primacy of social interactions in children’s learning, (b) semiotic mediation, and (c) the interrelatedness of different contexts (Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Wells, 2000, 2007). In this section, I begin by discussing these three overarching premises of sociocultural-historical theory, which have laid the groundwork for other theoretical approaches in this study.

**The primacy of social interactions in children’s learning.** Within sociocultural-historical perspectives, it is important to note that learning occurs in socially and culturally regulated contexts and bears characteristics of the children’s socio-cultural background (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). In Vygotsky’s (1978) words “human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). The opportunities that children’s backgrounds provide for them are not static, but change constantly, because the historical conditions that shape social and cultural contexts are constantly changing. Therefore, sociocultural-historical theory focuses on the process of learning as well as the products of that process (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

The need to study the processes of learning necessitates an in-depth analysis of how children are involved in social and cultural contexts that contribute to the development of new skills and knowledge. First of all, the role of the social other is argued to be critical for the

child/learner (Vygotsky, 1962; 1978). Vygotsky observed that children who collaborate with more experienced peers and adults perform beyond their developmental level. To conceptualize the role of the other in the process of learning, Vygotsky put forward a concept called “the zone of proximal development.” In his words, the zone of proximal development is “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The collaboration with “the social other” opens up the zone of proximal development for the child/learner. Within the zone of proximal development, higher mental processes (language, thought, reasoning, etc.) that have not yet matured, are activated.

Based on the Vygotskian notion of the “zone of proximal development,” Cole (1996) states that a special focus should be given to the power of adults as organizers of the learning environments for children. However, Veer and Valsiner (1994) criticize the educational applications of the “zone of proximal development,” arguing that the role of the adults is usually presented as helpful and positive. Depending on the social and cultural circumstances, the adults’ intervention may have harmful and detrimental effects, a detail which is overlooked in many studies within the sociocultural-historical framework.

The sociocultural-historical theory approach also assumes that children learn new skills by participating in culturally valued activities. The main mediator in learning is the interaction between learners and their environment. Moreover, for the child/learner, learning involved changing participation roles (Rogoff, 2003). It is a process that adapts to the changing requirements of new conditions of learning. This perspective leads to the argument that learning “the new” results from appropriating and working through what is already known (John-Steiner

& Mahn, 1996; Rogoff, 2003). This framework also acknowledges the mutuality of the co-construction of new knowledge in a dynamic process of development. For instance, when children add new knowledge to their entire range of skills, this process of development also influences the other members in the same community. If one person evolves through being interactive within her environment, then others, sharing the same environment, will evolve too. Thus, a sociocultural-historical perspective recognizes that interactions among social actors are dynamic and provide various possibilities for all parties in any interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The child acquires the nature of the social interactions, the value of literacy practices, and concepts of print from her local environment. Yet, sociocultural-historical approaches do not assume a deterministic relationship between different contexts, either. Rather, socio-cultural theory assumes that the ways in which children learn in school and the cultural repertoire they bring with them into school, are related (Rogoff, 2003; Wenger, 2008). For example, while learning to read and write, the child's socio-cultural background may be totally different from what is expected and supported in the formal school setting. From sociocultural-historical perspectives, the ways children learn how to speak, read, and write are not transmissive, but transformative in nature. There is no unidirectional transfer from one context (e.g., home) to another (e.g., school) in the process of learning; rather, learners constantly make transformations between diverse social and cultural settings. The dynamic characteristics of the social and cultural contexts cause children to reorganize their cognitive strategies to learn new things when faced with novel circumstances. Learners also combine the forms in their repertoire, already shaped by the social interactions around with the new forms of skills and knowledge. In this process, children create new combinations of different means and mechanisms to perform

particular tasks (Heath, 1982; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Scribner & Cole, 1981).

According to a sociocultural-historical perspective, the concept of “community” is important, since children’s enculturation as literate “actors” is constructed within a community. “Community” is not just a collection of people, but can be best defined as including a set of “relationships among people based on common endeavors – trying to accomplish some things together – with some stability of involvement and attention to the ways that members relate to each other” (Rogoff et al., 2001; p. 10). Furthermore, ideas and skills required for reading and writing have developed in communities, through collaboration, for centuries, and have become regular in certain communities (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff et al., 2001). Children can discover those regularities only by being a member of their historical community. This process of engagement in cultural practices has two functions. On the one hand, children acquire crucial knowledge, skills, and wisdom under the guidance of experienced members in the community. On the other hand, their participation in ongoing activities is essential for the community to transmit skills and knowledge to the next generations. Without participation from its novice members, a community cannot continue to exist and function across generations.

In public and educational discourse, it is generally assumed that individuals are “carriers” of culture, and that prominent features of culture are located within individuals. All the members of a group are believed to have common skills, experiences, and interests. However, Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) warn researchers that this assumption may lead to a deficit hypothesis, especially in schools. The students who are regarded as members, thus the “carriers” of the educationally underserved populations, may be labeled as having some sort of deficiencies that cause failure. Without paying attention to the histories of people’s engagement in particular

cultural activities, the unsuccessful students may be considered as being inadequate compared to the dominant groups. The hidden idea here is that performance is a result of the essential traits of individuals or groups. This widespread assumption is also problematic because it regards the regularities in cultural groups as static; therefore, they can be attributed as individual traits. One way to overcome this problem is to define learning as a process, along with routine, ongoing activity, so it cannot be separated into independent individual traits and contexts. Thus, the category of “membership” is claimed to be misleading, since it refers to something constant and stable. So instead of categorizing people based on their ethnic membership, foregrounding their “engagement” in culturally valued activities gives us dynamic, or changing descriptions of their practices. After all, regularities in ways of doing things are also under constant pressure from emerging goals and expectations of cultural groups (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

To establish a dynamic and historical view of cultural practices, Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) suggest avoiding definitions via rigid personal traits. According to them, people’s experiences are accumulated as a result of engaging with a number of cultural activities. To capture socially and culturally organized “proclivities” of people, they introduced “repertoires of practice” (Gutiérrez, 2006; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Repertoires of practice refer to people’s linguistic and cultural-historical resources, built up through observation and participation. Their repertoires depict their knowledge of themselves and of the history of their communities. Repertoires of practice provide people with the ability to deal with novel circumstances.

**Semiotic mediation.** Another major theme in sociocultural-historical theory is semiotic mediation (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Veer & Valsiner, 1991). In a semiotic act (i.e., an act of meaning making), everything might be a sign in the form of, for example, drawings, words, and numbers. Since sign systems are defined as social artifacts, the notion of mediation through

signs implies the understanding that people's actions exist in relation to other symbols and materials (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). Sign systems such as oral language and writing provide the instruments of making and conveying meaning, hence mediating individual and social functioning. They are acquired by individuals as a result of their interactions with other people. For Vygotsky (1978), human activities are never direct, but mediated by sign systems. As mediational means, they are also carriers of knowledge and practices (Wertsch, 1991). Since users create meanings through signs during their social interactions, it is assumed that semiotic acts cannot be studied in isolation, but in specific social situations within a historical perspective (Vygotsky, 1962; 1978; 1994; 2011).

Within the framework of sociocultural-historical theory, language and literacy, among other modalities of meaning, are assigned greatest importance, since they both have the role of mediating social practices of communication (Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003). In this respect, Cole (1996) expresses the key roles of language and literacy as mediating artifacts for meaning construction. Similarly, Hassan (2002) defines semiotic mediation as “mediation by means of linguistic sign” (p. 3). Being socially provided, semiotic mediation is internalized as children engage in their local practices as active participants. Children transform these artifacts into *tools* to change their surrounding environment, as well as themselves, when their ability to use language and literacy develop over time.

**The interrelatedness of different contexts.** The third major theme in socio-cultural historical theory is the interrelatedness of different contexts. For sociocultural-historical theory, learning something is organized contextually; hence, new knowledge bears numerous traces that it belongs to a specific culture or community (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). This theory also recognizes the importance of transmission and synthesis between types of activities across

different contexts. Sociocultural-historical perspectives on learning, for instance, make it possible to ask how the knowledge that children acquire before beginning school relates to concepts that are learned in school. This focus is mainly derived from Vygotsky's (1962) analysis of spontaneous and scientific concepts. According to Vygotsky's definition, spontaneous concepts are acquired without explicit instruction, especially in everyday settings. On the other hand, scientific concepts are learned through explicit teaching, mostly within school contexts. It is important to note, however, that these are not mutually exclusive domains; rather, they are parts of a single process of concept formation.

In addition to the social and cultural perspectives, a historical approach is also deemed essential to understanding interrelations between different contexts from which the ongoing literacy practices in a society have arisen. Barton and Hamilton (1998) argue that "literacy is historically situated" (p. 12), which means that literacy practices are connected to the social and cultural practices of the past. Literacy practices change over time as people's interest and available resources change. For example, the ways in which religion is included and organized in the education system has an impact on contemporary literacy practices. As the role of religion in regulating educational contexts changes, people's engagement with religious texts and other types of texts is also altered, eventually<sup>23</sup>.

**Bakhtin's "Social languages"**. The conceptualization of reading and writing activities as socially situated practice has arisen out of Bakhtin's (1986) writings (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Chapman, 1999; Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Mikhail Bakhtin's (1986) ideas about the socially constructed nature of language have been especially influential in the development of

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter One for an example of how the relation between religion and education changed in Turkey after the Kemalist Revolution in the 1920's.

the view that language never refers to a general linguistic code that every speaker uses independent of the social context. Instead, language is determined by social identities and socially meaningful activities of the participants in communication (Gee, 2005; 2014b).

Bakhtin's (1986) theory conceptualizes language and verbal interaction as organized in a social context rather than as units outside of it. Thus, according to Bakhtin, any analysis regarding language use should start with analyzing the social event. Bakhtin argues that nothing can be analyzed in isolation. Instead of taking language as a system that is frozen in a particular moment in time, he considers language mainly a social event organized in a dialogic relationship between the actors in the event. Bakhtin's concept of "situated dialogue" rests on two important concepts: (a) the utterance, and (b) the authorial intent.

***The utterance.*** In the Bakhtinian framework, the central unit in communication is called "the utterance." Rather than being a simple linguistic unit (e.g., a sentence), an utterance is a socially communicative unit. Both speaker and listener are assumed to have an active role in creating "the utterance." Utterances form the situated dialogue since first the speaker derives her consciousness from her position of active listener. Speakers produces "the utterance" with the expectation of a response (i.e., either verbal or nonverbal) from the listener, and the listener displays a responsive attitude toward the speaker's utterance. In this sense, the speaker and the listener are tied to each other while forming communication situated in a social context. Therefore, Bakhtin defines "speaker" and "listener" as "rejoinders." According to Bakhtin, communicative interaction is the joint production of both the speaker and the listener, located in a certain social context.

The formulation of a link between the speaker and the active/responsive “other” (i.e., the listener) defines the boundaries of the utterances. The boundaries of an utterance are determined when the speaker gives the floor for the other’s responsive understanding. Hence an utterance begins where the previous one ends and ends where a subsequent one begins. In this sense, every utterance is linked to previous utterances in a very complex way. When uttering speech, the speaker acts according to the preceding utterances. In other words, every utterance bears characteristics of the previous ones and builds on the preceding utterances continuously in time, creating intertextuality. In line with Bakhtinian’s theory, Gee (2005) defines intertextuality as a process of switching from one variety of language to another by borrowing words from it, in a subtle way. Consequently, texts may incorporate echoes and/or contradictions from other texts.

Speakers always generate their utterance based on a) the topic that the audience is discussing, b) the position of the listener, and c) the assumed understanding of utterance among audience members. So the context in which the language is used shapes the thematic, compositional, and stylistic types of utterances. The generic features of utterances are determined by these thematic, compositional, and stylistic types. At this juncture, Bakhtin’s (1986) concept of “whole utterance” is worth mentioning. Based on the previously mentioned characteristics of the utterance, it is clear that utterances can be one word or much longer, but no matter how long they are, there are common structural features and clear-cut boundaries between each utterance. By common structural features: Bakhtin means that the utterance is framed in a way that it could exist as a whole on its own. The second feature indicates the possibility of changing speakers. The boundary of the utterance is determined by whether it initiates a response or not, meaning that every utterance is bound by the onset of a new one.

***Authorial intent.*** The speaker formulates the theme of her utterance in such a way that the listener can understand that the utterance assumes a response. This is called “authorial intent” because the same speaker could have formulated the same utterance in a completely different way, intending to convey the theme by setting up different frames. Moreover, the speaker’s plan also regulates the way in which the utterance is finalized. The speaker plans her speech according to what she has in mind to say, and frames it accordingly. In addition to having a plan, the speaker also chooses the generic form of the utterance. By formulating an utterance derived from a theme and linking it to previous utterances, and generic features, the speaker ensures that the listener will grasp the intention of the utterance from its beginning. In other words, the listener gets the sense of the “whole utterance,” by evaluating the plan and the formulation of it. In communicative interaction, the features of generic forms have the power to generate mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener.

**Social languages and D/discourse.** Bakhtin’s social perspective leads scholars to differentiate forms of languages as “social languages.” According to Bakhtin (1981), a social language is “a discourse peculiar to a specific stratum of society (professional, age group, etc.) within a given system at a given time” (p. 430). Social languages are determined according to the social identity and social purposes of the actors in communication (Gee, 2005). Depending on the social context, the actors communicating in a social event adapt their language according to “who they are” (i.e., their identities) and “what they are doing” (i.e., their socially meaningful activities). These two parameters determine various forms of social languages to be appropriate in particular social contexts. For example, a teenager might use rather formal language while talking to her parents compared to the language that she chooses to use with her boyfriend.

Thus, while studying language-in-use, the mediating role of language in identity construction needs special attention.

Gee's (1996, 2005) conception of D/discourse has transformed our understanding of language as mediator. From Gee's perspective (1996, 2005), language plays the key role in constructing social languages (i.e., discourses) and identities. Gee's term "discourse" with "a lower case d" refers to "how language is used on site" (Gee, 2005; p. 7). This "language-in-use" is basically what people do by using language to represent and/or perform their identities and activities. Yet, like any social construct, using language for particular purposes has been shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. So Gee (2005) uses the term "Discourse" with "a capital D" to cover all sorts of events, objects, thoughts, actions, and interactions. D/discourses can be best understood in people's joint activities with others, which combine "ways of being in the world" and "forms of life" (p. 7). In short, all aspects of social practices that enable people to represent, perform, and recognize their socially situated identities are wrapped up in the term "Discourse" (Gee, 1996).

Gee (2005) also identifies language use as an active process of constructing things. Children, for instance, learn how to read a text in a culturally specific way. That is, while learning to read, they are socialized into specific values, feelings, actions, and interactions represented by the text. Thus, what people read is arguably informative regarding their social practices which are shaped by culture, society, and history, since "reading something" (Gee, 2001; p. 17) includes ways of reading and listening as well. For example, reading the Muslim holy book, the Quran, requires being clean and purified, because in the Muslim tradition, one must conduct ritual ablutions, or washing, before holding the Quran. This kind of activity has a symbolic value. It symbolizes that the person is cleared of sin before touching the religious text.

If the Quran is read aloud, the listeners are required to dress in a certain way. For example, women cover their hair while both reading and listening to the Quran. On the other hand, reading a school text signifies different kinds of meanings and values associated with school education.

**Communities of practice.** To account for the various forms of practices in people's immediate social contexts, Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the notion of "communities of practice." Communities of practice are the primary contexts in which people build up, negotiate, and share their ways of understanding the world (Wenger, 2008). Not every group, team, or network can be defined as a community of practice. In communities of practice, there should be mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared cultural repertoire. First, the members of a community of practice negotiate the meaning of their actions with one another in the community. Second, a community of practice is like a "joint enterprise," wherein members negotiate coherent understanding of their situation in life. Communities of practice have particular resources and constraints developed in larger social, cultural, and historical contexts. Those resources and constraints, in turn, shape the local practices in the community, as well. External forces affect communities' practices only indirectly after their effects are internalized by the community itself. Finally, being a member in a community of practice is a matter of shared repertoire. Communities of practice have developed certain routines, tools, ways of doing things, symbols, genres, and concepts as sources for negotiating coherent meaning. Based on this repertoire, the members state the forms of their membership and their identities as members of particular communities of practice (Wenger, 2008).

**The relevance of sociocultural-historical theory to my research.** Sociocultural-historical theory conceptualizes meaning and forms of practices as bound to context. This perspective is especially important for my research, since it informs meaning, in both written and oral language, as not autonomous, but rather, embedded in social events (Bakhtin, 1986; Gee, 2001; 2005). Children primarily acquire the social codes for constructing meaning in their interaction with their social environment by observing or taking part in instances of situated dialogue. Drawing from this perspective, literacy development is considered to be neither “linear nor hierarchical,” but “multiple,” as literacy skills build on multiple and complex human activities in social life (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Another contribution of the sociocultural-historical framework is the theorization of language and literacy as situated practices. Texts are defined as genres, that is, definite and stable forms of language bound to various contexts of human activity. Consequently, this approach constitutes the understanding of texts (oral or written) as a tool that mediates interpersonal activity.

Yet sociocultural-historical approaches inherently call attention to the peculiarity of these studies, since their findings are dependent on the particular social, cultural, and historical processes in a community (Rogoff 2003; Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995). A sociocultural-historical framework notes that the results should not be generalized across different communities or across different individuals in the same community. Hence, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other people acting in different contexts, but conclusions can only be made regarding the group observed in this research. Similarly, one cannot assume generality throughout distinct practices performed by the same people. Rather, a sociocultural-historical perspective tries to understand both variations and similarities in terms of social, cultural, and historical processes affecting people’s activities.

## **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory**

The second theoretical perspective that helps me formulate the role of social and cultural contexts in children's activities is Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) first developed this model under the name of ecological systems theory to account for the role of overlapping social and cultural contexts in children's development<sup>24</sup>. Although Bronfenbrenner's model is usually referred to in child development studies, it also offers a broad perspective for studying the interactions or the types of activities that adults engage in (Tudge, Makrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009; Wertsch, 2005). Bronfenbrenner's main stance is obvious in his argument that individuals develop together with the social organization as they are engaging with it through social interactions. Based on this argument, Bronfenbrenner formulated both "the person" and "the social group" as developing organic units. Bronfenbrenner argued, "Piecemeal analysis, fixed in time and space, of isolated aspects and attributes is insufficient and even misleading, for the elements of social status and structure are interdependent, organized into complex patterns" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; p. 26).

First developed in the 1970s, the original ecological model continued to evolve until Bronfenbrenner's death in 2005. Even though Bronfenbrenner started to call his theoretical model "bioecological" after the 1990s (see for example Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), the model is still referred to as the "ecological model" in the broader literature of both child development and cultural and anthropological studies (see for example; Campbell, Pungello, & Miller-Johnson, 2002 and Tudge et. al., 2009 for a review). Following those studies, I will also

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<sup>24</sup> In Bronfenbrenner's terms, "development" refers to "stability and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings over the life course and across generations" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; p. 995). It does not need to assume a change for improvement, nor a decline.

use the name “Ecological theory” when referring to Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical model in its fully developed version.

Unlike the original model proposed in the 1970s, the more mature form of Bronfenbrenner’s theory does not solely conceptualize the contextual factors, but concentrates equally on interactions among them. In the following sections, I define process, person, context, and time<sup>25</sup> as four operational properties of a research design within Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory.

**Process.** Although the interactions between people and their ecological contexts have always been foregrounded in the theory, the focus on the environmental factors in the first works of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) has evolved to include the role of processes in human development as well (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). According to Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994), the conceptual and operational changes in the individual are results of mutual interaction between a developing and active biopsychological human organism and other people. These particular forms of interaction are called “proximal processes” (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In addition to interpersonal interactions, certain objects and symbols also have the potential to function as “proximal processes.” Activities such as playing with toys, reading, or engaging in fantasy play can be examples of proximal processes since they also generate attention, imagination, and exploration.

Yet, not all interactions have the power to create change and development. The interactions, to result in development, should be regular and sustained over a period of time.

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<sup>25</sup> Based on Bronfenbrenner’s works after 1990s, Tudge, Makrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009) state that it would impede theoretical clarity if Bronfenbrenner’s theoretical model is treated only as a theory of microsystem or macrosystem influences on people’s interactions and development.

Furthermore, these interactions need to evolve from simple to more complex throughout the course of life. In this way, they can produce changes in the interactions between a human and her environment. In short, the regular, sustained, “increasingly more complex” and reciprocal forms of interaction responsible for generating development are called “proximal processes” (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Several examples of proximal processes include child-to-child activities, caring for others, reading, acquiring new knowledge, and planning intellectual and social activities.

**Person.** In the ecological model, Bronfenbrenner (2005) focuses on the personal characteristics of the individual, since he argues that personal characteristics influence the direction and the power of the proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In addition to the personal characteristics of the developing person, the personal characteristics of “significant others” (Mead, 1934) like parents, siblings, and spouses also become relevant when we consider their influence in shaping the ecological contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Personal characteristics are grouped under three categories: (a) demand, (b) resource, and (c) force characteristics. “Demand characteristics,” such as gender, physical appearance, skin color, and age, are visible in the first interaction; therefore, they are responsible for stimulating the initial personal reactions in the immediate setting. “Resource characteristics,” on the other hand, refer to social and material resources (e.g., educational opportunities, access to food and housing) as well as mental and emotional resources (e.g., intelligence, skills, and past experiences). Contrary to demand characteristics, resource characteristics are not visible during the first interaction, yet can be inferred, based on demand characteristics. The last category is “force characteristics,” which differ from one person to another in terms of motivation, persistence, and temperament. Bronfenbrenner (2005) argues that two people, for example, may

have identical demand and resource characteristics, yet their activities may not be identical, due to differences in their motivation levels when pursuing a task. These personal categories are used in the ecological model to formulate an individual's role in changing his/her context. People's contexts may change as a result of their demand characteristics, such as gender. This type of transition is a passive one since individuals do not have any intentional control over it. Another type of contextual transition is more active, when people change their contexts as a result of their resource characteristics. Educational background, for instance, hinders or facilitates people's ability to shift their context in various ways. Lastly, the most active contextual change is tied to an individual's force characteristics, when that person is motivated to do something (Tudge, Makrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). Personal characteristics have a unique place in this theory since they are formulated as both a source and as a developmental outcome, which is assumed to be gained through certain proximal processes (i.e., interactions) in time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

**Context.** According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), people live in multiple environments, such as communities and schools, which cannot be studied as mutually exclusive. Rather, these contexts jointly affect how an individual regulates her/his daily life and interactions. Therefore, in ecological theory, Bronfenbrenner describes social environments as similar to the ecology of living organisms.

The ecological environment is composed of nested structures of different settings in which the child either participates actively or is not even present. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory elaborates four levels that affect people's development and their interactions with the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; 1986b; 2000). The first level is called "microsystem." Microsystems represent interpersonal relations, social roles, and patterns of

activities in the immediate settings that contain the child as a participant. Settings such as home and school are part of the child's "microsystem."

The second level, "mesosystem," includes interconnections between different settings. The ability to learn reading and writing, for example, depends on the nature of home and school as single microsystems. It is also determined by interconnections between home and school. So in ecological theory, the interconnections both within a single system, and among various microsystems, are captured in the "mesosystem" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The third level, known as "exosystems," refers to the processes and relations between two or more settings when in at least one of these the child does not participate personally. The links between exosystems and the child's immediate settings are indirect, yet exosystems deeply affect the children's activities in their microsystem. In other words, they are an extension of the mesosystems, such as parents' employment settings, informal social networks, government agencies, and the mass media (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2000).

The outermost fourth level is the "macrosystem." Macrosystems include the generalized patterns in any society or cultural group, such as social values, policies, and religion. These patterns specifically determine the features of micro-, meso-, and exosystems. For example, a classroom in a particular society looks and functions like other classrooms, since the structure of classrooms are determined by the macrosystems (i.e., values, norms, and social rules), which are dominant in a given society. In that respect, macrosystems are carriers of the dominant ideology of a social group (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Therefore, at this level it is essential to recognize the wide-ranging effects of macrosystems on any previous levels for thorough social analysis.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that although the four levels of ecological systems tend to be similar within the same social group, they differ from one social group to another. Consequently, relations between home and school are different in Turkey compared to those in Canada. Consistent patterns of variation are also found within the same society. Ethnic, socioeconomic, and other sub-cultural groups in a country differ in the ways they interact in, and regulate their ecological environment. To sum up, the four layers of context known as microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem have been analyzed to reflect the multiple influences of the context on the developmental outcome, which is young children from Kurdish speaking families, learning to read and write, in Turkey.

**Time.** The category of “time” adds a temporal dimension to the previous four levels. It comprises both the changes and continuities that affect people and their environments over time. In relation to the contextual subcategories mentioned above, the ecological model categorizes the operational notion of “time” under three headings. First comes “micro-time,” referring to the continuity or discontinuity of some particular interaction or activity, that is, episodes of proximal processes. Second, “meso-time” describes the quality of recurring intervals within these episodes across broader time such as weeks and months (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Third, rather than describing the effects of a single event such as parental employment conditions on family processes, Bronfenbrenner (1986b) argues for the necessity of taking “a life course perspective” (adapted from Elder, 1974) with the notion of “macro-time”<sup>26</sup>.

A life course perspective considers how specific historical transitions, such as the Great Depression in the United States of America, are reflected in different layers (micro-, meso-, and exosystems) progressively. Moreover, macro-time encompasses the changing social conditions,

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<sup>26</sup> Macro-time refers to Bronfenbrenner’s (1977, 1979) previous notion, called “chronosystem.”

events, and expectations within a society both throughout the same generation and across generations. In short, changes in process, personal characteristics, and contexts over time are the result of historical conditions, but at the same time, those changes in three domains also create the impetus for historical change (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

These four key components, “Process-Person-Context-Time,” constitute the core of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model in its most developed version. In their extensive review of the studies based on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, Tudge, Makrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009) state the minimum requirements of an ecological research design. Any study that draws from the ecological framework needs to consider the critical element “Process (proximal processes)” first. Analysis of proximal processes consists of assessing the typical interactions and activities that are linked to the research participants’ developmental outcomes. In addition to focusing on interpersonal relationships, the study also needs to focus principally on interactions between a human subject and the surrounding symbols and objects.

As a next step, the researcher needs to pay attention to the impact of each component, such as “person,” “context,” and “time,” on the proximal processes (i.e., participants’ durable and regular activities and interactions). For instance, the minimum requirement for including the relevance of the operational category “person” would be to consider how demand characteristics (e.g., age, gender) affect the way that the participants interact in particular contexts. The personal characteristics can be either “developmentally generative,” causing competence, or “developmentally disruptive,” causing disadvantage. The interrelations between home and school, for example, as two microsystems, or between middle and working class families, as two macrosystems, can be regarded as the impact of “context” on interactions. Lastly, the research should be longitudinal in order to measure “time.” It should look at the effects of proximal

processes, together with “person” and “context,” over a certain period of “time.” Most importantly, the study needs to evaluate what is happening at the historical time as well (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Tudge, Makrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009).

**The relevance of ecological theory to my research.** Ecological theory contributes to literacy studies by developing the concept of “environment” systematically at four levels. Thus, it allows researchers to observe the effects of the environment on people’s activities in a consistent way. The power of ecological theory lies in its formulation of the concept of “environment” as an objective reality, which has rules and regulations (Tudge, Makrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). First of all, an ecological perspective focuses on the nested and interconnected nature of the environment. Child-rearing practices within a family, for example, depend on external factors arising from other settings, such as parents’ literacy histories, job opportunities, the availability of social services, and neighborhood safety. Furthermore, any alterations in the composition or function of the given setting also alter people’s activities. For instance, migration can modify the composition of people’s immediate settings (i.e., microsystems), and the ties between them (i.e., mesosystems). It also influences the external setting, or exosystem, in which the person is not personally involved, but still affected by, such as the employment conditions for migrants (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In this respect, ecological theory offers another helpful concept, “ecological transition,” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) for my study. Ecological transition defines people’s shifting to different roles and settings, for example, when starting school, having a child, or moving to a new place. New setting and roles also bring changes in the way a person acts, thinks, and feels, as well as how she is treated by others.

A research design informed by an ecological perspective needs to be attentive to the three properties of ecological systems. First, there is a reciprocity principle, emphasized by Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979). According to the reciprocity principle, the relationship among actors in a setting is not unidirectional. Just as the adult has an effect on the child's activities, the adult's activities also develop in response to what the child does. Second, there are interdependencies between settings as well. Throughout their life span, people participate in different microsystems such as home, school, and mosque. They take up different roles in each setting. In addition, each microsystem forms particular relations with each of the others. The connection between school and home is different than the way in which home and the mosque are connected with one another. This second principle emphasizes that children's experiences in one system may influence their activities in another. The experiences of children in school, for example may change their interactions with the household.

Lastly, the research potential brought by shifts in role, activity, and setting is captured in the ecological transition principle. At any time, people cross a number of borders between different systems, creating a transition in their ecological setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1986b). When children start school, their two microsystems, (i.e., home and school) link together. So when children enter a new setting like school, they shift from an exosystem to a mesosystem. Moreover, when people visit a setting from a different sociocultural background where different norms, values, and ideologies are dominant, they also cross the borders of a macrosystem. Migrating from the village to the city also entails a transition in macrosystems, since the ideological and institutional patterns are all different in a city. In this respect, Bronfenbrenner (1986b) categorizes two types of transitions: normative (e.g., school entry, marriage, retirement) and nonnormative (e.g., divorce, migration, death or illness in the family).

## **Critical Theories**

The previous two theoretical frameworks, namely sociocultural-historical theory and ecological theory, provide necessary perspectives about the role of social, cultural, and historical contexts as separate entities. Most importantly, sociocultural-historical theory and ecological theory describe interrelations among context, processes, personal traits, and time. In addition to these, the two final theoretical frameworks, critical pedagogy theory and the sociocritical literacy model, become vital in understanding literacy activities in the two focal migrant and linguistically diverse families in Turkey in my study. In this section, I will begin with an introduction to critical theory in general. Then, I will continue with critical pedagogy theory and the sociocritical literacy model.

Critical theory was first developed by social theorists affiliated with the Frankfurt School in the beginning of the twentieth century, along with the works of Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. The primary interest of social critical theorists was to question the status of modernity on social and philosophical thought. In critical theory, the term “critique” means examining the conditions under which thoughts and ideologies function. This sense of “critique” necessitates acknowledging the fact that people live in the same world but use various kinds of concepts, language, and ideologies to make meaning out of the world. Hence critical analysis tries to understand the influence of these differences on meaning making. Moreover, critical understanding aims to interpret why things are one way rather than another since, beyond surface appearances, reality reveals itself through the analysis of inherent causes and conditions (Calhoun & Karaganis, 2001).

Power is the main focus of critical theory. Power has a complex structure that is not easy to observe, analyze, or even notice. It is not unidirectional or distributed equally or regularly. Power takes shape in multiple forms depending on social, cultural, and historical contexts. Even though power relations seem to be neutral and natural, they are socially constructed. As people participate in the activities of particular communities, they learn how to appropriate power relations influenced by their social characteristics like race, gender, and social class. Eventually power becomes a part of their identities. Although power relations develop as people produce and reproduce them, they are never replicated in the same way due to the complex nature of social interactions and human diversity (Bourdieu, 1991; Calhoun & Karaganis, 2001; Wenger, 2008)

With its focus on power, critical theory offers an analytical view about why and how some practices are valued, while others are degraded, in the same social context. Specifically, Bourdieu's (1991) formulation of the relationship between power and the positioning of people in a society needs to be considered. According to Bourdieu (1991), a dominant language is a product of social conditions; therefore, to account for the ways in which non-dominant groups submit to the language and practices of the powerful groups, we should take power relations (embedded in social interactions) into account. Bourdieu argues that the group of people whose social and linguistic capital have become dominant over social and historical conditions, have, at the same time, gained the social power to decide the criteria of appreciation in favor of their products, such as their language(s), practices, and knowledge. Drawing from Bourdieu (1991), one could also assume that even researchers, themselves, are of course subject to such power relations. The kinds of questions a researcher may ask are defined by the valued and accepted practices and knowledge of a society. The status of minority populations in Turkey exemplifies

Bourdieu's analysis of power and social practices. In the Turkish context, while knowledge and communication based on the dominant language (i.e., Turkish) determines the mainstream, the practices of the non-mainstream population (i.e., multilingual and migrant peoples) have been designated "inferior."

**Critical pedagogy theory.** Paulo Freire was the central figure in applying social critical theory to the field of literacy learning and education, and he is thought of as the originator of the critical pedagogy framework. In the early 1960s, he developed an adult literacy program for sugarcane workers in Brazil, in which he introduced the principles of critical pedagogy; this was a remarkable success. From the perspectives of critical pedagogy, schooling and literacy cannot be conceived apart from their political contexts and from hierarchies of power. For example, schools, as one of the most widespread institutions, have certain power and legitimacy in determining the valued literacy practices that help dominant groups maintain their advantage. The ideology in schools regulates the agents and the recipients of their services based on the interests of dominant groups while relegating non-dominant groups to inferior positions. The main aim of the critical pedagogy framework is to have learners explore the realization of inequality and power in both formal and informal educational settings. In this pursuit, critical pedagogy defines a critical/radical educator as one who is aware of relations between education and politics.

Although oppression based on inequalities of gender, race, and class are determined and shaped by social and cultural practices, they are considered "natural" in many contexts.

Similarly, the ability to read and write is also configured by the power relationships in a society. Therefore, this model of pedagogy demands that both educators and students question implicit assumptions and combinations of social, cultural, and economic inequalities (Apple, Au, &

Gandin, 2009; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Larson & Marsh, 2005). In Freire and Macedo's (1987) words:

[...] (L)iteracy cannot be viewed as simply the development of skills aimed at acquiring the dominant standard language. [...] For the notion of literacy to become meaningful it has to be situated within a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform, and reproduce meaning. Literacy must be seen as a medium that constitutes and affirms the historical and existential moments of lived experience that produce a subordinate or a lived culture. Hence, it is an eminently political phenomenon, and it must be analyzed within the context of a theory of power relations and an understanding of social and cultural reproduction. (Freire & Macedo, 1987; p. 142)

By using the term “cultural reproduction,” Freire and Macedo (1987) state a causal link between the oppression of certain social groups and the interests of dominant groups. The dominating social and cultural groups produce, mediate, and confirm ideologies, which in turn, affirm and reaffirm their particular views, while at the same time silencing others. They use their language and literacy practices to exert power on other groups. Social power shapes literacy activities, and consequently individuals and their discourses, in two opposite directions. On one side, literacy reinforces the conditions of inequality. On the other side, it helps people by empowering them to transform inequalities (Comber, 2005; Gilbert, 1993).

Freireian critical pedagogy is called emancipatory pedagogy, since “empowerment” is a crucial ideal in his theory. Emancipatory pedagogy aims at enabling members of oppressed groups by giving learners power and authority over their learning process and materials. According to Freire (in Freire & Macedo, 1987), the child first reads “the world,” that is, the social context from which the learner comes. Children acquire their values, perspectives, and knowledge from their families, relatives, and from their immediate communities such as the neighborhood that they live in. When trying to understand the surrounding environment, they

start from their own context and soon master the visible and invisible symbols that differentiate their world from other people's worlds. Then the learner learns how to read and write "the word." As they improve skills in reading "the world" and "the word," learners can develop a critical understanding about how they are involved in various power struggles and how they reconstitute their experiences out of these conflicts.

Educational applications based on critical pedagogy should start with texts that have the potential to help students understand structural concepts (e.g., power, race, gender). Furthermore, texts obtained from the learners' "world," that is, texts that include the history, the environment, the dreams, and the fears of the students, should be used predominantly in literacy programs. Another essential feature of critical pedagogy is to encourage the use of minority/oppressed languages in literacy contexts. In such an educational design, the learners are able to analyze themselves as socially and culturally situated selves. They are assumed to become aware of their cultural capital (i.e., their histories and experiences) and question their immediate environment (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Larson & Marsh, 2005). Eventually, this understanding enables them to construct their own meanings and expressions, at the same time supporting them in becoming empowered and active citizens<sup>27</sup>. Hence, in Freire's work, emancipatory theory recognizes literacy as "a vehicle by which the oppressed are equipped with the necessary tools to re-appropriate their history, culture, and language practices" (Freire & Macedo, 1987; p. 159).

The stance of critical pedagogy theory necessitates a critical perspective towards meaning making processes based on texts. It is assumed that meaning making with texts is a process of social construction, in particular social, political, and historical contexts; therefore, every

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<sup>27</sup> To read how Freire's notion of empowerment is criticized see Street (1984).

element in that process should be incorporated into the analysis in terms of the authority that the legitimate ideology bestows on them. In an interview with Larson and Marsh (2005), Barbara Comber states that certain forms of texts have authority that implicitly hinders people from questioning what is in them. Religious text, for example, or school texts in some contexts, can be examples of such authorized texts. Furthermore, texts indicate alienation and belonging for certain groups of people. While some people are included and represented in authorized texts, others are misrepresented or totally excluded.

The notion of authorized texts rests on the argument that “texts are everywhere and inescapably ideologically structured” (Kress, 1985; p. 65). They communicate ways of being, doing, and acting; that is “discourses” in Gee’s (1996; 2005) terms. The way that some discourses organize the structure of the text to communicate meanings and values represent what is prestigious in society and what is marginalized (Kress, 1985). In contrast to traditional approaches to text and discourse, the main purpose of critical pedagogy is to provide readers with the ability to decode ideology-loaded texts. This stance of critical pedagogical framework not only foregrounds the writer and her authority but also theorizes the reader as an active participant in the meaning construction process (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 2013). The reader “productively consumes” the text by bringing in appropriate and available ideological formations to the text. It is a process of reconstructing the systems of meanings, which may or may not correspond with the ideology of the writer (Fowler, 1987).

Having recognized the links between literacy and power, critical pedagogy assumes that there are multiple ways of being “literate” (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). The group of people who have acquired the skills of reading and writing through formal schooling represent only one form of literacy. Similarly, it is more appropriate to talk about different “literacies” than a single

literacy, since literacy has developed historically in many forms as a consequence of individuals' collective interests (Street & Leung, 2010). Barton and Hamilton's (1998) discussion on dominant versus vernacular literacies fits into this conceptualization of multiple literacies. Supported by powerful institutions, dominant literacies are more influential and visible compared to vernacular literacies (i.e., literacies in the everyday lives of the people). Vernacular literacies, on the other hand, may generate literacy practices that are not supported by powerful social institutions like schools; hence, they may be less visible (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

Another major contribution of critical pedagogy is its particular focus on identity as a social construction, hence susceptible to conflict and change. Social interaction and identities are always negotiated in asymmetrical power relationships, leading people to adapt multiple identities depending on their social positioning and roles. As mentioned before, defining identity as a social process demands studying social practices in particular contexts. Social context and power relations have a determining impact on the construction of social interactions and the social positioning of actors based on gender, class, and race. For instance, while people who assume certain identities sustain their presence in certain interactions, others may stay silent and hide their presence. Yet the dynamic nature of the process of identity construction continuously opens up spaces in which people are able to reflect their contexts, both local and global, and their senses of selves (McCarthy & Moje, 2002).

The interplay between local and global contexts also shapes what people's identities mean to them or to their local communities (Wenger, 2008). What it means to be a man versus a woman, or literate versus illiterate, is produced within complex and rich sets of relations both in local and global contexts. Therefore, people's identities are not just categories or labels to assign, but lived as rich and complex experiences. Moreover, identity is not an everlasting label.

Being under the continuous influence of local-global interactions, identity is an ongoing and pervasive process of becoming. In addition to local-global influences, people's identities also project the past and the future onto the present time. They take multiple forms as people experience multiple social contexts across local and global levels (Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009; Wenger, 2008).

Authorized texts, forms of literacies, and local-global interactions have both productive and reproductive force on the ways that people construct aspects of their identities (Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009). In contrast to the unitary and static senses of identity, Gee (1996) reconceptualizes identity as fluid and shifting from one context to another, as people change their linguistic registers, actions and behaviors depending on the context. On the other hand, critical scholars identify identity construction as a process that is intricately wrapped up in literacy activities and texts. To quote Moje, Dillon, and O'Brien (2000), texts are "more than sites of information or aesthetic expression; they are cultural tools for establishing belongingness, identity, personhood, and ways of knowing" (p. 167). For instance, people from certain groups are positioned as outsiders when they are excluded from or misrepresented in authorized texts. In other words, people infer their identities, in relation to where they find themselves while engaging in certain practices (Stevens & Bean, 2007).

**Gutiérrez's sociocritical literacy theory.** The second critical line of thought framing this dissertation is the "sociocritical literacy" framework developed by Gutiérrez (2005, 2008). The main aim of sociocritical literacy is to connect reading and writing activities more closely to people's experiences in political and cultural-historical contexts, as well as in their proximal personal circumstances (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Drawing from sociocultural-historical theories, the sociocritical literacy framework argues that people and communities both have effects on, and are affected by, cultural, political, and social practices and discourses organized in specific periods of time and settings (Gutiérrez, 2008). This framework suggests a dynamic, non-essentialist, and historical understanding of social practices. It defines the factors that influence people's activities as a "process" determined by both the larger society and local communities (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Accordingly, everyday activities and face-to-face interactions are constructed as a process through which every one of its participants creates her/his own "script" or "counterscript." These scripts illustrate how power is socially created, as participants get involved in particular activities (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995).

**Scripts and counterscripts in sociocritical literacy theory.** While communicating with others, people use distinct forms of interactions, languages, assistance and resistance. In all these forms of communication, they create their own "scripts" or "counterscripts." Scripts are defined as people's discourses specialized in their social contexts. When a script is built up on a script as a response, the discourse is defined as "counterscript." In a classroom interaction, for example, a student may use or appropriates the teacher's script to form her own script, which makes the student's script a "counterscript" (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). The dialogue among multiple scripts and counterscripts create "scripted environments." For instance, the script of a teacher and counterscripts of students make classroom a scripted environment (Gutiérrez et al., 1995). Scripted environments provide people with patterned ways of doing and being. At the same time, such environments serve as frames of reference for people of differing social status and power, to orientate their activities and identities. In this way, the sociocritical literacy model

accounts for the ways in which social and power relationships are constructed mutually and in a dynamic way, by all of the participants.

Apart from people's scripts and counterscripts, there is also a "transcendent script", operating at the non-immediate level of interaction. The transcendent script represents the dominant, hence legitimate, form of knowledge within both the local culture and society. It is the larger social discourse where the binaries in the dominant versus non-dominant scripts are disrupted. This perspective reveals a challenge to the traditional demonstration of routine activities as a source of power relations. Instead of either praising the non-dominant participants (e.g., marginalized students in a classroom), or blaming the dominant actors (e.g., the teacher), sociocritical literacy tries to posit a critical position to understand asymmetrical power relations maintained through everyday activities (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995).

Within the tradition of critical approaches, the sociocritical literacy approach describes each account of literacy development as reframing institutional and everyday literacy activities into powerful forms of literacy. Instead of focusing on binaries in multiple settings of learning such as formal versus non-formal, or school versus home, a sociocritical model of literacy emphasizes the overlaps across multiple settings of communities and institutions in the journey to becoming literate. The theory rejects the deficit accounts of home and school discontinuities. Rather, it foregrounds the resources and tools that are offered and used in everyday practices to either support or restrict people's social and cognitive progress as literate selves. In this respect, sociocritical approaches argue that knowledge is confined both by the culture and by local contexts. Similarly, power is also culture-bound and locally situated (Gutiérrez, 2005; 2008; Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995).

In the analysis of the ways in which power is contested or contained in social discursive practices, Gutiérrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) propose the concept of “Third Space.” Third space is an independent space of interaction where scripts or counterscripts eventually meet. This transitional level contains multiple voices of contributors<sup>28</sup>. According to Gutiérrez (2005), the third space is a place of true communication or interactions. Interacting in the third space not only transforms individuals, but also results in a transformation of the environment and people’s relations to their environment, as well.

Gutiérrez and her colleagues (1995) also borrow Goffman’s (1961) concept of “underlife” to describe various activities that people use to separate themselves from the surrounding ways of being, doing, and acting, “discourses.” In Goffman’s descriptive framework, the concept of “underlife” corresponds to the dominant discourse either in a “disrupted” way or in a “contained” way. In the disrupted form, “the realistic intentions of the participants are to abandon the organization or radically alter its structure” (p. 199). On the other hand, in the contained form of underlife activities, people seek ways to conform to the “existing institutional structures without introducing pressure for radical change” (p. 199). In response to the teacher-dominated discourse in classrooms, for instance, students may assert other forms of knowledge, such as popular music, that are unacknowledged in the teacher’s script.

Goffman’s framework of “underlife” rests on the assumption that people’s identities are adopted within social interactions. Institutions like families, schools, and businesses offer people various social roles, while at the same time extending opportunities for their participants to

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<sup>28</sup> The third space is an extension of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development beyond its narrow applications as a space of adult-centered scaffolding. Instead of adult-centered transmissions, in this model, the development is seen as a result of “mutual appropriation,” that is the mutual and dynamic interactions among individuals to change the other according to their own goals (Gutiérrez, 2005).

respond to given identities. Thus, the notion of “underlife” mainly foregrounds how people constitute their sense of identity through the activities that they use for rejecting or resisting the identities assigned by institutions. It represents people’s attempts to show that they are different from what is assumed by others. Underlife behaviors are not unique to the non-dominant actors, but are engaged in by all the participants in institutional life. For Goffman, the ways people respond to or reject assumed social roles can vary, depending on competing discourses and scripts in the social worlds. In this sense, any sociocultural tensions can be understood as a function of the conflicts that people create to connect multiple social worlds (Brooke, 1987; Goffman, 1961; Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995).

### **An Abstract of the Theoretical Perspectives**

The complex of different, but related, theoretical perspectives of sociocultural-historical theory and ecological theory represent an agreement about the links between literacy activities and cultural-social-historical contexts in which these activities develop. In addition to sociocultural-historical theory and ecological theory, critical pedagogy and sociocritical literacy models within the framework of critical theory facilitate the crucial theoretical understanding of literacy as a critical social practice with its links to power relations in both local and global contexts. In this section, I discuss how these four theories inform my research.

First and foremost, this research is framed by the formulation of sociocultural-historical theories. The socio-cultural framework supports my focus on the cultural and social factors that have significant effects on children’s learning and development. From this framework, children’s experiences in their homes and local communities are important to consider because knowledge of reading and writing is shaped by the initial experiences from different literacy

activities in their immediate contexts (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). Furthermore, these experiences from different socio-cultural contexts are transformative in nature (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Hence, it is assumed that what children learn in one context is carried over to other contexts in which engagement with print occurs (Heath, 1982). Within this framework of sociocultural-historical theory, learning and literacy activities are viewed as changing participation in cultural activities. These activities are mediated by social interactions and cultural tools (Rogoff, 2003; Scribner & Cole, 1981).

As the second main theoretical framework, the stance of ecological theory offers me two major foci to analyze people's activities in context: (1) ecological niches, and (2) ecological transitions. That is to say, children's literacy activities and literacy development are involved with their participation in specific "ecological niches." In addition to ecological contexts, interactions among personal characteristics, proximal process, and time merge to influence developmental outcomes. Accordingly, in this study, the focal children's route to becoming literate, throughout their first year of primary school will be investigated based on their typical interactions with people and objects via print. The focal children made an ecological transition and took up new roles in new settings. This ecological transition of the focal children is expected to influence the organization of interactions in the focal households, as well.

Since proximal processes are at the heart of Bronfenbrenner's theory as the engines of development, specific attention will also be paid to the factors that affect the focal children's literacy learning. Tudge, Makrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009) indicate that it is an arduous task to study proximal processes, since it requires "collecting data about regularly occurring interactions and activities with the important people, symbols, and objects in the developing individuals' lives" (p. 207).

Finally, the work of scholars from critical pedagogy theory has been important in shaping our theoretical understanding of how literacy functions as a process and a tool, as well as a product of formal and informal power dynamics. While literacy empowers the dominant groups and their ideologies, it holds others (e.g., people from subordinate linguistic and ethnic groups) outside of powerful positions. Furthermore, the historically constructed power relations determine people's identities and place them in social networks with particular rights and duties. Eventually, how people use and make sense of literacies changes depending on their social positioning and identities (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Larson & Marsh, 2005).

Drawn from critical pedagogical insights, Gutiérrez developed a model called the sociocritical literacy model, the final theoretical approach in this dissertation. According to the sociocritical literacy framework, members of a community construct normative rules of life while interacting with others within and across different social events. During their interactions, they use various "scripts;" i.e., specialized discourses of social spaces like discourses of teachers and those of students in their classrooms. In other words, scripts are various patterned interactions that represent both the ways in which people interpret the actions of others and the ways in which they guide their own actions. Through people's various scripts, social settings that people participate in become "scripted" as well. People's scripts and their orientation in scripted environments reflect the dominant ideology of the larger system. At the same time, they function as a frame of reference for various forms of being and doing. From the perspectives of sociocultural literacy models, understanding how alternative forms of knowing are silenced and marginalized is critically important, as they are closely linked to the power relations interwoven in local settings and the larger society (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995).

Although Gutiérrez has primarily studied interactions within classrooms, I believe that the premises of a sociocritical literacy perspective will also shed light on how interactions and discourses are organized within out-of-school contexts, such as students' homes. Even though the context of my study is children's homes, the ideology of the school and the discourse of the teacher are taken up by the focal children and influence their interactions with their families. So, as Gutiérrez, Rymes, and Larson (1995) state by observing routine activities, I will be able to address the complex and multiple patterns constructing daily interactions in focal participants' households. This will also help me to understand continuities and discontinuities between the individual, the environment, and the larger system along the process of learning and development in the context of migration and multilingualism.

### **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I review studies that support the theoretical perspective that literacy is shaped by social, cultural, and historical context. The literature in this section has been selected from within the sociocultural-historical area, since studies drawing on sociocultural-historical perspectives have challenged the ideas that literacy is composed of discrete, isolated skills and that it can be studied as distinct from its context (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004; Scribner & Cole, 1981).

Based on the theoretical perspectives and research questions presented earlier, six topics are especially relevant here. To begin this section, the first body of literature has been chosen from the emergent literacy framework. Following these, I focus on prominent fieldwork from the cultural practice of literacy framework and from the area of family literacy. I review various studies to argue for the situated, social, and active nature of literacy activities (Chapman, 1999). The fourth theme in this literature review centers on the conditions of non-dominant groups, such as migrants, minorities, and multilingual populations in the context of language and literacy learning. The fifth theme includes various studies on language ideology. Finally, I present discussions of power and identity in literacy studies.

#### **An Emergent Literacy Framework**

The emergent literacy perspective, developed in the late 1960s (Clay, 1966), has broadened our understanding of literacy development outside of formal instruction. This perspective challenged the idea that the mental process that is needed for successful acquisition of literacy skills starts with formal schooling. Instead, the studies under the emergent literacy umbrella sought to show that children's literacy abilities develop simultaneously, at multiple

levels. Furthermore, contextual factors, which are seen as intricately related to children's literacy abilities, have become the focus of many studies (Chapman, 1994; Teale & Sulzby, 1986).

The emergent literacy framework marked a growing realization that children's participation in adult directed activities is crucial to literacy development. For example, Teale (1984) and Sulzby (1985) discovered the emergence of written language awareness by observing the literacy related behaviors of children who were read to by their parents regularly. Other studies in this framework also suggested that before starting school, young children become familiar with the difference between oral and written modes of language when they are engaged in storybook reading activities with their parents on a regular basis. Most importantly, literacy practices at home form the basis of children's literacy skills in other contexts, such as in school (Snow, 1983; Snow & Ninio, 1986; Teale, 1986). In addition to home environments, schooling produces particular social contexts that enable children to make use of cultural tools such as speech, writing, and mathematics, through different classroom-based tasks (Moll, 1992).

### **Cultural Practices of Literacy**

Through the lens of sociocultural-historical theory, literacy is defined as a situated social activity mediated by written texts (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004). People, as active participants of the social and cultural practices of reading and writing, gradually grasp the "situated, social, and active" nature of literacy activities (Chapman, 1995, 1999; Kamberelis 1999; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000). To analyze social and cultural ways of using literacy, the notion of "literacy practices" was introduced within the tradition of the cultural practices of literacy studies. Barton and Hamilton (1998) proposed that "literacy practices offers a powerful way of conceptualizing the

link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape” (p. 6).

The studies that have adopted the perspective of the cultural practices of literacy have attempted to document people’s actual practices within their own cultural contexts. In a pioneering study with the Vai people in West Africa, Scribner and Cole (1981) examined different literacy practices among different groups of people in the Vai region (i.e., literates in indigenous Vai script, literates in Arabic, English-schooled men, and illiterates with no schooling and/or no script knowledge). Based on their findings of the forms of literacy relevant to the Vai people, Scribner and Cole (1981) concluded that literacy could be best understood as a “set of socially organized practices” (p.236). Their perspective, called “a practice account of literacy,” indicated that a “recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities” (p. 236) in a social system is shaped by the cultural and historical characteristics of that society. Therefore, it is highly problematic to argue for the generalized effects of literacy on human cognition or human orientation to language that would produce the same outcomes in different social contexts. Since literacy provides a communicative tool for particular types of social purposes, the abilities related to literacy bear the traces of social rules peculiar to different social groups.

In an ethnographic study of the literacy practices in a community during the 1990s in England, Barton and Hamilton (1998) argued that literacies should be analyzed as differing according to various domains of life. The authors defined “domains of life” as “structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and learned” (p. 10). It is possible to find distinct literacy practices in distinct domains such as home, work, and school because relationships and resources that shape literacy practices are structured quite differently in each domain. Furthermore, people may hold different purposes while participating in different social

domains. To carry out their purposes, they could choose from a variety of literacies, that is, “coherent configurations of literacy practices” (p. 9) related to different domains of life. Domains of life constantly affect one another; therefore, one domain, such as the home context, may export its literacy practices to other domains and at the same time, import several literacy practices from other domains (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Hence, based on the “domains of life” notion of literacy as a social practice perspective, it is possible to argue that children carry over the literacy practices from the social domain of home to other domains, such as school.

The transcontextualized character of literacy has been discussed widely by a range of studies mentioned previously. Yet, it is put forward that literacy has transcontextualizing potential, as well (Brandt, 1995; Brandt & Clinton, 2002). This idea of literacy especially problematizes exaggerating the local contexts and their power on determining the forms of literacy. According to Brandt and Clinton (2002), although the role of social context in organizing literacy has been well documented in many studies, the function of literacy as a participant in local practices has been under-theorized. Since literacy is shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts, it can also function to reorganize people’s local lives. Literacy is local, particular, and situated, but at the same time, the technologies and objects of literacy also come from distinct contexts with a potential of intervening in people’s relation with literacy. Analyzing the material characteristics of literacy can generate answers about how local and other settings are linked to one another by literacy.

### **Family Literacy**

The area of family literacy studies the infinite ways of promoting and practicing literacy within a family (Anderson, Anderson, Friedrich, & Kim, 2010; Heath, 1982; 1983; Purcell-Gates

et al., 2004). A foundational research study of the links between the uses of language in different communities and in schools was carried out by Heath (1982, 1983). Heath's study, published in *Ways With Words* (1983), is framed by a sociocultural-historical perspective, in which is reflected in her definition of culture, "The culture children learn as they grow up is, in fact, ways of taking meaning from the environment around them" (p. 49). In accordance with a sociocultural-historical framework, Heath also defined literacy as a socially situated construct, rather than a sum of technical skills. In her study, Heath explored the various ways children learn to use language in three socially and culturally different social groups (i.e., white, middle-class, school-oriented families; white working-class community; and black working-class families) in the United States. She analyzed language and literacy patterns in each community. To understand the effects of children's language and literacy-related interactions in their immediate contexts on their academic achievement, she linked her home observations to the school performances of focal children. According to her, when the literacy-related interactions between a child and his/her social environment are similar to what is expected at school, the child comes to school equipped with the required cultural knowledge to achieve in an academic environment. On the other hand, when the kinds of literacy practices that preschool children are socialized into in their communities are not reinforced in school, children experience difficulty in adapting themselves to formal literacy practices; hence they are likely to fail at school.

The idea that children's literacy skills are based on experiences in their social contexts, such as their homes, has been supported by a number of researchers. For example, in a study conducted with low-income families in the United States, Purcell-Gates (1996) documented home literacy practices in twenty homes, and how those practices relate to school learning for the children in focal homes. She found that the authentic or functional and purposeful texts were

very prominent in daily lives of the participants. Texts for real life purposes (i.e., authentic texts), such as TV guides, coupons, and food packaging were mainly used in the focal families either for entertainment (such as reading magazines and reading game cards when playing board games), or for their daily routines (such as cleaning, shopping, and cooking). Purcell-Gates concluded that children's understanding regarding the signifying nature of literacy and its functions in various ways is intricately related to the quality and frequency of interactions between adults and children around print. The focal preschool children were more capable of grasping the fact that print functions to convey meaning when there were print embedded interactions directed toward children by literate adults in their homes. In home contexts where this phenomenon occurred less frequently, the focal preschoolers were likely to start school lacking knowledge about concept of print and its alphabetic nature, which put them behind their peers who experienced more print-related activities at home. Another finding of Purcell-Gates (1996) is about the involvement of low-literate parents in their children's learning. Although it has been generally assumed that parents with low levels of education tend to hold back from their children's schooling, in this study, Purcell-Gates (1996), found that parental involvement was increased with the onset of schooling even in low-literate households.

McTavish (2007) conducted a case study of home literacy practices in a working class family living in a low-income neighborhood. She asked, "What kinds of resources does a home environment provide children from different socioeconomic groups?" to question the commonly held assumption that most out-of-school literacy activities exist only in middle class homes. She analyzed intentionality, written register knowledge, concepts of print, concepts of writing, and the alphabetic principle in focal children's interactions with print. She found that there were many ways of supporting children's literacy learning. Her findings demonstrated that

socioeconomic status is not a reliable factor to predict the potential of home environments to support children's academic achievement.

A study conducted by Oates (2009), in a non-Western context concerned the at-home literacy practices of an extended family living in Kabul, Afghanistan. In her case study, she found that oral poetry recitation is much more preferred and valued than the Western practice of silent reading for pleasure. She argued against bringing in policies and education models from abroad to a country like Afghanistan, since imported educational models are likely to have negative effects on the local practices and resources. Instead, as Oates concluded, indigenous literary traditions provide better tools for formulating literacy inventions for people from various cultural, religious, and social environments.

Similar implications have been suggested by Mui and Anderson's case study (2008) of an immigrant family in Canada. Their article portrayed literacy activities in an Indo-Canadian extended family living in a culturally diverse neighborhood. Like Oates (2009), Mui and Anderson also looked at how literacy was organized and supported in an extended family. While the Johar family attached great value to literacy, the types of activities present in their homes were different than those of mainstream Canadian families. For example, there was no storybook reading, and functional purposes appeared to be the prevalent motivation for reading and writing activities. The authors chose to take a critical look at the highly promoted storybook reading activities in Western contexts. What they emphasized was valuing various family literacy practices in non-Western households, instead of promoting one type of activity exclusively. Furthermore, while it is strongly believed that mothers are the main supporters of children's literacy, this article showed that the allocation of that responsibility is dependent on

the ways in which the family is organized. When the family is an extended family like the Johars, other family members, such as cousins, could take up supporting roles.

The interest about literacy and language practices in non-Western contexts has given rise to many different studies from all over the world. In a study with a Malay family in Singapore, Bakar (2016) looked at how formal schooling influenced current literacy practices within the family. Similar to the Johar family, the Malay parents in this study were highly literate; therefore, they did not experience difficulties in making connections with what their children brought from school. For instance, the parents could easily introduce a topic related to the school reading and use the school text as a resource to talk about everyday life. In that way, children had the opportunity to learn how to make meaning from the print with the help of more experienced family members. Moreover, the literate focal parents were also able to regulate the impact of formal schooling in accordance with the cultural ways of using literacy in the family.

To capture the set of knowledge and practices encountered in households, Moll (2000) introduced the notion of “funds of knowledge.” According to him, documenting the activities in a household, “including its involvement in the formal and informal economies, as well as its domestic labor, and the maintenance of social networks that tie the household to other households,” (p. 258) constitute various funds of knowledge in a family. From all the studies that have attempted to document household funds of knowledge, it has become evident that families, irrespective of their socio-economic background, encompass a wide range of resources available to their members. Although the wealth of resources originating in local contexts may not be apparent to policymakers and educators, or even to the families themselves, they are carried to the classrooms by students who are initially socialized within the circle of their families, and utilize those resources particular to their families. These resources are argued to be

of paramount importance, especially in multilingual and migrant settings, since students base their initial efforts of meaning construction on the knowledge, expertise and inheritances that they bring from their homes to school (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000).

### **Being a Migrant and/or Multilingual in the Context of Language and Literacy Learning**

When people migrate from their place of origin, they invariably end up in a new life in which they will live with a new language. In this situation, children find themselves in a new environment where they have to go to school, make friends, and find ways to manage the demands of the new environment and the expectations of their families. Living in multilingual environments requires both adults and children to perform in more than one language. Yet, adults and children face distinct challenges and use different resources while adapting to a new life (Cummins, 1979; 1984; 2010; Gee, 2014a).

Studies on the educational attainment of children from migrant and minority linguistic groups have led to a growing realization that there are intricate links between academic achievement and the linguistic and social conditions of minority children. Cummins (1979), an education specialist from the University of Toronto, asks the following question:

Why does a home-school language switch result in high levels of functional bilingualism and academic achievement in middle-class majority language children [...], yet lead to inadequate command of both first (L1) and second (L2) languages and poor academic achievement in many minority language children? (p. 222)

Cummins developed his argument by foregrounding the causal role of social factors in children's educational achievement. That is, beginning education through a second language is likely to produce favorable outcomes for children when L1 is valued in the society, when parents actively contribute to the children's literacy development, and when there is easy and safe access

to different media such as books, newspapers, television and radio broadcasts in both the L1 and the L2. On the other hand, children who have been trapped in social situations particular to minority language speakers do not enjoy these opportunities, and thus, are likely to fail when the medium of instruction is different from their L1.

In addition to emphasizing the role of social factors, Cummins also attempted to explain the underlying linguistic mechanisms that mediate the effects of social factors on the academic failure of many minority children under the framework of “linguistic interdependence.” Linguistic interdependence proposes that language skills can be transferred between L1 and L2; therefore, the learners’ proficiency in L1 does not hinder them from acquiring L2 as long as favorable social conditions are created for the learners. However, the problem remains: power dynamics existing in favor of the dominant groups determine the status of different ethnic groups and their languages. Educational policies are just a reflection of such power dynamics that emphasize the dominant and/or prestigious languages while excluding others. When the first language of a child is a dominant or a respected language of the society, the instruction through L2 does not have any negative effect on their L1 skills and it results in additive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975). Children who develop additive bilingualism can transfer their L1 skills to another language without any loss in their L1. On the other hand, when various forms of efficient institutional support in home languages are lacking, the L2 replaces the L1 skills, leading to subtractive bilingualism in children. As a result, the learner’s L1 development is suppressed and it deteriorates. Similarly, according to Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977), for example, a high level of competence in L1 is required for better L2 development. When a child’s L1 skills are underdeveloped, his/her chance of acquiring enhanced competence in the L2 diminishes. Thus, together with a limited L1 competence, the child’s L2 also remains immature.

## **Language Ideology**

The issue of losing the first language skills has been explained in relation to the status of minority languages and how this status is normalized through social interaction. The values and attitudes about the worth of certain languages and dialects represent the language ideology dominant in a society. Language ideology also refers to how individuals and communities evaluate the use of their language in social life (Guardado, 2002).

Dorian (1998) stated that those who hold a powerful status in a society employ several tools to maintain their legitimacy and prestige. Language, as a carrier of prestige, is one such tool. The dominant group sets its form of speech as the standard language by emphasizing linguistic differences between it, versus non-dominant forms. In this context, non-standard forms come to be viewed as inferior while the dominant language is believed to be rich, rational, and structurally complex. This bias of treating “subordinate” languages as inferior and lacking is called an “ideology of contempt” (Grillo, 1989; Dorian, 1998). To justify standardizing and promoting one high-prestige language instead of multiple coexistent languages, the dominant ideology applies the idea of language deficiency, as if the subordinate languages deserve their inferior positions due to some inadequacies in their complexity and expressiveness. The speakers of subordinate languages may also be convinced to accept that their languages are deficient.

To date, neither the permeability of the ideology of contempt, nor the support for single language policies has changed much through history. What is relatively new are the liberal policies reinforced through global institutions like the European Commission for Human Equality. In contrast to the colonial era, non-dominating groups are given more opportunity to

learn the language of status. With increasing efforts to fight against discrimination, the European Commission has been promoting “equality of opportunity and treatment for all in education” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1960; p. 3) by ensuring equal access to education in the dominant language, as well as in heritage languages for every person regardless of his/her linguistic, ethnic, and religious background.

In a world where mass media and education impose linguistic homogenization, Skutnabb-Kangas (2013) mentions that culture, ethnic identity, and language are cultural constructs rather than inherited characteristics. They are dynamic and hybrid, as people can use more than one language and claim several cultures at the same time. Therefore, dominant-language medium education does not promote the well-being of students from non-dominant groups, but severely harms their mental growth. At the same time, denying equal educational opportunities to certain populations also reproduces poverty among indigenous populations, since access to the dominant forms of knowledge opens the way to occupations and wealth.

Although the task of passing their native tongue to the next generation is mostly seen as a parents’ responsibility, studies have demonstrated that indigenous, tribal, and minority parents usually prefer to speak to their children in the dominant language. Parents from minority groups prefer to use the dominant language over their native tongue with the hope that their children will adapt to the society better if they master the dominant language. Skutnabb-Kangas (2003) claimed that this is not a choice that the parents can make. Rather, the dominant ideology in the society manipulates the opinions of people from non-dominant groups, regarding their native tongue and culture, by using the mass media and education.

Skutnabb-Kangas' argument about families' lack of agency in transferring L1 to the next generation is supported by Wong-Fillmore's (2000) exemplary case of language shift and loss in an immigrant Chinese family living in the United States. Since the first years of immigrant life were challenging for the focal family, the Chinese speaking family members spent all their energy to survive economically in their new country. Hence they could not prevent their children's first language loss together with the children's immersion in English at school. Gradually, focal children's shift into English had a deteriorating effect on communication between adults and children in the family. Although three focal children out of four learned English and made good progress in education, minority children's increasing separation from their L1 and their families is argued to impair their socialization process. Wong-Fillmore (2000) wrote, "The school can take what the family has provided and augment or modify it even, but the foundation must be laid by the family." (p. 206). However, loss of family language is not an inevitable result of teaching a second language.

Scholars who are critical of exclusive education in English or any other dominant language have offered new approaches to educating non-dominant and indigenous populations (Malone & Paraide, 2011). Instead of immersing minority children in the school language when they start school, mother-tongue-based multilingual education is argued to be beneficial for a successful L2 teaching while maintaining L1. In a mother-tongue-based multilingual education model, students' mother tongue is used as a bridge when learning the dominant language(s). With this approach, children from non-dominant families are also able to maintain their native tongues. This approach is believed to help maintain linguistic diversity, as well (Cummins, 2009; Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008; 2013; Malone & Paraide, 2011).

## **Power and Identity in Literacy Studies**

The prominence of cultural and social factors in language and literacy activities has led to a body of work to examine how ideological factors such as the power relations in a society define some practices as “mainstream” while marginalizing others (Dorian, 1998; Rajagopalan, 2004; Razfar & Gutiérrez, 2003; Street, 1984). This argument about the intricate relations between power dynamics and literacy, especially theorized by Brian Street, has been put forward by several ethnographic studies in different social contexts. In his ethnographic study in an Iranian village, Street (1984) questioned the dominant definition of “illiterate” used by such agencies as the public educational institutions and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to represent non-mainstream communities. He concluded that literacy practices express a particular world-view represented by those institutions and act as a contrivance to dominate and marginalize others. In that sense, literacy practices can be observed to be “ideological” and “contested.”

To capture the contested nature of literacy practices, Street (1984, 2001) differentiates between “autonomous” and “ideological” representations of literacy. In the “autonomous” model, literacy is treated as a sum of the technical skills of reading and writing. Moreover, it is assumed to denote the neutral and universal practices associated with them. Street (2001) argues that the autonomous model of literacy neglects variations in literacy, in that the definition it adopts does not reflect how people engage with literacy activities in their social contexts but imposes a predefined model on local practices. Contrary to the “autonomous model,” the “ideological model” of literacy posits that literacy cannot be studied isolated from its cultural and ideological assumptions. The so-called “neutral” and “universal” modeling of literacy is mainly based on Western, urban, and/or middle-class practices, while it overlooks the practices of others

(i.e., non-Western, minorities, and marginalized groups). As an alternative, the ideological model argues for the need for culturally sensitive definitions of literacy practices, since they are not the same over various social contexts, but differ from culture to culture and from period to period. In addition to the cultural meanings of literacy practices, the power relations embedded in reading and writing processes should also be taken into account because the literacy practices of different social groups are not equal in terms of the groups' social status and power. Such a standpoint undoubtedly necessitates ethnographic fieldwork to appreciate, holistically, the rich variety of human activities as they occur in their natural contexts.

A similar line of argument comes from the studies conducted among indigenous populations in North America. Noll (1998), for instance, shed light on the meaning making practices of aboriginal people through literacy activities. To this end, she inquired into both in-school and out-of-school literacy practices of two aboriginal adolescents in grades seven and eight, by using case study method. One of the findings of this study is that although she, as the researcher, had positive connotations about the term 'literacy,' her participants had different understandings of the term because they had negative experiences with "literacy."

In another study, Hare (2005) collected stories from elders of the Anishinaabe community, to elicit how, and for which functions, these people use Western and Aboriginal literacy in their lives. These stories show that literacy practices could be something else, other than reading/writing print. For instance, these practices comprise reading symbols and inscribing meanings across landscapes. Since this indigenous community depends on nature for their lives, nature constitutes the context of their literacy experiences; as a result, their literacy practices have been shaped according to their environment. Hare's paper especially offers insight on the role of education as a tool by colonial powers to create colonized subjects. She mentioned, for

example, the fact that indigenous people want their children to have a Western education because they think that Western schooling will allow their children to find jobs and “to maneuver between two very different cultures” (p. 248). This is what Collins and Blot (2003) called the “creation of hybrid identities,” that is, people who display a blending of two cultures. People with hybrid identities accept the codes of the powerful ideology of Western education, but at the same time they resist it by using the tools that Western education gives them. Writing petitions in English to complain about the discrimination they suffer is such an example.

The challenges of taking a social position in the world and constructing an identity through several languages differ for different groups of people (Moje, 2000). Burck (2005), for example, argued that speaking more than one language is experienced by adults and children differently. That is, adults and children have different strategies to ‘own’ a language. In her study on multilingual identities, Burck (2005) used Connel’s (1987) notion of the “performance of identities.” This notion implies “the idea that individuals ‘do identity,’ that the taking up of a particular subject positions in the talk with others, is performative and constitutive” (Burck, 2005, p. 44). For example, the literature on migration indicates that women are seen as preservers of culture and the L1; therefore, their experiences in multilingual environments are different than men’s (Burck, 2005). Traditionally, men have the role of sustaining the family; in that respect, the L2 is a must for them. On the other hand, women’s access to the L2 may be limited, as their place is supposed to be at home or in local networks. As a result of this, women may bear more loyalty to the L1 and their native ethnic communities than their male partners (Polat & Mahalingappa, 2010).

From a sociocultural perspective, people acquire an additional language (e.g., second language) through complex social interactions and power relations that also affect the learners’

identities in complex ways. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to many aspects of this process, such as learners' identities, the learning setting, and the ways that learners engage with other speakers (Norton & Toohey, 2011). It has been suggested that people negotiate their multicultural and multilingual identities based on their interpretation of what constitutes "language" and "heritage" as distinct but interrelated constructs (Blackledge, Creese, Baraç, Bhatt, Hamid, Wei, & Yağcıoğlu, 2008). Language is defined as a set of resources which are unequally distributed as a consequence of power relations in the society. Heritage, on the other hand, constitutes "elements of past experience which a group deliberately sets out to preserve and pass on to the next generation" (Blackledge et al., 2008; p. 536). In a longitudinal study, Creese, Bhatt, Bhojani, and Martin (2006) studied how heritage language classes created a social field or network for Bengali adolescents living in Leicester, England, affording them the opportunity to combine various identity positions. Heritage language classes established links between the learners' culture of origin and their current culture in England through the interactions with bilingual teachers from the same community. Creese et al. (2006) argued that flexible heritage language classes provided the focal multilingual students the opportunity of moving between languages and cultures overlapping in family, school, and heritage contexts. Furthermore, in the process of learning "language" and "heritage," Bengali learners contested against the singular and static heritage identities imposed by the schools and the teachers. The Bengali youngsters could inherit their heritage transferred from the previous generations while they were contesting and renegotiating their subject positions (Blackledge, Creese, Baraç, Bhatt, Hamid, Wei, & Yağcıoğlu, 2008).

One of very few studies dealing with identity issues in the context of Turkey was conducted by Polat and Mahalingappa in 2010. They looked at Kurdish people's identification

and their degree of acculturation with Turkish as an L2. In their study, Polat and Mahalingappa found that their Kurdish participants who had generally mostly integrated into the Turkish community and networks developed more native-like accents in their L2 (i.e., Turkish). The authors argued that ethnic identity is constructed, based on interactions with the cultural and social environment. Participating in L2 networks provides individuals with opportunities to socialize in the L2, and hence, to develop positive identity practices in their new environments. On the other hand, negative experiences with L2 learning and use at home and/or in school hinder the learner from developing positive connections with the L2.

As people engage in different social contexts that intersect with ethnicity, gender, and social class, they construct different identities. In this regard, identity is not a stable, unitary construct (Gee, 2001; Dyson, 1993; Moje, 2000; Moje, 2002). People can have various identities, some of which can be in conflict with one another. In one of her studies, Moje (2000) looked at how literacy practices are used as tools for constructing an alternative identity and taking a social position in the world. Her data came from unofficial literacy practices, such as graffiti, hand signs, and poetry produced by marginalized adolescents, who were normally excluded as unsuccessful students. She argued that the alternative literacy practices that are not recognized by schools enabled adolescents to resist against the marginalized position ascribed to them by the powerful discourse of the school. For example, those who could produce rap, parodies, and clever poems rose to a special position and their identity became a source of admiration from others. In this way, their voice, which was normally silenced during their abortive school experiences were realized in their unsanctioned literacy activities.

Similarly, Dyson's various works documented how children's identities and their peer cultures can be established through the use of texts from popular culture (Dyson, 1999; 2003). In

one line of her studies (Dyson, 1999; 2003), Dyson conducted ethnographic fieldwork in a culturally and economically diverse area of the United States. She observed the lessons in a first grade class, collected writings from the students, and interviewed the focal children and their families for almost eight months. She analyzed the links between the content of students' writing and popular media, such as movies, songs, and games. She discovered that children's unofficial literacy practices play a role in managing social, symbolic, and ideological tensions between official and unofficial domains. Furthermore, through a complex process of recontextualization, children determine how they can make use of official literacy activities to operate in the social world. The focal first graders, by recontextualizing materials from popular culture, adapt to a powerful, knowledgeable, and "full of fun" type of identity, to differentiate themselves from their peers in their social networks.

One area that has usually been neglected is the links between the history of immigration and adolescent identity construction through literacy activities. Taylor, Bernhard, Garg, and Cummins (2008) commented on the notion of transnationalism to explain the social conditions of immigrant people. Mitchell (2000) defines transnationalism as the connections between immigrants and their separate nation states, through simultaneous political, social, and economic links. He writes, "Rather than movement 'from' a society of origin 'to' a country of settlement, the migrants operate in a social field of networks and obligations that extend across international borders" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 71). Based on this definition, Taylor et al. (2008) argued that identity and literacy are not static inventories of habits and cultural values; they are shaped by the transnational sense of community.

## Summary

The most essential function of a review of the literature related to my research is to identify promising directions for my study. As documented in this chapter, research in early literacy studies has focused primarily on their emergent literacy abilities in children's local contexts such as home and school. Of particular importance are investigations of how children acquire early literacy skills by observing and taking part in various literacy activities and events in their homes and communities. The studies like those mentioned have had widespread influence in arguing against the individual and discrete nature of literacy skills. As a result, it is believed that literacy cannot be studied in isolation from its context. Yet, the emergent literacy perspective was especially criticized for having the potential to distribute a "deficit idea" about particular forms of literacy. The emergent literacy framework puts extra value on literacy activities common in Western, white, and middle-class homes, by foregrounding school-based and Western literacy activities. To address these concerns about the emergent literacy perspective, I focused on a non-Western cultural and social context defined by low literacy level. In this way, I aim at providing a broader picture of human activities around language and literacy.

Studying various patterns and pathways that people from different social groups follow when interacting with literacy becomes essential to getting a more complete picture of literacy use. The main contribution of the cultural practices of literacy group is to provide perspectives from literacy activities prevalent in multilingual, non-dominant, and racial minority communities. In this pursuit, however, the challenge is how to make non-dominant types of literacies visible. Among others, the area of family literacy, specifically, offers a wide view of how various literacy activities build on one another in the process of literacy development.

Family literacy studies propose that home environments are a major context for literacy research in addition to the school contexts because the way children, especially those from non-dominant groups, socialize as literate beings in homes affects how well they do in schools. This field of research has paid attention to the use of literacy activities as tools for establishing, sustaining, and transferring social relations in various ecological contexts including non-Western, and non-dominant populations.

Studies related to the conditions of migrant and multilingual populations in the context of languages and literacies have focused almost exclusively on the contested nature of literacies. It is stated that, as a consequence of power relations, literacy practices, and the meanings embedded in them, are always contested. According to this perspective, people assign meaning to literacy activities when they are participating in their social communities. The dominant group determines the value of certain forms of language and literacy by imposing certain types of texts, discourses, and identities on the non-dominant populations (e.g., migrant, multilingual, and/or low literate people/communities). While the dominant group controls the gateway to the “literate communities of practice,” there are certain groups of people who are excluded from participating in privileged practices. Thus, literacy is not a neutral practice, but is shaped by the ideologies that are dominant, thus valued, in a society.

Finally, the available research suggests that children are socialized into multiple social identities through language and literacy. Belonging to a racial group and being identified as having a learning disability based on school performance are examples of the dynamic and fluctuating character of identity construction through language and literacy socialization. Since the value of certain identities is constantly negotiated at multiple levels of society, the identities and discourses around these identities determine people’s relations with literacy.

## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

In this chapter, I describe the methodology and design of this study. I begin by identifying what it means to design a case study in general. Following this, I describe ethnographic fieldwork with its challenges. Then, before moving on to the data collection and data analysis procedures, I discuss the rationale for my using qualitative research and my interpretive paradigm. The data collection phase is presented with detailed information about the research site, the participants, the research process, and the data collection procedures. The section subtitled, “My role as a researcher,” gives details about the relationship between me, as the investigator, and my participants. I have broken down the process of analyzing the data into five stages. These are (a) organizing the data, (b) identifying themes, (c) coding the data, (d) searching for alternative explanations, and (e) reporting the analysis. Finally, I consider issues in critically analyzing qualitative research to defend the soundness of my study.

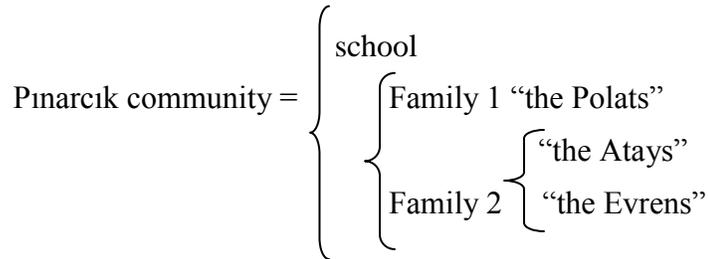
### **Research Methodology**

The theoretical perspectives that I have drawn upon for my dissertation have led me to design my research as a case study using ethnographic techniques. The data were gathered mainly in the form of in-depth interviews and on-site participant observations, in order to examine the real situations of “what people do with literacy” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 6) together with their own perceptions regarding their literacy activities.

I collected data from two different families living in the same community. Although they shared similar life contexts, the two focal families differed in terms of language and literacy practices (see Family Profiles in Chapter 5). Therefore, they are not regarded as one case but as

“nested cases” within the community in which school is a part. The following visualization represents the focal families as nested cases within the Pınarcık community:

Figure 4.1 Focal families as nested cases



I used ethnographic accounts to observe, record, interpret, and understand complex issues, such as how these activities connect to, and are determined by, power relations prevalent in a society (Heath & Street, 2008).

**Case studies.** Case studies refer to non-experimental, descriptive research designs that provide a rich description of a particular social unit as a whole (Barone, 2004). Any social unit, such as an activity, a place, a person, or a group can be studied as a case of a particular phenomenon. Since these units become the focus of close analysis, qualitative researchers gain insight into “the meaning people make of their lives in particular contexts [...] through social activities that are informed by the world beyond the visible one” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; p. 9).

Because of the inseparable relationship between the cases and the contexts that they are studied in, case studies are not appropriate for determining context-free, causative connections between variables. Rather, researchers try to understand the participants’ interpretations of what is happening and what is relevant within their particular context and for a particular time being studied. The interpretations of participants are specific to the context and time; and may be

different (or not) across varied contexts and time periods (Barone, 2004; Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

**Ethnographic techniques.** Ethnographic fieldwork is the most common research method used by literacy researchers whose work is informed by sociocultural-historical theory. Heath and Street (2008) define ethnographic perspectives in literacy as studies, “using field work methods and sensitized to ways of discovering and observing the uses and meanings of literacy practices to local people themselves” (p. 1). Ethnographers attempt to explain the *how* and *why* of research questions, rather than trying to determine causal significance (Purcell-Gates, 2004). Ethnographic perspectives are needed because simply asking people about reading and writing does not reveal the patterns of “how” people use literacy in their social lives or the “meanings” they attach to reading and writing activities. Researchers who try to understand the nature of these activities strive to link them to the cultural and social contexts in which the activities are embedded (Heath & Street, 2008; Street, 2001).

In literacy studies, it is especially important to conduct systematic observation of people’s activities in situ, through personal participation since, as Scribner and Cole (1981) put it, “literacy tends to co-occur with other significant personal and social attributes and experiences” (p. 20). Therefore, in interviews, respondents may regard their activities of reading and writing as something different from literacy as they practice it. In their mind(s), what they do with reading and writing may merely be related to other activities such as religion, work, or entertainment. Street (2001) mentions a corresponding finding in McLaughlin and Heath’s (1993) study. In this study, Heath and McLaughlin (as cited in Street, 2001) discuss newspaper-reading habits among urban adolescents in the United States and found that they did not regard

most of their literacy activities as reading and writing events but, rather, saw them as something else. Therefore, a superficial survey would quite simply label those adolescents non-readers.

Although used in a number of studies in the field, the ethnographic approach has undergone a lot of criticism. One of the problems associated with ethnographic perspectives in literacy studies is the potential of bolstering “a relativized view of literacy,” as a result of localized fieldwork (Street, 2001). Street refuted the arguments of such critics by stating that ethnographic studies do not express an unrealistic celebration of local practices that do not have an exchange value in the dominant social system. Rather, the ideological model recognizes the power relationships in the wider society and their role in extending certain practices of language and literacy as dominant. In that sense, the ideological model of literacy contemplates the issue of transformation of “devalued” practices by making the social value of literacies visible. In relation to this argument, ethnographic perspectives allow researchers to link their observations to the broader socio-cultural context (Street, 2001).

Ethnographic approaches have also been criticized because of the potential problems of generalizing their findings and applying them to other social contexts. Even though it has been acknowledged that ethnographic case studies suggest critical insights about the social value of literacy, their findings based on ethnographic representations, are seen as too local; hence, hard to apply to multiple circumstances (Williams & Cooke, 2002). It has also been mentioned that in-depth studies of practice in one community are bound to their particular context and participants; therefore, going beyond the localized findings and exploring ways of applying them from one locality to another is a main challenge for researchers (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Scribner & Cole, 1981).

## Design

The site of data collection in Turkey was in İstanbul, one of the biggest cities in Turkey. İstanbul has also been the city hosting the most im/migrants from Turkey or abroad for almost 50 years, such that there is now a total population of over 14 million<sup>29</sup>. Data was collected in the 2013/2014 school year from an impoverished neighborhood that I will call Pınarcık (a pseudonym). Pınarcık was specifically chosen as a research site because of its large migrant and multilingual population. Most families living in the Pınarcık district are internal migrants who came to Istanbul from other parts of Turkey. This rural-urban migration flow has resulted from either economic reasons, such as the search for better jobs, or from security reasons, such as an escape from clashes between the Turkish army and the armed groups of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the southeast. Unlike most of the immigrant receiving areas, Pınarcık is not a suburb, but is located in the very center of Istanbul.

As a researcher, I was familiar with the research site. Between the years 2007-2010, I took part in longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork as a linguist researcher in the public school and homes of Pınarcık<sup>30</sup>. I spent the summers working as a volunteer tutor in the Pınarcık Community Center. Therefore, prior to beginning my data collection, I had substantial information about the spatial and temporal configurations of the research site, such as the physical layout and daily activities of the people of Pınarcık.

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<sup>29</sup> According to the Address Based Population Registration System (ABPRS), 2007-2014 published by TUIK (Turkish Statistical Institute).

<sup>30</sup> The project was called "Literacy Acquisition in Schools in the Context of Migration and Multilingualism" (LAS). It was a cross-linguistic project funded by the Volkswagen Foundation out of Germany. The main concern of LAS was to provide contextual information about children's "schooling" in environments shaped by migration and multilingualism, as are both Turkey and Germany (Sürig, Şimşek, Schroeder, & Boneß, 2016).

## **Qualitative Research and the Interpretive Paradigm**

The analysis of qualitative data rests on inductive and reflexive analytic work. It is inductive because the researcher interprets her “case” proceeding from the data, such as observational field notes, demographic information of the participants, and interview transcripts (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). By working on the pieces of data, the qualitative researcher develops analytic insights leading to new questions about the phenomenon. Furthermore, analysis of the qualitative data builds on how the researcher understands the intentions of social actors who have provided data for the study. Yet, the researcher’s understandings and inferences are connected to her own personal and professional experiences and knowledge. In that sense, the interpretive paradigm of data analysis is also reflexive. The researcher’s own historical, social, and cultural contexts determine how she analyzes the qualitative data. Her context functions as a source for the researcher’s intuitions; that is, both what she sees and what she overlooks have bearing on the data (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000). Accordingly, I describe how my social context as a researcher affected my research design later in this chapter.

### **Research Site**

My research context, called Pınarcık, is one of the poorest and most problematic settlements in Istanbul, with its high illiteracy rate. According to a field report done by the Pınarcık Community Center in 2006, 32% of the Pınarcık population has less than five years of education. This report states that, among the total population of the Pınarcık district, the portion of people who had never attended school amounted to 16% (Şahin & Çağlayan, 2006). The Pınarcık district is also a place where many people from differing ethnic origins have come together. In the Pınarcık field report, nearly half of the respondents (49%) stated that Turkish

was their mother tongue, while the other half (51%) claimed another language, such as Kurdish, Arabic, and Armenian (Şahin & Çağlayan, 2006).

Pınarcık also has a unique status in İstanbul because of its location. Unlike other migrant receiving places, it is located very close to one of the main city centers of İstanbul. Due to its proximity to the city center, a gentrification process is occurring which is restructuring Pınarcık in both its physical and demographic features. Based on the Pınarcık rehabilitation project, old, ruined buildings have been demolished, and the inhabitants have been placed in various suburbs located in the outskirts of the city. The aim of Pınarcık's gentrification is to raise its exchange value on the market by making the place a centre of attraction.

Another feature of Pınarcık is the high number of illegal activities, such as drug dealing, pick-pocketing, and prostitution. Pınarcık has long been the first-stop for migrant families who are not able to afford to set up in a better place. The migrant families residing in the Pınarcık district are among the poorest in İstanbul, and typically suffer from the effects of violence, lack of public services, prejudice, and discrimination (Yılmaz, 2006). Due to the many problems, there is a police station at the entrance to the district and police patrol the district regularly.

The school the focal children were attending was the only public primary school in Pınarcık. It was established in 1970. It has 31 classrooms, 31 teachers, and 927 students in total. The classrooms are typical of any primary grade classrooms in İstanbul, decorated with calendars, children's artwork, Atatürk<sup>31</sup> pictures, as well as the alphabet and number charts.

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<sup>31</sup> Founder of the modern Republic of Turkey.

## Participants

Within the social context of Pınarcık, my nested cases consist of two focal children aged seven, in two different families. Together with those two focal children as case participants, their parents and their first grade teachers were also identified as key participants in this study. Since the focal children lived in extended households, their grandparents, aunts, and cousins were included in observations and interviews.

The participants were selected on the basis of their social and demographic backgrounds (i.e., internal migrant, multilingual families in an impoverished settlement). The foremost criterion for the selection of the focal children was the children's age. Since the observations centered on family dynamics when the children started attending school in the first grade, I recruited focal children who were starting school, at seven years of age<sup>32</sup>. The languages spoken in the family and the education levels of the households were also taken into account during selection, as well as practical considerations such as the families' willingness to participate.

Preliminarily, I found research participants using my personal contacts in the neighborhood. I began with people I already knew within the community, and asked them to refer me to others whom they thought might be appropriate and interested in participating. I contacted the referred families personally. Initial contact with the families was made in the Pınarcık Community Center, where I have worked as a volunteer in the summers since 2010. This community center is a very respected and trusted place in the neighborhood. It has provided families and children with educational, recreational, psychological, and legal support

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<sup>32</sup> In Turkey, children start between the ages of 66 and 84 months. Preschool education is not required before primary school, although it is available in some districts. Since most children start school without any pre-school education, the first couple of months of the first grade are spent with activities that typically found in pre-schools.

since 2006. Since longitudinal studies that rely on families' cooperation over a long period of time might put a burden on families, the participant families were offered an honorarium for their participation. The two selected families lived in the Pınarcık neighborhood and the focal children attended the same public school. The socio-economic composition of the two focal households was similar, with low income, low educational, and low literacy levels. Turkish and Kurdish were spoken simultaneously in the selected homes.

### **Research Process**

The inspiration for this research arose from my own social and intellectual experiences. Before starting the doctoral program at the University of British Columbia, I had already participated in school ethnography research in the same community. In that previous research, I took part in a research team studying the schooling conditions of migrant and multilingual children living in Pınarcık. After having observed what was happening in school, I started wondering what was happening in their homes in the same community. So I formulated a set of research questions which were rather broad, asking questions such as, “why, how and what is happening” in that particular sociocultural context (Purcell-Gates, 2004).

During the first years of my doctoral studies, my initial aim was to study people's home literacy practices in Pınarcık. Bronfenbrenner (2000) reminds us that scientific pursuit necessitates looking at the data to “discover” rather than to “verify” the research hypotheses. Hence, the iterative process of going back and forth between the data, the theoretical frameworks, and the research questions is an imperative challenge in any ethnographic fieldwork (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Purcell-Gates, 2004). While reading the field notes and coding them, together with the transcripts of the interviews, the data “angled” my perspective to focus

especially on how the research participants took positions, and negotiated their identities with one another based on their abilities to read and write. Thus, the initial research questions that guided my data collection developed in different directions. My shifting perspective led me return to the beginning of the project design to revise my theoretical framework and to develop a new set of research questions. In other words, the data spoke for itself by foregrounding power relations in the focal households. Consequently, I included the theoretical framework of critical literacy in order to understand the links between power dynamics, literacy, and identity.

The following research questions I sought to answer in this study include:

1. What kinds of messages related to literacy, multilingualism, and schooling do the focal children receive in the two different immediate contexts (i.e., home and school) during their first year of school?
2. How are the relationships among the focal participants reconstructed when they are confronted by messages about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling?
3. Do school literacies act as a “catalyst” to initiate changes in the focal families; if so, in what ways does this occur?

### **Procedures of Data Collection**

The observations began when the focal children started first grade and continued until the end of the school year. Two focal children and their families were selected based on the language(s) spoken at home (i.e., Turkish and non-Turkish). The data were collected primarily through participant observation in two domains: the household and the community context where there were extracurricular activities centering on literacy. Within the context of socio-cultural perspectives, the two domains of home and community were worthy of observation because they

constituted sites of various literacy practices with a variety of aims and regulations. Thus, the literacy activities of the focal children have been contextualized into the social domains of family, the Pınarcık community, and their school.

In Turkey, the school is the main place for the learning and teaching written language. In the formal school context, children learn to read and write in Turkish based on Western-oriented and secular pedagogical practices. They begin school in first grade, usually without any prior preschool education, and learn the alphabet, reading and writing, and some basic genres during their first year. Therefore, I selected the first grade as the appropriate temporal focus for my study because it is when children are formally taught to read and write for the first time.

**My role as researcher.** Taking on a researcher's role requires lots of complex decisions, since it affects the research design directly (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In studies where data collection is carried out in people's homes, the complexity of locating oneself as a researcher within the context can be even more challenging. First of all, for Middle Eastern people (both Turkish and Kurdish), the "family" is taken to be a highly intimate sphere, into which outsiders are not allowed to enter easily. In Turkey, and particularly in Pınarcık, it is culturally more acceptable to invite a woman who is an outsider into the home than to invite an unknown man. Yet, even as a female researcher, I needed to consider issues such as what to wear, where to sit, and what to say involved intricate decisions, since the opportunity to make connections with my participants also depended on how they viewed me. My regular outfit of jeans and shirts (and no headscarves), for example, was quite different from most of the women in the neighborhood, who wear long skirts, headscarves, and long cardigans due to Islamic and cultural conventions. With my clothing, I looked similar to the teachers of the focal students, who also wore trousers and casual sweaters (without headscarves).

During the day, the houses were full of women and children. Men were usually out, either at work or at the coffeehouses in the neighborhood. Therefore, I mostly came into contact with women who were at home in the daytime. Furthermore, my visits to the focal families caused lots of wonder in the families' networks. During my first visits to the focal homes, relatives and neighbors came over to see me and, most importantly, as the aunt in the Polat Family expressed, "*to judge whether you [the researcher] were a reliable person or not*"<sup>33</sup>. They asked many personal questions, for instance, how much rent I paid, and at what age I got married. These questions were the families' attempts to understand my "context," that is, where I came from, as I was studying theirs. When I asked for their family history and, especially, their migration stories, I also shared my stories with them. It turned out that being a married woman and a mother was an important common ground to share, after all, we were all women living in the Middle East.

To negotiate my role as a researcher in the focal households, language was an important factor. With this in mind, I had taken Kurdish classes for six months before beginning my data collection. People that I contacted in Pınarcık for data collection were surprised when I spoke with them in Kurdish, although my Kurdish was very limited, with some expressions for greetings and everyday communication. The research participants enjoyed correcting my Kurdish pronunciation and teaching me new Kurdish words.

During the visits, the extent to which I participated in the ongoing activities at the research site depended on the type of activity. Most of the time, especially when the children were doing something alone or when they were co-operating with someone from the house, I was just an observer who was "busy" writing her notes (Dyson, 1999). I usually waited for a signal

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<sup>33</sup> enote-S1-2013-11-25

that the research participants were inviting me to join the activity. Most of the time, the focal children came to me to initiate an action, or the adults broached a topic for conversation.

My role as a researcher was not easily grasped by the families, since “researcher” was not a familiar social role for them. For the adult participants, I was a regular, knowledgeable visitor. They would ask me questions of any kind, for example, the starting date of summer vacations, about doctors’ prescriptions, and parenting advice. When the parents were busy, I looked after the younger children, or took the older children home from school. For the focal children, I was someone who was mainly attentive to their activities. When the focal children asked me what I was writing, I simply answered, “What you did,” and read some excerpts from my field notes aloud to them. This explanation seemed to make sense to them since I observed the focal children making the same explanations when neighboring kids asked about me. My handbook in which I wrote down my observation notes was always open to the focal children’s access. They liked scratching on the blank papers in it. Since they were just learning to read and write, they enjoyed it when they were able to recognize letters or their names written by me.

My presence as an observer in the focal homes certainly had an influence on the environment. First of all, it may have influenced the participants’ tendencies to use Turkish or Kurdish. Therefore, when the research participants spoke Turkish or Kurdish to one another, I always tried to notice if this choice was influenced by my presence. I took notes when I doubted about whether the language used by the participants was inherent to the context or not. Then, on my next visit, I asked which language (Turkish or Kurdish) they would use on occasions similar to those that I observed. Moreover, my presence may have also influenced people’s engagement with print. In some cases, the focal children (or even the younger children in the focal

households) used print to initiate an interaction with me. They simply took a pencil and paper and came to me to play a game.

**Types of data collected.** My primary methodology was participant observation, in order to collect five types of data: demographic information of participants, detailed field notes, semi-structured interviews, written artifacts of participants, and visual documentation of texts in public areas (e.g., bus stops, walls, stores). Several semi-structured interviews were also carried out with the focal children, their first-grade teachers, their families, and other members of the community. I did not conduct any language tests to examine the children's language abilities, neither in Turkish nor in their home language.

***Demographic information of participants.*** The demographic data includes the age, marital status, occupation, educational history, and migration history of the participants.

***Fieldnotes.*** Over the course of observation, I observed the first grade children in out-of-school contexts using the ethnographic case study method. The observations started when the focal children started school in September and continued throughout the whole school year until it finished in June. There were regular visits to their households and other environments that the focal participants involved in the study attended, such as religious instruction sessions in a neighbor's house. The duration of the visits lasted two to three hours a week. I observed and wrote up detailed field notes about relevant contexts in which children interacted with any type of written texts, and how this interaction was initiated and sustained by "the rejoinders" (Bakhtin, 1986). I conducted the visits during different periods of the day, distributed over the weekdays, as well as on weekends, to represent the sum of typical literacy activities that the focal children participated in. I also visited the families when the focal children were in school. One

of the aims of collecting this type of data was to elicit information about the types of literacy events children engaged in by themselves and with other people who interacted with the children in various literacy contexts.

During the visits, I paid particular attention to the links between children's home and community literacy activities with other social domains, such as school and religion. By exploring these themes, thoroughly, I hoped to gain a holistic view of how literacy was embedded in the focal children's lives, as well as any possible existing connections between literacy practices at home and at other institutions.

Before each visit, I read my previous field notes and reviewed the issues that I would like to ask the participants about or try to observe. During the visit, I took descriptive notes in a handbook, and after each visit, I compiled my field notes from observational notations. In addition to descriptions of my observations, the field notes also contain my personal reflections, questions that occurred to me out of my observations, and additional comments about how my observations could be related to my study. The purpose of including my interpretations based on the data in the field notes was twofold. First, I intended to construct a detailed account of my observations. Second, I was also keeping a list of insights from my observations to discuss with the research participants afterwards.

***Semi-structured interviews.*** I conducted at least one semi-structured qualitative interview with each participant; that is, with the focal children, their teachers in school, the parents, and other members of the household. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 3 hours. The interviews were audio-recorded for future reference. In cases of interviews in which multilingual family members were not proficient enough to communicate in Turkish or where they wished to

express themselves in their first language, a translator helped me carry out the interviews. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and were used to analyze discourse and relationships.

The following table gives detailed information about the interview data:

Table 4.1: Detailed information about the semi-structured interviews

	Participants	No. of Interviews	Language
Household 1, Polat Family	Mother	2	TUR
	Father	1	TUR
	Focal child	2	TUR
	Grandfather	1	TUR+L1
Household 2, Atay and Evren Families	Mother	2	TUR
	Father	2	TUR
	Focal child	2	TUR
	Aunt 1	1	TUR
	Aunt 2	1	TUR
	Aunt 3	1	TUR
	Grandmother	1	L1
Focal teachers	Mr. Boylan	3	TUR
	Ms. Ersu	3	TUR

***Written artifacts of participants.*** To observe the focal children’s literacy development, I collected all written texts that they encountered at home that were present during my visits and all of their writing and drawings they produced at school. There were basically two types of

written artifacts collected. The first type was the writings and drawings that the focal children produced in the social domain of school. Each month I borrowed their schoolbooks, notebooks, and workbooks and scanned them into the computer. In addition to those materials, the focal children had a school folder in which they put all the handouts they read and wrote in school. Each week, I collected the content of their school folder, scanned them, and gave it back to the families. Second, I took note of all types of written texts that the focal children encountered in their homes. Although I gave each family a separate folder to collect texts produced and encountered in the community, it did not work effectively. So, I looked for any out-of-school texts in the focal homes in each visit. I asked the focal participants where they got it and how they used it. I also took pictures of the texts present in focal homes.

The school writings of the focal children were not included in the main analysis because what children wrote in their notebooks were mainly copies of letters, syllables, and words that they learned during the first year. They were only used to support one of the arguments regarding construction of relationships among focal participants (see “Results and Interpretive Discussion” in Chapter 6). When the focal children started to produce written texts in the second school term, they did not engage in writing as a composing activity (with a communicative intent addressed to an audience), but rather, copied existing texts from schoolbooks. Thus, the text “writing activities” in the first grade in Pınarcık school involved only the scribing aspects (surface features) of writing rather than meaning-making. In the first focal home, I did not observe the first focal child Samet write anything other than his schoolwork (rote assignments). Different than Samet, although the second focal child, Zilan, produced a few written artifacts (such as, a shopping list – a school assignment – or a “thank you” note for me), these seemed to be peripheral rather than central data.

## **Data Analysis**

This study, being a qualitative case study, undoubtedly implies particular methods of data analysis to answer my research questions. Marshall and Rossman (2010) define data analysis as “the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data” (p. 207). In qualitative data analysis, the strategy of analyzing the data is defined as being interpretive/subjectivist rather than being technical and standardized since “qualitative data are exceedingly complex and not readily convertible into standard measurable units” (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; p. 108).

The analysis of qualitative data typically starts from the very beginning of data collection as researchers adjust their observation strategies according to their initial understandings of their case and the participants’ perspectives and attitudes. Yet, the initial understandings do not provide everlasting categories, but instead, need to be constantly checked and modified during the data collection process. The fundamental analytical strategy should be discovering meaningful classes of events, activities, and ideas. Eventually, in this pursuit, researchers connect classes by articulating the linkages among them and start to form sets of interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Merriam, 2014; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973).

To construct a consistent interpretation of the data, content thematic analysis of the Discourses with “a capital D” (Gee, 1996) has been recruited as the primary method of analysis in this study. Analyzing Discourse with “a capital D” is simply defined by Gee (2005) as “the analysis of language-in-use” (p. 5). It offers an appropriate method to study how language is used by the focal participants to perform social identities and social activities. By going back and forth between language and its context of use, a researcher can gain knowledge of the

context, as well as understand how the speakers and the listeners assign meaning to it (Gee, 2005).

In the following section, I describe the five phases of analytic procedures I used to look at themes in the content, including: (a) organizing the data, (b) identifying themes, (c) coding the data, (d) testing and searching for alternative explanations, and (e) reporting the results of the analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Although I explain how I have dealt with the data in these five phases, sequentially, below, by nature of the qualitative analysis, most of the phases overlap and were carried out simultaneously.

**Organizing the data.** First, all data were uploaded into Atlas.ti (2010), a software program developed to code and analyze different kinds of qualitative data such as field notes, pictures and transcripts of interviews, as a bundle. Before uploading to Atlas.ti, I transcribed all the interviews, following the conventions stated in the following table.

Table 4.2: Transcription conventions

(...)	Three dots inside a parenthesis indicate a short pause.
[text]	My explanations for clarity are given in square brackets.
<i>TEXT</i>	The words emphasized by the speaker are given in uppercase.

This phase also includes reading the data repeatedly to become familiar with the events and the focal participants' activities and statements. During the reading process, the categories or the classes of events, activities, and ideas started to appear with their distinctive properties which characterize them.

**Identifying themes.** The analytic process of identifying themes in the data requires “questioning the data and reflecting on the conceptual framework,” simultaneously (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; p. 214). In this phase, I used content thematic analysis of the Discourses as used with “a capital D” by Gee (2005). It is especially helpful to analyze the dynamic and interactive nature of language; hence, providing an awareness of higher ordered themes as patterns in the data (McCarthy & Carter, 1994). My analysis is based on Gee’s classifications of building domains of language (Gee, 2005). First, people use language to establish certain things as significant and worthy of communicating, while leaving other things in the background. Second, language functions as a signifier of the activities that people engage in; for example, one speaks differently when opening a meeting, versus engaging in an informal conversation before the meeting. Furthermore, individuals take on various identities and roles, such as the chair of a committee or a colleague in an academic circle, depending on the social situations that they operate in at different times. Language is for building and representing these identities, as well as communicating them to other people. Fourth, the way that people use language also signals the sort of social relationship that the interlocutors want to build, or have already built, with one another. One can call someone either by name or by her title, such as “Professor.” The speaker’s choice is determined by the type of social relation that the speaker has with her partners. Moreover, since the users of language actively design their tools of communication depending on the social situation, the researcher must also account for change and transformation as vital aspects of language-in-action. Language use also conveys politics; that is the speaker’s perspective about what is “normal,” “valuable,” “inappropriate,” or “high status or low status,” and so forth. Moreover, the language also functions to connect and make several things relevant; it also serves to break the connections among things that had been accepted as relevant. Lastly,

different sign systems (e.g., Turkish vs. Kurdish, school language vs. everyday language, images vs. words) can be promoted or disfavored via language. Similarly, people use language to build prestige for different types of knowledge or beliefs – or distinct ways of believing and knowing – over disadvantaged ones.

The analytic perspective derived from Gee (2005) has helped me identify the social functions of language in the focal participants' daily lives. Categories and themes generated from the data were used to determine the direction of further explorations.

**Coding the data.** The coding system adapted here was what Dyson and Genishi (2005) define as “open coding.” Open coding starts with the researcher’s descriptions of patterns of behavior and words or phrases that seem relevant to the study. The descriptions are kept in a running list to be further developed into a more focused coding system. Then the researcher reorganizes the descriptive categories by eliminating, collapsing, and extending them, as well as connecting them hierarchically. The next step is a more focused coding whereby the evolved subcategories based on descriptive information are identified and compared with one another. The last step is the analytic coding. Because certain categories frequently repeat, the researcher recognizes that there are common patterns suggested by the data. Yet the analytic coding is not only a step to represent how things fit together in the context of the study. It also aims at finding out the contradictory or negative instances of the emerging pattern, thus far (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

**Searching for alternative explanations.** Gee (2005) reminds us of the necessity to be open to finding evidence that might contradict generally favored views. In accordance with Gee’s suggestions, I tried to note other ways of saying and doing things, both in the interviews

and in my observation notes. For example, some focal family members believed that “*the success of a child depends how well you intimidate (frighten) her*” (enote-S2-2014-02-13). Zilan’s aunt, Berfin, for example, thought that praising children by saying “*you are very hardworking, you did a good job*” is harmful, because those praises would boost the children’s self-esteem and cause them to quit studying. Similarly, Nurcan occasionally threatened Zilan saying, “*If your school report card will be bad, do not ever come to home*” (enote-S2-2014-01-13). Furthermore, I searched through the data for any instances that challenged my interpretations. In this way, I was able to generate further questions about why my participants did and said a particular thing, rather than doing and saying something in an alternative way. New perspectives derived from of searching the data for contradictory and alternative explanations were incorporated into the larger picture of the case. This phase of analysis particularly guided me to see which parts of the data were central and useful in answering the research questions, as well.

**Reporting the analysis.** Reporting the data analysis cannot be distinguished from the ways in which researchers analyze their studied cases (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). In reporting the data, I have included the raw data (both the excerpts from my field notes and statements of the focal participants) as much as possible. When I did this, I used italics for direct quotations taken from the interviews and my field notes. At the end of each quotation, I indicated the source of the data in parenthesis. When the quotation was taken from an ethnographic field note, I used the code “enote,” followed by the code of the focal family and the date. For instance, “enote-S2-2014-01-21” indicates that the excerpt comes from my field notes about the second focal family (i.e., Zilan’s family) written on January 21, 2014. When the quotation was taken from an interview, I indicated that with a code “int” followed by the speaker and the data. For

instance, “int-S1fat-062014” indicates that the quotation was taken from the interview with the father of the first focal family (i.e., Samet’s father) recorded in June, 2014.

The challenge was translating my participants words stated in Turkish faithfully into English. I tried to preserve the wording and the sentence structure in the original statements as much as possible. As a non-native user of English, I struggled when word-to-word translation from Turkish to English did not make sense to me, or when I felt the speaker’s gist was lost in verbatim transcription. In such cases, I chose to change the wording or the sentence structure slightly to represent the speaker’s message accurately. Luckily, I worked with a Canadian editor who edited and proofread my dissertation. She had lived in Turkey for five years, and knew enough Turkish for translation purposes. She checked my translations to see if the two versions matched correctly in terms of the message expressed in Turkish.

### **Issues in Critically Analyzing Qualitative Research**

Since qualitative studies mainly rely on “interpretative data analysis,” it is a must to find ways to defend the value and the logic of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Lincoln and Guba (1985) developed four basic criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of the project in accordance with the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm. These are: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. In addition to Lincoln and Guba’s criteria, I also discuss the ethical considerations, as independent criteria, to defend the soundness of my study.

**Credibility.** The credibility of the findings refers to correct identification and description of the studied case. The credibility standard substitutes for internal validity, which is defined as the match between reality and the research findings. However, although the focus is on the

reality of the findings, reality is not a fixed construct. It depends on “multiple constructions of how people have experienced a particular phenomenon, how they have made meaning of their lives, or how they have come to understand certain processes” (Merriam, 2014; p. 214).

According to Merriam (2014), the credibility, or internal validity, of research is a complicated issue and therefore can be ensured by following several strategies like (a) triangulation, (b) member checks, (c) long-time engagement in data collection, (d) reflexivity, and finally, (e) peer examination.

***Triangulation.*** In this study, I attempted to ensure triangulation by using multiple methods of data collection. I took extensive field notes during my observations, and did at least one semi-structured interview with each of the focal participants. I collected the focal children’s writing and reading materials, in addition to all of the print materials that I observed in focal homes. These multiple sources of data helped me to compare and cross check my interpretations out of the data.

***Member checks.*** The strategy of member checking is also called respondent validation. It is defined as referring back to the focal participants to ask for their feedback on the emerging interpretations of the researcher (Merriam, 2014). Throughout the course of this study, I noted down the interpretations that I had reached before each visit and tried to create opportunities to discuss my interpretations with the focal participants. This helped me to rule out any possible misinterpretations and to receive their perspectives in a focused angle. At the end of the study, I also presented them with a synopsis of my study and my findings. The focal families were especially interested in how they could contribute to the academic success of their children, and we mainly discussed the different perspectives of the focal teachers and the focal community.

***Long-time engagement in data collection.*** This refers to long-term observation of the case in its natural setting in order to understand focal participants' perspectives (Merriam, 2014). My observations started in September, 2013 and lasted until the end of June, 2014; so I collected data from the focal participants' life contexts for ten months. At the end of data collection, I had 162 pages of observation field notes and over 19 hours of interview recordings. Merriam (2014) states that adequate engagement in data collection also necessitates a purposeful search for alternative explanations or negative evidence. Thus, during the data collection period, I looked out for any explanations contrary to my interpretations. During the member checks, I also occasionally tried to discuss any alternative interpretations with the focal participants.

***Reflexivity.*** The fourth strategy to ensure credibility of the findings is reflexivity, which is also known as identifying the researcher's positions. Lincoln and Guba (2000) define reflexivity as, "the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher" (as cited in Merriam, 2014). In the sections entitled "My role as a researcher" and "Researcher bias", I explained the similarities and differences between my research population and myself in terms of social class, education, and ethnicity. Since the analysis rests on the researcher's subjective interpretations, it is essential for the researchers to think about how her biases, assumptions, and background influence her perspectives.

***Peer examination.*** Through this strategy, the links between the raw data and the emerging analysis are reviewed by a colleague. The reviewer colleague may be inside the field or new to it. In this study, I greatly benefited from my supervisor's feedback on my initial analysis. I traveled to UBC to work closely with her on my analyses over a period of several days. Issues of coding and themes were resolved by two of us as we coded many parts of the data together. I also met with Turkish scholars who work in the Pınarcık community, to discuss

the data and my interpretations, on a regular basis. In these ways, I was able to establish strong inter-rater reliability.

**Transferability.** The transferability condition, also known as external validity, refers to the application of the findings to other contexts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that transferability of the findings to other situations is a condition that can be decided by the reader. To guarantee that the readers determine the transferability of the findings, the investigator needs to provide a detailed description of the data. Therefore, in the findings chapters, I have provided the readers with “thick descriptions” of my research context to help them make decisions regarding whether the findings are applicable to other contexts as well. Quotes from the focal participants were included as much as possible to enable readers to follow the analysis and argument.

Another strategy for checking the transferability condition is purposefully sampling typical members of the studied case (Merriam, 2014). Both of the focal families were selected because they resemble the majority of the families in Pınarcık. Although there were some differences between the focal households, they shared lots of similarities such as lacking much formal education and being low-income extended families, and both migrated from the same place at the same time.

**Dependability.** The dependability or reliability condition asks the question if repeating the study would yield the same results or not. In qualitative studies, replicating the studies with similar results, hence establishing the reliability in the traditional sense, may be problematic because a qualitative researcher tries to describe the world based on how people interpret the circumstances. Since there are many different ways of interpreting events, and since the

fieldworker cannot make the same circumstances happen twice, there are no ways to repeat the same study exactly. Therefore, the main question that a qualitative study needs to ask is, “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2014; p. 221). That is why the term dependability is preferred to make sure that the findings make sense, and that they are dependable and consistent with the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Similar to the credibility condition, the dependability condition also requires triangulation of data from different sources, peer examination, and reflexivity (Merriam, 2014). Since I collected the data over a long period, the data were rich in terms of the inclusion of various accounts of the ways in which the focal participants interpreted their social contexts and engaged in activities as part of their social life. Thus, for the analysis, I only included the instances that occurred at least twice to ensure that the findings were consistent and dependable.

**Confirmability.** The confirmability conditions correspond to the objectivity of the findings. Confirmability means that the findings need to be confirmed by other researchers as well. The biases derived from the subjective position of the researcher should be removed, to lead ultimately to the implications from the data. To increase the confirmability of the findings, an audit trail is suggested (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). To ensure the audit trail, I kept detailed field notes which included every detail of data collection, emerging coding decisions, and preliminary analysis. Those records were open to discussion with other people for peer examination.

**Ethics.** For qualitative studies that focus on non-dominant communities, the ethical stance of the researcher has an overall impact on the trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam, 2014). Although ethical issues particularly arise during the process of collecting the data and reporting the findings, the privacy of research participants and their protection from any possible

harm should be considered rigorously from the beginning of the study. Thus, in this study, I maintained confidentiality by ensuring that the names of the participants were not revealed. All names, including the names of places, were replaced immediately with pseudonyms on all documents. The pseudonyms were used all the time, both during and after the study, to refer to places, focal children, their friends, their family members, and other people from the community who participated in this research. Another ethical consideration is that the relationship between the participants and the researcher rests on full consent of the participants about their participation in the study. Therefore, the full consent of the participants was obtained before beginning the study and renewed in the middle of the data collection period, to ensure that the participating families and the focal children would continue to participate in the study based on their free will, without any coercion of any kind.

## **Summary**

This chapter has described the methodology and research design of my study through the following sections: research methodology as an ethnographic case study; the description of qualitative research and the interpretive paradigm; procedures of data collection, including information about the research site, participants, research process, my role as a researcher, types of data collected; and data analysis. Finally, the issues in critically analyzing the qualitative research have been presented along with a detailed description of how the trustworthiness of the findings was ensured in this study.

## **Chapter 5: Profiles of the Focal Children with their Families and Teachers**

In this chapter, I construct a descriptive narrative of the focal children and their families in order to represent the contradictions and complexities of their real lives. My purpose in doing so is to provide the reader with a “thick” description of the case, so that the reader can draw his or her own conclusions and arrive at different interpretations about the implications of this case (Geertz, 1973; Flyvbjerg, 2006). This chapter is the first of the two results chapters, since, as Flyvbjerg (2006) stated, “The case story is itself the result” (p. 238) which cannot be summarized or generalized. It starts with a description of the focal children: (1) Samet and (2) Zilan. I then continue by describing their households: (1) the Polat family, and (2) the Atay and Evren families. After describing the focal families in detail, I provide the background on the focal children’s teachers, including their personal literacy histories and teaching pedagogies.

Each research participant appears in the following accounts to the degree in which they play a key role in the interactions with the focal children. Furthermore, the function that each participant plays in regulating the literacy activities within the household determines their position in my narratives of the families.

### **Description of the Focal Child, Samet, and the Polat Family**

In my account of the first focal family, the Polats, the mother Fatma appears as a protagonist since she is the main person who organizes all the family activities, including Samet’s interactions with print most of the time. As a consequence, Fatma appears as the main character when I describe the Polat family, and my narrative of Polat family seems to be built on Fatma equally to (or more than) the focal child, Samet.

**Focal child, Samet.** Samet (7), with his short dark brown hair and the witty smile on his face, was the oldest son of the Polat family. He was not very tall and quite thin. He looked young compared to other children of the same age. His mother, Fatma, always complained that Samet did not eat enough. To make him eat more, his mother still fed him with a spoon. She excused this with a shy smile on her face: *“People keep telling me that I should stop feeding him. But he won’t eat at all if I let him eat by himself”* (enote-S1-2013-11-25<sup>34</sup>)

Both his mother and Samet’s first grade teacher described Samet as a clever and accomplished boy. Samet liked playing games with his school friends and watching cartoons on TV. He got along with his sister, Beyza (4), very well. Samet was fond of junk food, and according to his mother, that is why his front teeth decayed very early.

Samet’s mother named him after a respected Muslim person who lived in Yemen in the sixth century. Fatma was charmed by his story and the hero’s love for his own mother; therefore, she gave Samet his name, wishing that her son would have the same love and respect for her.

**Samet’s household.** Samet’s house was located on a sloped street next to one of the busiest main roads in Istanbul. The street was narrow enough for clotheslines to be strung across the old houses on the two sides. One block from Samet’s street, all of the houses were evacuated as a result of the gentrification of the Pınarcık<sup>35</sup> district<sup>36</sup>. Although it was forbidden to enter

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<sup>34</sup> From my ethnographic fieldnotes

<sup>35</sup> Pınarcık is used as a pseudonym for the district.

<sup>36</sup> I have already described the current gentrification process in Pınarcık in the methodology chapter. Just to repeat briefly here, Pınarcık is a unique place, since it is very close to the city center. Now it is a slum, but the government intention is to make the place a new commercial zone with shopping centers, luxury apartments, and hotels, by tearing down the buildings in this neighborhood. The low-income inhabitants, of course, are being forced to move to the outskirts of Istanbul.

these old buildings, Syrian refugees have settled in these houses, where they have found shelter. In addition to the Syrian refugees, several street gangs also occupied some of the empty buildings. With its current composition, this area has become one of the most problematic districts of Pınarcık, where street prostitutes wait for clients, Syrian children play in ruins, and street gangs and their big dogs wait outside the empty buildings.

Samet's family, especially his mother, occasionally mentioned that they did not feel secure in Pınarcık, and that they lived in fear. Therefore, she did not let her children play outside, and she always accompanied Samet on his way to school. The following observation is an example of the situation in Pınarcık:

*When I arrived at Samet's building, I called Samet's mother to open the building door for me. Since the building does not have a doorbell, Samet's mother, Fatma, came downstairs to open the door. After she took me in, she explained that they started to lock the building door because three days ago the police had found a female corpse in the garbage container next to their house. All three families in the building were terrified by this incident. (enote- S1-2014-06-06)*

Samet's building was an old three-storey building, with only one apartment on each floor. The owner of the building was Samet's grandfather, who also lived with the Polat family. The ground floor is a rental, which provides Samet's family with extra income. One of Samet's uncles lives with his family on the second floor. Samet lives on the third floor, at the top, with his extended family.

Samet's household consisted of seven people: mother Fatma (24), father Ayhan (27), two children, grandfather Tahir (73), grandmother Narin (68) and a bachelor uncle Azad. The family lived in a rather narrow apartment, which was approximately 40 meters square. In the apartment, there was a living room with a small balcony, a very narrow kitchen, and one bedroom with a

second balcony. In between the living room and the bedroom, there was a hallway. There was no toilet or bathroom inside the house. The family used a small toilet located by the stairway on their floor.

There were no sofas or tables in the living room, just a TV on a drawer and one cupboard. The family sits on mattresses on the floor. For meals, the mother lays a tablecloth on the floor, and they all sit on the floor around the tablecloth. The family members come together in the living room to eat dinner and watch TV in the evenings. During the night, the grandparents and the uncle sleep in the living room. This multifunctional living room reflects the inner structuring of traditional rural houses in Anatolia<sup>37</sup>.

The apartment door opens to a hallway. In the hallway, there is a refrigerator and a large closet for the bedding and some household goods. Since there is not enough space in the kitchen, the mother keeps some kitchen utensils in the hallway. This area functions like a workspace for the mother. She prepares the food in the hallway but does the cooking in the kitchen. She also hangs laundry inside the hallway. The hallway is also used for praying. Five times a day, the adults in the family perform their prayers in this hallway.

The parents sleep in the bedroom with their two children. There is a double bed for the parents. The children sleep on the floor next to the bed. There is one large wardrobe where the clothing and some of their personal belongings are stored. Samet's books and study materials are kept in the wardrobe as well. There is also a small chest of drawers with a mirror in the bedroom. The washing machine has been installed in the bedroom. In addition to the TV in the

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<sup>37</sup> Anatolia is the name of the peninsula between the Middle East and Europe.

living room, the family has a second TV in the bedroom. The children usually use this one to watch cartoons when the adults are watching the TV in the living room.

**Migration background.** The Polat family is a Kurdish family from a small village in Bahe<sup>38</sup> (a city in southeastern Turkey). The father and mother are first cousins; the mother is married to her maternal uncle's son (i.e., Fatma's maternal uncle's son), which is quite common among rural families in Turkey. Consequently, Fatma and Ayhan's migration and cultural backgrounds are similar.

Both Fatma and Ayhan moved to İstanbul 21 years ago when they were young. Their families migrated when their village was destroyed during the armed clashes between Kurdish separatist groups and the Turkish army. Tahir (Samet's grandfather) said: *"There was no life there"* (int-S1grfat-042014<sup>39</sup>). First, the grandfather came to İstanbul for work; then his family joined him. Samet's father and his family have been living in Pınarcık ever since. Samet's mother's family moved to another district of İstanbul. After Fatma and Ayhan were married, Fatma moved into her husband's house in Pınarcık.

Samet's grandfather longed for home and he wished they could move back to their hometown one day. According to him, the weather and the air in their village were good for their health; therefore, Tahir and his wife visited their village occasionally. However, they had to live in İstanbul because of their health problems, as Tahir said, *"My wife has been sick for 37 years. It is impossible to visit the hospital every time you need to when you live in a village. Therefore we stay in İstanbul"* (int-S1grfat-042014). According to Samet's mother, *"Elders*

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<sup>38</sup> Bahe is a pseudonym for the Polat family's home town.

<sup>39</sup> From the interview with the grandfather

want to live in their home village but the youngsters want to stay in the city” (enote-S1-2014-03-18).

The mother liked living in the city, although she would prefer to live in another district of İstanbul. On many accounts, she told me that she hated Pınarcık: *I am sick of it here. Pınarcık is like a cesspool. I wish Pınarcık would be ruined so that I could get out of here* (enote-S1-2014-05-28). Yet all of her husband’s friends lived in Pınarcık, so Ayhan did not want to move away.

**Personal literacy histories of the household.** Samet’s grandfather spent his childhood in the village where there was no school at the time. Therefore, he needed to go to another village, which was quite far away. The grandfather once told me that there was no transportation and the school children had to walk for two hours to get to the school. He started going to school, but as the weather got cold during the winter, it was impossible for him to walk that far. Samet’s grandmother was not sent to school because girls’ education had not been a priority for many families in Turkey<sup>40</sup>. Especially in rural areas, girls are kept home from school to help with household chores and they are married off at an early age. When the grandmother was nine years old, she married the grandfather, who was then eleven<sup>41</sup>.

Ayhan and Fatma did not go to school even though their families had already moved to İstanbul when they were of age to attend. As the economic conditions of both of the families worsened in the city, Ayhan and Fatma were put to work in informal sectors for extra income. Although it was banned, they were both selling bottled water in the streets when they were six or

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<sup>40</sup> According to the UNICEF reports (2015) there is an enrollment gap between boys and girls in Turkey; therefore, Turkey has been one of the countries selected by UNICEF to encourage the acceleration of gender equality in basic education.

<sup>41</sup> The grandmother was given as a bride exchange known as “*berdel*” when her brother was married off to the sister of the grandfather. Basically, the two families exchanged their daughters through marriage.

seven years old. After Ayhan was arrested by the police, his family gave him to a textile workshop as a child worker. Fatma was hit by a car while she was selling bottled water in the middle of a busy intersection and she spent several months at home, recovering. After a while, Fatma's family was also forced to send her to work at the textile factory where she worked until she got married. After Ayhan and Fatma married, Fatma quit her job because Ayhan did not think that it was appropriate for married women to work. Ayhan still works in the clothing industry, yet he does not have a steady income. The workshop in which he works is closed during the winter, and Ayhan is not paid for the months he is off.

Although Fatma did not go to school, she learned how to read by herself. She learned the alphabet when she was working in a textile factory. When Samet started school, she developed her reading skills with him by practicing Samet's phonics drills. Fatma's writing skills were not developed since she does not write at all. She did not feel confident enough when she needed to write Samet's name on his school materials but asked for help from her neighbors. Similarly, I observed that she was not able to write her own name at Samet's school, but asked someone else to write it for her. In the beginning of the school year, she was able to read well enough to check Samet's homework. She could notice when Samet read out individual words incorrectly. However, as Samet's literacy skills developed through the end of the first term in December, Fatma experienced difficulties helping Samet with his homework, especially in text-based activities.

Samet's father, Ayhan, told his father that he wanted to go to school when he was seven or eight years old. The family had already moved to İstanbul but his father did not have the economic resources to pay Ayhan's school expenses. Ayhan said, *"I have never rebelled against my parents for all the hardships. I worked hard, and tried to support my family"* (int-S1fat-

062014). He learned how to read somewhat during his compulsory military service. He learned how to form and divide words into syllables, which helped him a lot now. He was not good at silent reading. For example, he said he could read newspapers only by sounding out the words aloud. He spent his evenings in an Internet café, and came home only after the children were asleep, *“I am not fond of home. I don’t know. I like drinking tea, chatting with my friends, and smoking, yet I don’t smoke at home. I have never smoked at home”* (int-S1fat-062014). He was an active user of the Internet and spent approximately five hours a day at an Internet café. He watched videos on YouTube, listened to music, and messaged his friends via his Facebook account. Although he described his writing skills as not good enough, he did not experience problems writing messages on a computer. The keyboard made writing easier for him, *“I cannot normally write with a pen. It is too difficult to write the letters with a pen on a paper. But, hitting the letter keys on the keyboard really helps me writing. And I can syllabify words, that also helps”* (int-S1fat-062014).

Samet’s youngest uncle, Azad, did not receive adequate education either. His parents did not send him to school until he was eleven. When he started first grade at eleven years old, he did not want to continue because he felt awkward among other first graders who were seven years old. His teacher barely taught him any reading and writing and eventually he dropped out before the fifth grade without a primary school diploma. He works as a janitor at an ice-skating rink owned by the municipality. He only had a temporary position at work, since getting a permanent position requires a school diploma. Azad thought that his future was determined by his parents’ reluctance to send him to school (enote-S1-2013-12-25).

When Samet reached school age, his grandparents did not want to send him school, thinking that Samet was too young to start school. Fatma was not able to object to her father-in-

law's decision, although she disagreed with him. Uncle Azad and Samet's other uncle who lived downstairs convinced the grandfather that Samet had to start school at the age of seven like other children. When Samet finally started school, he was the only one in the family who had the chance of receiving a proper education.

**Household daily routine.** A normal weekday at the Polats house starts at around eight a.m. Fatma wakes Samet up for school and prepares his breakfast. After breakfast, she takes him to school. When Fatma comes back, the rest of the family wakes up. Fatma prepares another breakfast for the family. In one of our interviews, Fatma told me that she would like to go to the writing and reading classes offered at the Pınarcık Community Center in the morning. Yet her in-laws did not allow her to go because of her duty to prepare breakfast for the family in the morning. After breakfast, Fatma spends time doing the house chores until Samet gets back from school. When she has a few hours to spare, she goes to her neighbor in the same apartment to learn to read Mawlid. Mawlid is a religious book that tells the life story of the Islamic prophet, Muhammed. The language of Mawlid is Kurdish but it is written in the Arabic alphabet; therefore, Fatma needed instruction in order to read it. Samet's school ends at two o'clock. Fatma goes to the school to take Samet home. Usually she does the shopping when she is out picking Samet up. Wherever she goes either to a neighbor or to Samet's school, she takes her daughter Beyza with her since the grandparents do not want Beyza left at home with them. After school, Samet and Beyza have their lunch while watching cartoons on the TV. While the children spend the whole afternoon watching television, Fatma cooks dinner. Samet's homework time starts at around five p.m. Fatma shuts off the TV and helps Samet with his homework; they continue until dinnertime. When Samet does not have homework, he visits his uncle who lives downstairs, to play with his cousins. The family eats dinner at around eight p.m.

After dinner, the adults watch the TV in the living room. The children do not want to watch adult programs; therefore, Fatma switches the TV on for them in the bedroom where they watch cartoons until their bedtime. Since the Polat family does not have a computer in their home, the father, Ayhan, and uncle Azad go to an Internet café after dinner, to go online. When they are out, they come home very late, at approximately one a.m. Fatma did not like her husband spending the evenings in an Internet café, saying, “*This is our biggest problem. I don’t like that at all. I am angry at him because of this*” (enote-S1-2013-11-29). She complained that Ayhan mostly came home very late, after the children were asleep, and did not spend time with the children (enote-S1-2013-12-13).

Bedtime for Samet and Beyza is around ten p.m. The children first sleep in their parents’ bed. Fatma gets into the bed with her children to tell them tales. These tales are usually Fatma’s made-up stories. She also tells tales that her father used to tell her when she was a child. Although Fatma’s father used to tell her tales in Kurdish, she translated her father’s Kurdish tales into Turkish while telling them to her children. I asked Fatma why she did not prefer to tell the tales in their original language, Kurdish. She answered, “*They [the children] wouldn’t understand the tales if I told them in Kurdish*” (enote-S1-2014-05-28).

After the children fall asleep, Fatma sits alone in the hallway and reads the Muslim holy book, the Quran. She also studies the pages she has learned so far from the Mawlid. According to Fatma, nighttime is the best time for her to do the religious readings. While the children are sleeping and the family is watching TV in the living room, nobody disturbs her and she can concentrate on her reading. When it is time for the family to sleep, Fatma lays out the beds, transfers the children to a futon bed in the bedroom, and finally goes to sleep after everyone else.

**First language/second language attitudes in the Polat's household.** The Polat family is bilingual. The grandparents spoke mostly in Kurdish, and the children spoke in Turkish. The parents communicated with one another, as well as with their children in Turkish. They used Kurdish while talking to the grandparents.

Grandmother Narin does not speak Turkish. Everybody said that Narin did not know Turkish, yet during one of our conversations with the grandfather Tahir, Narin interrupted us to comment on what Tahir was saying. Although we were talking in Turkish, Narin spoke Kurdish to us, yet Tahir answered her back in Turkish. Based on this evidence, I think that she can understand Turkish but does not speak it. Even though I did not observe any verbal exchanges between Samet and Narin, Fatma reported that the children spoke in Kurdish when talking to their grandmother, Narin. Yet, based on Fatma's accounts, it can be concluded that the content of the communication between Samet and Narin is limited. In Fatma's words: *Especially Samet speaks Kurdish to his grandmother when there is a message from us such as – 'my mother is downstairs' or 'do you want something to drink?' Apart from that, Samet does not know many words in Kurdish* (enote-S1-2014-05-28).

Grandfather Tahir was able to communicate in Turkish. He began to learn Turkish when he started school, and improved after having migrated to Istanbul. During the interview that I did with him, he preferred to speak with me in Turkish although a Kurdish-Turkish translator was also present. According to the translator, who is also from a bilingual family living in the Pınarcık community, Tahir's Turkish level was "good." Yet, I occasionally felt that I was not able to follow what he was saying to me. This could be partly due to his Turkish. When talking in Kurdish, he translated some Kurdish expressions directly into Turkish, which did not make sense when said in Turkish. In addition to the language differences, I also think that his

rhetorical strategy is different from what I am used to. Although it has not been studied so far, I believe that Kurdish has a different rhetoric than Turkish. Moreover, as a Doctor of Philosophy candidate, I am deeply imbued with the written culture. In contrast, Tahir, who did not go to school, communicated his message to me by using the codes of oral culture specific to Kurdish<sup>42</sup>. I suspect that the contrast between the written culture personalized in me, and Tahir's oral culture, made communication more difficult between us. Unfortunately, Tahir had not passed on such cultural practices of communication to his grandchildren since there are not many verbal interactions between the children and the grandfather in Kurdish. The Kurdish-Turkish translator, who is also a neighbor of the Polat family, confirmed that Tahir states so in Kurdish as well. Thus, she translates from Tahir's words, "*There is not much conversation between them, just swapping*" (int-S1grfat-042014<sup>43</sup>).

Fatma reported that she spoke with her husband and her brother-in-law in Turkish all the time. She said, "*We got used to it that way*" (enote-S1-2013-12-13). This is also why Samet's parents talk to their children in Turkish. She also said that her father knew Turkish very well, and her mother sometimes speaks Turkish and sometimes Kurdish. Yet, Fatma loves talking to her mother in Kurdish, saying, "*I don't know why*" (enote-S1-2013-12-13). She uses both Turkish and Kurdish with her sisters, brothers, and neighbors. During my observations, Fatma used Turkish all the time when speaking to her children. When I asked her whether she wanted her children to speak Kurdish, she answered, "*I want them to learn Kurdish as well so as they not to forget Kurdish*" (enote-S1-2013-12-13). Based on my observations, I conclude that Fatma's Turkish speaking skills were quite developed although she had a strong Kurdish accent. Fatma

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<sup>42</sup> Since I could not understand the content fully, I did not include it in the analysis.

<sup>43</sup> The interview data is referred as "int-PARTICIPANT CODE-DATE"

confirmed this by saying, *“I used to watch lots of TV before I got married. I always used to watch Turkish TV series and celebrity gossip programs on the Turkish national channels. That’s why, I think, my Turkish is better than most people around me”* (enote-S1-2013-12-13).

I observed that Samet and Beyza spoke Turkish all the time. According to the mother’s accounts, Beyza could understand Kurdish but did not ever speak it. According to the grandfather, only the grandparents spoke Kurdish to the children; therefore, the children used Turkish more often. Grandfather Tahir said, *“Samet prefers talking in Turkish because Samet couldn’t get his tongue around Kurdish words”* (int-S1grfat-042014). According to the grandfather, Samet’s Kurdish would be better if he had been spoken to in Kurdish since birth. As a result, the communication between the children and the grandparents is restricted. He said, *“That is Samet’s father and mother’s fault. They have never talked Kurdish to their children. If they talked to them in Kurdish, we would be able to understand each other better now”* (int-S1grfat-042014). Fatma stated that Samet preferred not to speak Kurdish because of his very limited Kurdish vocabulary. Therefore, Samet preferred to speak Turkish.

During my visits, I observed that both Fatma and the children utter strange and incorrect Turkish expressions from time to time. For example, in one of my interviews, Samet concluded most of his answers by saying something like, *“This is all I want to say.”* Yet, his expression for saying so in Turkish was rather ungrammatical and meaningless (int-S1-122013). He said:

(1) *Bu kadar sorum tek var*<sup>44</sup>

*[This much question-1ST PERSON POSSESSIVE only exist-3RD PERSON SINGULAR]*

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<sup>44</sup> Since this is ungrammatical in Turkish I decided to give it in Turkish with its gloss translation.

Instead, one possible answer that is close to Samet's construction could have been "*Cevabım bu kadar*<sup>45</sup>" [*My answer-1ST PERSON POSSESSIVE this much*].

The family preferred watching Turkish television channels for the news and television series. The children watched cartoons from Turkish channels all the time. They frequently watched the Kurdish channels to listen to Kurdish music. In addition to the music, the video clips of Kurdish music on TV appealed to the family a great deal, since the video clips presented a wide variety of themes ranging from pastoral scenes from the family's hometown, to love stories in big cities. Moreover, video clips also presented stories of major historical events in Kurdish history such as wars, massacres, and mass migrations. In this respect, video clips provide people with ways to connect to their history and cultural heritage.

**Samet's school performance and studying.** Samet usually did his homework in the bedroom. He had a small folding desk that could be set up in any room at home. Most of the time, he wrote his homework on the folding desk, but sometimes he did his homework on the bed, or on the floor. When it was study time, Fatma set up the folding desk in the bedroom for Samet, and usually stayed with him until he finished his studies. His sister, Beyza, liked being with Samet during his study time and imitated her brother when Samet was writing. She lay on the floor, flipped through Samet's folder, and scribbled on her brother's handout sheets.

Since Samet watched TV all the time, it was difficult for Fatma to convince Samet to shut off the TV and start studying, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

*The mother attempts to start the homework time. She brings Samet's school bag to the living room. Samet is watching TV in the living room. On her first attempt, the mother is not able to convince Samet to turn off the TV. After a while, she makes a second attempt, "We are turning the TV off." But Samet does not turn it off. Mother delves into Samet's*

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<sup>45</sup> This sentence could be translated as, "This is all I want to say."

*school bag and is trying to find his notebook and workbook in the bag. Samet does not show any interest in his mother's preparations. It seems that he is used to his mother preparing everything for him. His mother takes out the notebook. Eventually, Samet negotiates with his mother about turning down the volume of the TV. While his mother is trying to find the page for the homework in the workbook, Samet starts watching TV again. He has a book on his lap but his mother warns him that he has the wrong book. (enote-S1-2013-12-25)*

Mostly, these conflicts between Samet and his mother were resolved when his mother promised him that she would give him biscuits if he finished his homework or when his mother threatened not to give him any snacks.

Fatma took on all the responsibilities of Samet's schooling and studies. She collected, tidied up, and organized her son's school materials. When Samet could not find his eraser while doing his homework, for example, he called his mother to come and find it. And Fatma, even when she was busy in the kitchen, would come to the bedroom, find the eraser in Samet's backpack, and give it to him. I had never seen her complain; rather, she seemed happy to do this. Fatma mentioned that she regretted that she was unable to go to school. Therefore, she is determined to support Samet's studies in any way she can. As his mother, she is able to provide only this type of support for Samet's education.

As a reflection of all her struggles to support Samet's education, Fatma thought that the school report at the end of the year was an evaluation of her skills, as well. In her words, "*I would be offended if there will be a failing grade on Samet's school report card*" (enote-S1-2014-05-22). In another account, she said, "*I will be totally devastated if Samet has a failing grade at the end of the school year*" (enote-S1-2014-05-06). On school report card day, the families were invited to the school, and the mother was literally trembling as they waited to get Samet's school report. She was relieved when Samet got five out of five points in every subject

on his report card, which is the top grade in Turkish primary schools<sup>46</sup>. In his class, there were approximately eighteen students (out of twenty-five in total), all of whose grades were five in every subject.

At the beginning of the school year, I asked Samet why he was learning to read and write; he simply answered, “*My mother will buy me a bicycle when I learn to read and write*” (int-S1-122013). He gave me the same answer when I asked about the purpose of going to school. When I asked the same questions at the end of the school year, his answers were not very different, “*My mother will buy me a tablet computer*” (enote-S1-2014-06-06).

According to his mother, Samet was one of the best students in class. She thought that although Samet got bored easily while studying, he accomplished all the school tasks with great success. Yet, I observed that Samet lost his motivation for school very early. In the second term of the school year, he was very different than he was in the first term. In December, for example, I noted that he enjoyed doing his homework. In December, his mother told me that Samet liked doing homework alone and did not need her to accompany him (enote-S1-2013-12-18). The teacher stopped giving homework after March, or he just gave texts to be read at home. Therefore, Samet did not study at home anymore. In April (in the middle of the second term), for example, I observed that his mother was worried since she could not make Samet study, saying, “*This is his teacher’s fault*” (enote-S1-2014-05-22). Since his mother’s literacy skills are limited, she did not know what to do at home. She needed to be given structured tasks from the teacher to follow. She could not make up literacy activities to support Samet’s literacy development at home, even though she told me that she would like to do so. She had the

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<sup>46</sup> The grading system in Turkish primary schools ranks students’ performances on every subject with grades from one to five. A minimum grade of two (passing) or three (satisfactory) is needed to pass classes at the end of the second school term.

technical skills to read; therefore, in the beginning of the school year, his mother was able to help with Samet's homework since there were no text-based activities. In February, the teacher started working with short and simple texts, such as riddles, poems, rhymes, and stories. Given that text-based activities require literacy skills beyond "write what you hear, and read what you see," Samet's mother was not able to help Samet's with text-based tasks. For instance, when Samet asked her to make up comprehension questions from a text, she got completely lost since this task requires advanced literacy skills (enote-S1-2014-05-06). Eventually, I observed that Samet's oral reading skill had deteriorated in May (compared to the second focal child, Zilan).

When I asked Fatma about her aspirations for Samet's future, she told me that she wanted Samet to be a medical doctor. She would do anything to help Samet gain acceptance to university. In a separate interview with Samet, he also told me that he wants to be a medical doctor: *I will be a doctor to heal my grandmother, and my sister will be a nurse* (enote-S1-2013-12-04). Fatma thought that Samet had the capacity to pass the university entrance exams and to go to university. She proudly mentioned that her nephew had been admitted into medical school. She would take Samet to her nephew in the summers for tutoring. Fatma wanted Samet and her nephew to study together so that Samet could also get into medical school (enote-S1-2014-06-06). Samet's father did not have such a specific aspiration for Samet: *If he fails in school, I will take him from the school and put him to work* (int-S1fat-062014).

In my home visits, I observed that there were not many print materials in either of the focal houses. Samet and his younger sister, for instance, did not have any reading or coloring books apart from Samet's schoolbooks for the whole school year. In addition to being used for homework, school materials were the main toys of focal children and their younger sisters or cousins. Samet's four-year old sister, for example, made up different plays by using her

brother's study folder. Both children kept counting letters, pages, stars, and their teachers' signatures over and over again as a leisure activity.

### **Description of the Focal Child, Zilan, and her Family**

In contrast to my account of the first focal family, the Polats, the narrative of the second focal family (Atay) is built on Zilan, the focal child, since no one stood out as the main organizer and facilitator of family activities. I describe both Zilan's nuclear family and her grandparents' household as two main contexts in which Zilan lives. Zilan's nuclear family functions as a part of an extended family of grandparents, and duties like cooking, caring for the children, and doing schoolwork are shared by many people in both families.

**Focal child, Zilan.** The focal child Zilan<sup>47</sup> (7) is the only child of the Atay family. Like Samet, Zilan was small for her seven years and her mother always complained that she hardly eats her meals. Zilan's mother and teacher described Zilan as a hardworking and ambitious student. Zilan liked playing computer games with her cousins and listening to arabesque rap music. One of her favorite activities was singing songs while her father recorded her performance on his cell phone.

**Zilan's household.** Zilan's house is situated in the centre of the Pınarcık district. Several grocery stores, the Pınarcık community center, and the branch office of a political party that started out to defend Kurdish rights are all within walking distance. One can also see laundry hanging on the clotheslines of Zilan's street, which serves as a distinguishing characteristic of Pınarcık.

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<sup>47</sup> Zilan is the pseudonym of the focal child. The real name of the focal child is a Kurdish name, so the pseudonym has been selected accordingly.

The location where Zilan lives is safe compared to the other areas of Pınarcık since it is very close to one of the main police stations in İstanbul. There are two security checkpoints that were set up by the police at the entrance to the main street in Pınarcık which leads to Zilan's house. Several riot control vehicles and police officers with guns are always waiting at the checkpoints.

The mother, Nurcan, has lived in Pınarcık since her childhood. She liked talking about the good memories she had of her long-life friends in the neighborhood. Although her comments about Pınarcık were usually positive, she stated that she would prefer to move to another area of İstanbul, just to be able to send Zilan to a different school, saying:

*I don't like her school at all. Her school is very dirty, the toilets are not clean enough, there is garbage everywhere. The students look filthy. We would move to another place close to Yusuf's [Zilan's father] work this year, but there were no secondary schools with secular education in that neighborhood. (enote-S2-2013-09-21)*

Zilan lived with her parents in a rental apartment on the second floor of a small building. Zilan's grandparents lived right across from Zilan's building. Since her mother and father worked full time, Zilan spent most weekdays in her grandparent's house. To be able to identify the diversity of Zilan's literacy practices, in out-of-school settings, my observations were carried out both in Zilan's parents' house and in her grandparent's house. In this section, I describe both contexts: Zilan's parents' household and her grandparents' household.

***The Atay household: Description of Zilan's parents' household.*** Zilan lived with her father, Yusuf (32), and her mother, Nurcan (27), in a one-bedroom apartment. Being an only child, "*she is not used to sharing her belongings with her cousins, and they are always fighting*" said her mother (enote-S2-2013-09-21). The apartment had a very narrow entrance where the

refrigerator is placed. The bedroom, kitchen, bathroom, and living room all open to the entrance. The parents slept in the bedroom where there are one double bed and two medium sized wardrobes. During the winter, Zilan also sleeps in the bedroom with her parents because the rest of the apartment was quite cold. Next to the bedroom, there is a kitchen and a bathroom.

The living room is across from the kitchen. In the living room, there are two sofas, two chairs, two small coffee tables, and a television unit with a brand new LED television. The television was on most of the time and dominated all the activities in the living room. The family had installed a heater/air-conditioner on the wall, here; they used it to heat the room when it was cold. During the summer, Zilan slept in the living room. Since Zilan was fond of watching reality shows till midnight, she went to sleep very late. On weekdays, she had to wake up very early in the morning for school. Therefore, she could be quite sleepy during the day due to lack of sleep. Her teacher had complained about this several times. Accordingly, her mother called Zilan's teacher to express her concerns about this, hoping that her teacher would warn Zilan and that this would have an effect on her.

There were no bookshelves in the apartment. Zilan had a few books that were stored inside sofa bases in the living room, together with her toys. When Zilan wanted to get a book out of one of the bases, she needed to ask for help to lift the folding seats. There was one desktop computer with cable Internet in the living room. The Atay family shared their Internet access with Zilan's grandparents through an Internet cable strung out of the grandparents' window. There were also clotheslines which stretched between the two windows.

The living room functioned as the dining area for the Atay family. The family ate on the floor of the living room around a tablecloth. This room was also Zilan's study area; yet she did

not have a permanent place to study. She sometimes did her homework on a small folding study desk, sometimes on a low coffee table, or on her lap when sitting on the sofa. I also observed her lying on the floor on her stomach and writing in her notebook on the carpet.

***The Evren household: Zilan's grandparents' household.*** Before going to work, the mother, Nurcan, took Zilan to her grandparents' house, which has two bedrooms, one kitchen, one bathroom, and one living room. Despite not being very spacious, Zilan's grandparents' apartment provided housing for fourteen people. Zilan's grandparents, Mihriban and Abdullah, lived there with their youngest daughter, five sons, two daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren.

The daytime population of the Evren household consisted mainly of women and children. Female neighbors and relatives often visited the family during the day without any prior notice. The house was usually very crowded, yet family members did not complain about that. On the contrary, they mentioned many advantages of living together in an extended household. For instance, Zilan's aunt, Berfin, said, "*It can sound strange to someone who is not used to it. But for us it is normal. We are used to live in crowded houses*" (enote-S2-2013-11-27). Zilan's grandmother, Mihriban, added, "*This way is more economical. We only cook one meal for everybody, and everybody eats from the same pot. The children are looked after [by everybody]. My sons do not need to pay extra rent*" (enote-S2-2013-11-27). The following table describes the composition of the Evren family in detail:

Table 5. 1: Composition of the Evren household

Name	Relation to the focal child	Occupation	Schooling
Mihriban	Grandmother	Housewife	None
Abdullah	Grandfather	Retired	None
Remzi	Oldest maternal uncle	Owner of a textile workshop	None
Gülcan	Aunt (Remzi's wife)	Housewife	None
Onur	Cousin (Remzi & Gülcan's son)	NA <sup>48</sup>	preschool student
Ozan	Cousin (Remzi & Gülcan's son)	NA	NA
Aydın	Second maternal uncle	Worker in Remzi's textile workshop	None
Berfin	Aunt (Aydın's wife)	housewife	Completed 8 <sup>th</sup> grade
Ebru	Cousin (Aydın & Berfin's daughter)	NA	Goes to a special education institution
Pınar	Cousin (Aydın & Berfin's daughter)	NA	NA
Haluk	Maternal uncle	Worker in Remzi's textile workshop	Completed 5 <sup>th</sup> grade
Mutlu	Youngest maternal uncle	Worker in Remzi's textile workshop	Completed 5 <sup>th</sup> grade
Heja	Youngest maternal aunt	student	Student in the 8 <sup>th</sup> grade

<sup>48</sup> Not applicable when the person is not yet at school age.

The apartment has a narrow kitchen and a small bathroom. Since there is no extra room in either of the places, the refrigerator and the washing machine had been placed in the entrance. The first bedroom had a double bed, an infant bed, and a wardrobe. One of the married uncles slept in this bedroom with his wife and his two daughters. The other married uncle and his family slept in the second bedroom. There were no beds in the second bedroom, only bed mattresses stored on top of one another. These mattresses were used to lay beds on the floor at night. In addition, there was one large wardrobe and one desktop computer in this room. The computer had cable Internet access, shared with Zilan's parents, and was openly used by everyone in the household.

The living room was a place for many activities, including watching TV, and eating meals. There was one large LED television mounted on the wall. The television seemed to be on all day. The children watched cartoons during the day, and the adults watched television series in the evenings. The Evren family ate their meals on the floor on a large round tray. There were two sofa beds located across from the television. During my visits, I observed family members usually sitting on the floor. The sofa beds were usually reserved for guests. The living room was like a working place for the women. They ironed clothes, and prepared meals for cooking on the floor of the living room. Moreover, the women also did some outwork for Remzi's textile workshop in this room. During the night, Zilan's grandparents, Mihriban and Abdullah, slept in the living room together with their bachelor sons and daughter.

As in her home, Zilan did not have a special study area in her grandparents' house. She usually did her homework on the sofa or on the floor just across from the television, in the living room. On several occasions, I observed her placing a small cushion on her lap and using it like a desk to write on. Occasionally, concentrating on homework could be difficult for Zilan because

a special study environment had not been created for her homework time. The house could be very crowded with children playing around, guests eating desserts, drinking tea, and chatting away. Nobody at home shut off the television when Zilan was doing her homework. Yet, it was everybody's responsibility to make sure that Zilan finished her school tasks before her father came home from work.

**Migration background.** Like the first focal family, Zilan's mother and her family migrated to İstanbul from Bahe twenty years ago due to the armed conflicts between the Turkish state and Kurdish separatist groups. They moved to Pınarcık, and they have been living in the same place ever since. Nurcan was seven or eight years old when she came to İstanbul with her family. Since the Evren family's economic resources were insufficient for living in a big city like İstanbul, the first four children, including Nurcan, were put to work for extra income. Nurcan had been working in textile workshop since she was eight.

Zilan's father, Yusuf Atay, moved to İstanbul in 2003 from a town in the Black Sea region of Turkey. He came to İstanbul alone, for work. His parents stayed in their hometown, while his siblings move to other cities of Turkey.

Nurcan and Yusuf met at the hospital where Yusuf was working. When they decided to marry, both families objected to their marriage. Yusuf's family had already arranged a marriage for Yusuf with his first cousin. Yet Yusuf did not want to marry his cousin because while working in a hospital, he had encountered lots of inbred children who were suffering from severe defects. Therefore, he was against close-kin marriages. Nurcan's family wanted her to marry someone from the Kurdish community. When Nurcan and Yusuf married, against their families' wishes, both families were offended and stopped seeing them. Another problem for Nurcan's

family was that Nurcan insisted on continuing to work after getting married. For her family, it was not culturally appropriate for a married woman to work. Yet Nurcan did not want to quit her job, and Yusuf respected her decision. Eventually, both Yusuf's and Nurcan's families got over all of these problems once Zilan was born.

**Personal literacy histories of the Atay household.** Nurcan had seven siblings. As mentioned before, only the youngest four children were able to go to the school, as the older children, including Nurcan, were working to provide the family with an income. Nurcan did not know how to read or write at all. She did not have any intentions to learning how to read and write in the near future. According to her, *“there should be someone to be obstinate with; then I can feel an ambition to learn how to read and write”* (enote-S2-2013-11-23).

She described her reading abilities by saying, *“I can only recognize letters, but I cannot combine them”* (enote-S2-2013-09-21). However, on many accounts, I observed that she was not able to recognize many letters. Several times, she told me that she felt too embarrassed to admit that she did not know how to read and write. As a result, she tried to keep it a secret from everyone. When I asked her what she would do when she got something like a text message to read, she answered:

*I would show it to someone and ask them to read it aloud to me. But not to everyone, because I don't want everyone to know that I can't read. I don't want them to humiliate me. Not just anyone, but either my husband, sister, or a very close friend. Or I would wait until I got home in the evening.* (enote-S2-2013-12-21)

Yusuf was the oldest of four children and started school in his village. He liked school and wanted to be a teacher but his father got sick when he was in secondary school. To provide income for his family, Yusuf had to quit at the end of five years of schooling with a primary

school diploma. According to Yusuf, “When my father got sick, one child had to be sacrificed. And that was me as the oldest son” (enote-S2-2013-09-21). He worked hard for his family and strived so that his siblings could get a decent education. Yet they could only manage to finish primary school. His sisters married very early, and his brothers preferred to work instead of going to school.

Yusuf worked in a state hospital as a janitor. He liked his job, yet he was a temporary worker working without a permanent contract. Although Nurcan thought that Yusuf could find another job with a better salary, he did not want to quit his job. He thought that working in a hospital had benefited him a lot. He learned a lot from educated people like doctors and nurses. He said:

*I did additional jobs when I needed to earn more. I worked in three different jobs at the same time, but I did not quit this one. I won't quit working there. I like my job. I have been working in the same hospital for eleven years; I like my work environment. The doctors in my department treat me with respect. There is no superior-subordinate relationship. (enote-S2-2013-12-11)*

He admired doctors because he believed that doctors tried to overcome many difficulties with self-devotion. He wanted Zilan to be a medical doctor in the future.

**Personal literacy histories of the Evren household.** In Zilan’s grandparents’ household, four people out of fourteen had a school diploma; three of her maternal uncles and her aunt, Berfin. In addition, her youngest aunt, Heja, was an eighth grade student. The rest of the family did not go to school, but have worked in textile workshops, instead. Although five people in the grandmother’s household had five to eight years of schooling, it could not be directly concluded that they have acquired advanced literacy skills, since the school that these people graduated from has very low levels of achievement scores. For instance, Zilan’s youngest

aunt, Heja, who was an eighth grade student in the same school, could not read and write well. Zilan's mother blamed Heja's teachers because they had allowed Heja to pass through the grades without acquiring reading and writing skills<sup>49</sup>. My observation about the low literacy skills of both Berfin and Heja has also been confirmed by the teachers working in the Pınarcık school. Zilan's teacher, for example, stated that eighth grade graduates in Pınarcık community usually have low literacy skills compared to the other eighth grade graduates in İstanbul.

**Household daily routine.** A typical day is described as follows. Nurcan and Yusuf wake up at around 7.30 a.m. to get prepared for work. Nurcan wakes Zilan up with great difficulty in the mornings because Zilan usually goes to bed quite late. She dresses Zilan, takes her to the grandparents' house, and leaves for work. Zilan has breakfast with her grandparents. The grandmother, or sometimes one of her aunts, takes Zilan and her cousin Onur (6) to school. Onur goes to the kindergarten in Zilan's primary school. While the children are at school, the women at home are busy with the household chores. Visits to the hospital are quite frequent in this family since one of the granddaughters, Ebru, has a severe metabolic disorder, due to the consanguineous marriage. Occasionally, the aunts take the girl to the hospital before the other children come home from school. In the mornings, Zilan's grandmother is also busy with cooking and preparing stuffed mussels in the basement of the building. The family then sells the stuffed mussels to the street traders. Preparing and selling stuffed mussels is one of the common income generating activities among Kurdish families from Bahe in Pınarcık.

School ends at 2.15 p.m. The children are picked up from school by whoever is available at that time. When the children get back, the family eats lunch. After lunch, Zilan immediately

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<sup>49</sup> Yet, this cannot be only the teachers' fault, since, in accordance with the relevant regulations of the Ministry of Education, teachers are highly discouraged from making their students repeat a grade (Türk Eğitim Derneği, 2014).

starts doing her homework. Both Zilan's parents and her aunts always complained that Zilan's teacher gave the students too much homework. According to the aunt, Berfin, Zilan hardly managed to finish her homework until late in the evening. Zilan did not have a special place to study. She did her homework in the living room where her cousins watched cartoons on television and her grandmother drank tea and chatted with her neighbors. The aunt, Berfin, helped Zilan out with her homework. If she finished her homework early, she played with her cousins. Zilan is the oldest child among her four cousins, so when they played she was usually the playmaker who set the rules and criteria for their achievement. Zilan and Onur also played computer games either online or from a DVD.

The women in the family had their free time after lunch. They either watched television, listened to music, or played card games, such as solitaire, on the computer. The youngest aunt, Heja, spent her free time uploading photographs to the computer. She liked organizing them and creating a collage of several photos. Heja was not allowed to use the Internet. It was especially forbidden for her to use Facebook after the family found out about her virtual interactions with a man on Facebook messenger.

The grandfather came home first, at around six p.m. Zilan's father, Yusuf, came home from work earlier than her mother. He collected Zilan from her grandparents' house and took her home. The rest of the men of the Evren family came home together, at around 8.30 p.m., since they all worked in the oldest son Remzi's textile workshop with Nurcan. Nurcan also came home with her brothers. Usually, Zilan's parents ate dinner together with the grandparents. After dinner, they watched TV and played card games. Both Zilan's mother and father liked spending time in the grandparents' house.

When Zilan had reading tasks, she and father, Yusuf, would go home to do the reading homework until Nurcan comes. During the day, aunt Berfin helped Zilan with her writing tasks, yet she said, *“It is too crowded here [at the grandparents’ house] for reading tasks. I have my two children, and other things to do. Therefore I can only manage to help her with writing tasks. We usually leave her reading tasks to her father, Yusuf”* (enote-S2-2013-12-03). Nurcan’s work schedule was tighter and less flexible than Yusuf’s. She came home late and also worked half days on Saturdays. Thus, Yusuf knew more about Zilan’s abilities and progress in school.

The television was on both at dinnertime and after that, until the family members went to sleep. Zilan’s parents only watched Turkish national channels. Television series, reality game shows, such as “Survivor, Turkey,” and talent competitions, such as “Turkey’s Got Talent,” were their favorite programs. Yet, since these programs lasted a long time and did not end until nearly midnight, Zilan usually went to bed late. Consequently, she could not get up for school easily. Both her parents and her teacher complained that Zilan was drowsy in the lessons and would nod off in class. The teacher’s warnings both privately, in person, and in front of the class did not help.

**First language/second language attitudes in Zilan’s households.** Zilan’s nuclear family is monolingual in Turkish, yet the extended family is bilingual in Kurdish and Turkish. Although the parents talked to Zilan in Turkish, she was raised as a bilingual child. Unlike Samet’s Turkish, I never witnessed any ungrammatical or extraordinary expressions in Zilan’s Turkish. Unlike Samet, I also observed Zilan speaking Kurdish in several interactions with her family members. Zilan’s father did not know any Kurdish. Zilan’s mother also said that she mostly spoke Turkish:

*Speaking Turkish is easier for me. Sometimes I feel I cannot find the right expressions in Kurdish. At work, I generally speak Turkish. We use Kurdish only when there is something that we don't want other people to understand. One of my younger brothers does not even know Kurdish a lot. (enote-S2-2014-01-02)*

In the extended family, Zilan's grandmother and grandfather are the main people who spoke Kurdish to the children at home. I observed that the grandmother did not speak Turkish very often, and she hardly understood it. Zilan was used to speaking Kurdish to her grandmother. She was also able to translate what the grandmother said in Kurdish into Turkish. The two aunts talked to their small children in Kurdish and in Turkish, yet I observed that the children answered their parents only in Turkish. I never witnessed the children speaking Kurdish to one another; their parents also confirmed this. When the neighbors visited the home, they used both languages, freely switching from one to the other. Although both Kurdish and Turkish were used occasionally, the women at the grandparents' household seemed to be more excited and more fluent when speaking Kurdish. They also gestured more when they spoke Kurdish.

Both the Atay and Evren families usually watched Turkish television channels. The adults enjoyed watching television series and shows in Turkish. The only things they preferred watching in Kurdish were the Kurdish music channels. They reported that the children did not want to watch Kurdish television channels and preferred Turkish channels over the Kurdish broadcasting.

**Zilan's school performance and studying.** Zilan usually did her homework in the middle of the living room where many people entered and exited, interrupting Zilan's studies. The following incident describes a typical homework time at her grandparents' house:

*It is 4 p.m. when I arrive at Zilan's grandparents' house. Her grandmother has a guest in the living room. Zilan is sitting on the floor. She has a sofa cushion in front of her and*

*has placed her notebook on the cushion. She is doing her homework. Her sitting position seems to be uncomfortable. She constantly changes her sitting position while studying. The television is on, and Onur [cousin] is watching cartoons. The three aunts are in the kitchen. They are busy preparing dinner. Zilan goes to the kitchen to ask her aunt, Berfin, something. But Berfin is very busy and pushes Zilan off saying "I am busy."*

*When Zilan returns to the living room, her grandmother's guest has already left. Her grandmother feeds Ebru [cousin] with cornflakes. Zilan sits near them and continues writing. Her grandmother looks at Zilan's writing and keeps telling her, "Go on! Write! Go on! Don't you know? Go on!" She points out empty spaces in Zilan's workbook and says, "Look! Go on, write here as well." Her grandmother does not know how to read and write. Therefore she points to the wrong places. There is nothing to write on the places she shows. Zilan does not react to her.*

*Then comes the aunt, Berfin, who is an eighth grade graduate. She usually helps Zilan with her homework until her father, Yusuf, comes home from work. Berfin holds her baby, Pinar, in her arms. Together with the baby, she sits next to Zilan to help her and starts breastfeeding the baby. She does two things at the same time: looking at Zilan's homework and breastfeeding her baby. Zilan asks Berfin several questions and they try to figure out together what Zilan needs to do. After a while, Berfin gives the baby to the grandmother and goes to the kitchen. It is again the grandmother's turn to look at Zilan's homework. Grandmother says, "Come on, my girl."*

*Berfin comes back. Zilan reads to Berfin. When she reads a mistake, Berfin corrects her saying "No, that is wrong", and explains what Zilan reads wrong. The other two kids are also around. Berfin still breastfeeds the baby while listening to Zilan read her "study words." When Zilan finishes reading, Berfin flips through the pages of Zilan's workbook. She points out incomplete exercises that Zilan is supposed to do, and says, "You skipped these exercises." Zilan answers, "aha yes, you're right." She quickly does the ones that Berfin shows her. When Zilan writes something wrong, Berfin does not correct her errors this time. Onur sits in front of the television and starts watching another cartoon. He turns the volume up quite loud. I expect someone to warn him since Zilan is studying. But nobody does so. Now, Zilan herself flips through the pages to find unfinished exercises. When she finds one, she asks Berfin, "Aunt, do you know this?"*

*Ebru is bored and delves into my bag. She finds empty papers from my bag. I give her one, and Zilan gave her a pencil. Ebru starts scratching on the paper. When she finishes, she takes the page to Zilan and shows it to her. I think it is interesting that Ebru shows her scratching to Zilan, not her mother. Zilan is writing in her workbook. To draw Zilan's attention, Ebru pokes her saying "shush." Zilan seems flattered by Ebru's interest. She smiles and says, "ah! I don't care Ebru" but still takes her paper and scratches something nonsense: "Do something like this. I don't care." Like Zilan, Ebru lies down on the floor, on her stomach, places a sofa cushion in front of her, puts the paper on the cushion, and starts scratching again. She shows it to Zilan each time she does something. Zilan now says, "bring it here" and writes one of her study words "ele" down on Ebru's paper. Then she writes "8" by saying, "Do 8, do 9 and so forth!" Zilan is giving tasks to Ebru.*

*Aunt Heja comes back from the kitchen and thinks that Zilan is fooling around with Ebru. So Heja warns her, “Zilan, do your homework.” Yet Heja does not stay and goes back to the kitchen. Berfin comes in, and continues helping Zilan with her tasks. They work together for a while, but Zilan loses her attention and starts watching television. The volume of the TV is still very high. Onur and Ebru are fighting over Zilan’s pencils, “give the pencil back.” Now, Ebru delves into Zilan’s school bag, finds her old workbooks, and plays with the pages. Zilan turns to Ebru and shouts “Ebru, leave it alone!”*

*Aunt Heja comes in and sits right next to Zilan and Berfin. Zilan makes a mistake while reading, and blames Heja for her mistake “Ah, my aunt confuses me.” Heja leaves. Grandmother performs the ritual prayers of Islam on the other side of the living room. Since it is prayer time, family members either perform the prayer rituals or perform an ablution to get prepared for the ritual. Now Zilan and I are alone in the living room. (enote-S2-2013-12-03)*

As is apparent in this descriptive excerpt, there are many people who interact with Zilan while she studied. Even her grandmother, who did not know how to read or write, checked if Zilan was doing her school tasks. Although there were many people who controlled Zilan’s homework time, Zilan took all the responsibility for her studies. She decided the time she studied and where to start her homework. Zilan also liked to keep her school materials neat and tidy. She became angry when someone disturbed the order of the materials in her study folder. Zilan was highly motivated by her teacher’s praises such as, “*Zilan is the most successful student in the class;*” therefore, she felt obliged to finish all her homework, “*otherwise, I can’t even enter the school door tomorrow,*” said Zilan (enote-S2-2013-12-03). However, when there were many people around, it became difficult for Zilan to focus on what she was studying.

On weekends, Zilan studied with her father. Compared to the homework time at the grandparents’ house, Zilan seemed to be able to concentrate on her school tasks more easily at her home. As a result, compared to the grandparents’ house, Zilan read and wrote more accurately while studying with her father alone in their own house. During homework time, Zilan’s father patiently explained each task. He gave Zilan time to think and answer. He used

the same questions one after another to prompt Zilan to read, “*What is this letter?*” “*The next one?*” and “*How are the two read together?*” (enote-S2-2013-12-21). Having a structured style of instruction, both for reading and writing, facilitated Zilan’s learning. As the school term unfolded, Zilan studied alone more often. Towards the end of the first school term, her father reported that Zilan did all homework alone. He only checked it afterwards.

I never observed any decrease in Zilan’s motivation to study hard as the school year unfolded. Beginning her homework had never been a problem for Zilan; on the contrary, her father usually struggled to finish it when he noticed that Zilan had lost attention at the end of a one-and-a-half-hour study session. In the second school term, I observed many instances when Zilan wrote independently for out-of-school purposes. For example, she wrote short notes to her friends or to me. She drew pictures of several objects in the living room and wrote their names underneath, without any instruction from the adults. She spontaneously switched on the computer, launched WebPages, such as YouTube, and typed song names into the browser bar on YouTube. These types of independent writing and reading activities enhanced Zilan’s literacy skills.

Zilan’s mother did not know how to read and write and she spent most of her time at work; therefore, her contribution to Zilan’s literacy learning was very limited. Yet she felt that Zilan’s handwriting had improved as a result of her efforts. When someone praised the neatness of Zilan’s handwriting, her mother proudly said, “*If Zilan’s handwriting is beautiful, it’s because of me. I tried so hard to make her write better*” (enote-p-S2-2014-06-07).

Although Zilan’s family described their daughter as being one of the most successful students in the class, her teacher, Ms. Hande Ersu, stated that Zilan is a student who achieves

average success. Since Zilan could not get much help from her parents for school task, Ms. Ersu thought it took too much time for her to complete her homework. Generally, there were many mistakes in her notebooks, which went unnoticed by her parents. As a result, although Zilan earned five out of five points<sup>50</sup> in every subject on her report card, she could not make it into the most successful group at the end of the first grade.

### **Teachers' Profiles**

Both of the focal children went to the same public school in the neighborhood, yet they were students in different first grade classrooms. In the following sections, I describe Samet's teacher, Mr. Metin Boylan, and Zilan's teacher, Ms. Hande Ersu, in detail<sup>51</sup>.

**Description of Samet's teacher: Mr. Metin Boylan.** Mr. Metin Boylan was a young man in his early thirties. He graduated from the History department of a university located in the southeast of Turkey. Although he did not graduate from a teacher education department, he received pedagogical formation training to work as a teacher<sup>52</sup>. This was his twelfth year in teaching. Before coming to İstanbul, he worked in many southeastern cities and villages where Kurdish families were a majority. Although he is originally Kurdish, his Kurdish language skills were very limited. His parents did not teach him Kurdish, although they used to speak in Kurdish at home. He took lessons to learn Kurdish during his first years of teaching in Kurdish

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<sup>50</sup> In primary schools in Turkey, the top grade is five.

<sup>51</sup> The primary school teachers teach the same students for the whole primary school years and there are no separate teachers for different subjects.

<sup>52</sup> Pedagogical formation training is offered for university graduates who wanted to work as teachers but did not graduate from educational departments. The training takes four semesters. During the training, students obtain pedagogical competencies by taking courses such as "Introduction to Education," "Curriculum Development and Teaching," "Developmental Psychology," "Measurement and Evaluation," "Classroom Management," "Instructional Technologies and Material Design," "Learning, Teaching Theories and Approaches", "Guidance," "Special Teaching Methods," and "Teaching Practice."

villages in the southeastern region when he felt the need to speak Kurdish since most families did not speak Turkish. As a teacher who came from a Kurdish family and had served in Southeastern villages of Turkey, he did not feel like a foreigner among the bilingual Kurdish-Turkish families living in Pınarcık:

*I know these parents [living in Pınarcık]. I know these children, more or less. I know their economic conditions, their life circumstances. I know that they do everything in their power. Sometimes although they want to help us, they can't. But I know that they do their best. Some families can't. They work a lot, they have family problems; they have big problems. There is no need to hold them in contempt. If we emphasize their value, they feel we respect them, so they will work even harder. (int-S1tea-022014)*

This familiarity helped him connect with his students and their families in a more effective way. For Mr. Boylan, good communication with parents was crucial, “*When I spread negative energy to the families, they transmit it to their children at home. Then, the children bring that negative energy back to the class. Eventually, the class environment gets affected negatively*” (int-S1tea-022014). Moreover, according to him, families would stop supporting their children’s education if teachers excluded them. In all his remarks about families living in Pınarcık, Mr. Boylan foregrounded the difficulties that the people in the Pınarcık community struggle with:

*I visit them, I see their lives, I see their workplaces, their homes. Sometimes, I think about all of them and say to myself, “You are expecting too much from these people.” There are times when I decide I won't ask anything from them but then I again push them to give special attention to their kids. (int-S1tea-022014)*

**Mr. Metin Boylan’s philosophy of pedagogy.** Samet’s family described Mr. Metin Boylan as “*a teacher who does not give lots of homework*” (enote-S1-2013-11-22). He constantly warned families not to put too much pressure on their children to study hard. Mr. Boylan’s philosophy of pedagogy mainly relied on a more relaxed or flexible educational model,

in which students should not be oppressed, and should have more opportunities to talk, develop their abilities, and maintain their self-esteem. Yet, he added, with these students from Pınarcık, he faced classroom management problems when he conducted the lesson in a relaxed and flexible way. Applying a more flexible educational pattern and class environment was difficult because of students' behavioral problems. By behavioral problems, he implied mainly that there was a lack of skills, such as concentrating on a task and working in collaboration. For Mr. Boylan, this condition was closely related to the home environments. Before coming to school, the students should have already learned these skills. The lack of these skills influenced the classroom environment in a negative way. Since "the behavioral problems" are vital for Mr. Boylan, he started out his first parent-teacher meeting with the topic of "*how families can get their children to adopt these skills in an appropriate way*" (enote-T-2014-02-18). He had warned the parents several times not to beat or yell at their children, and he had explained why beating children would not work, by giving examples.

In one of our interviews, Mr. Boylan told me there were things that he could not say to parents in parents-teacher meetings:

*In the meetings, I want to tell the parents that their children cannot pass the university entrance exams, or even the high school exams. But I don't have the right to say so. For the time being, all the families want their children to be medical doctors. Yet ninety percent of these children will not even find a job when they finish primary school or secondary school. (int-S1tea-022014)*

This is also his rationale for explaining why there should be a more flexible and relaxed educational pattern in Pınarcık schools. He continued:

*I would like to tell the parents that only three or four children from this class will be able to pursue their education until high school. Therefore, the families should not push their children to do more or to study too much. Instead of focusing on the national high school*

*or university exams, we, the teachers, should teach these students [living in Pınarcık] how to build a strong self-confidence. They should gain the skills to express themselves comfortably in public. This is the skill that they need to get from school. However, when pushing these students to pass the national exams, we are crushing their chance to find their own level. (int-S1tea-022014)*

Another main idea in Mr. Boylan's philosophy of pedagogy is his focus on "students' discoveries" (enote-S1-2014-06-06). According to him, discovery-based learning is an effective way of teaching. He gave the following example of how he taught the national anthem through students' discoveries. The national anthem of Turkey is one of the first texts that students need to memorize. It is a long poem, full of difficult vocabulary. While the other first grade teachers were making their students memorize the national anthem in the second term, Mr. Boylan refrained from doing so because, he explained, he did not like giving students rote-learning tasks. Yet, the students told him they wanted to learn the anthem because the other classes had done so already. Mr. Boylan gave them his computer to make them do research on the Internet for the text of the national anthem. After a while, the students "discovered" on their own that the national anthem was already written in their textbooks. For him, this gives rise to "real learning" (enote-S1-2014-06-06).

Mr. Boylan encouraged students' opportunities to make discoveries in the classroom, since he believed that this activity resembled what the students will encounter in real life. He asserted that students need to make connections between what they learn in school and their lives. A successful education was only achieved when students acquired the skills that they need in their lives through school; otherwise, teachers cannot be influential in their students' lives. He criticized the schoolbooks that were sent by the Ministry of Education as preventing student-centered education. The way that the books teach subjects was too difficult and complicated for

the students; therefore, although he taught all the subjects required by the curriculum in the first grade, he did not use the regular schoolbooks. Instead, he either searched for simpler and more engaging activities on the Internet or prepared materials himself that would make the students talk and interact more with one another.

**Zilan's teacher: Ms. Hande Ersu.** Ms. Hande Ersu was a young woman in her early thirties. She came from a well-educated Turkish family. She graduated from primary school teaching department six years ago and has been working in Pınarcık Primary School ever since. When I conducted the study, there were thirty-two students registered in her first grade classroom, yet only sixteen of them attended classes regularly. Nearly half of the registered students dropped out of school without even starting.

Ms. Ersu stated that students in Pınarcık start school lagging behind the other students in İstanbul. According to her, Pınarcık students experience problems in school since they do not know the conventions of social behavior, such as how to use the toilet or behave in public. They have problems with Turkish because they usually try to translate expressions from Kurdish into Turkish. Most importantly, she believed, many students do not have a well-functioning family at home. Therefore, teaching in this school can be exhaustive compared to the other schools in İstanbul. She thought that the teachers in this school struggle more, yet the reward at the end is greater, since here she feels that she contributes to the well-being of her students more than she would in other places. With this motivation, she spent long hours in the school. While other first grade teachers (including Samet's teacher) left school when the classes ended at 2.30 p.m., Ms. Ersu stayed at school until five o'clock. She organized study groups for underachieving students after classes. In addition, she taught reading and writing classes to the parents in the community. So she said to the parents in the parent-teacher meeting:

*I can't give up on any of my students. I work hard to make my students succeed in school. If I work so hard for your children, you also have to work as hard as me. We [the teacher and the parents] won't have any other aims the whole year. (enote-T-2014-02-18)*

At the end of the school year, she proudly stated that her students were remarkable with their achievements in every setting. She followed up with them even in secondary school, and was happy to see that her students were the most successful ones in later grades.

According to Ms. Ersu, the success of Pınarcık children in school depends on coordination between the teacher and the parents. Although she acknowledged the difficulties in Pınarcık families' lives, she treated parents as her partners, with equal responsibility. When a child succeeds, Ms. Ersu uses the parents' dedication to support their children learn how to read and write as an example to other parents. For her, it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children come to school "ready" with clean outfits, a lunch bag with healthy foods, and enough sleep. At home, it is a must that the parents switch off the TV and check if their children completed their homework. However, at the end of the school year, I observed that she still struggled to come to an agreement with some of the families about her expectations.

Ms. Ersu first told me that when she first started teaching in this school, the parents approached her with suspicion because of her ethnic background. She thought she resolved this issue by talking frankly to the parents from the very beginning, "*Here we meet for the purpose of education. I am Turkish; you are Kurdish. But I won't bring that issue into the classes, so you won't either*" (int1-S2tea-022014). This is what she said to the parents in meetings.

Ms. Ersu stated that Kurdish belongs to the intimate sphere of the family. In school, bilingual children need to speak Turkish instead of Kurdish. When the children experience

problems in understanding Turkish, she believed that the solution for the bilingual children is to improve their Turkish. The sentences and text used in school were getting longer each year; therefore, bilingual children need native-like Turkish, to follow the courses in later grades. When her students used Kurdish in class, she reacted to them by saying, “*I don’t understand what you are saying now. If you say it in Turkish, I can understand it*” (int2-S2tea-062014). She told me that upon her remarks the students taught her some Kurdish words. In this respect, Ms. Ersu described herself as a solution-oriented teacher. Rather than sticking to people’s ethnic backgrounds, ways of building effective communication between teachers and parents should be supported. In her words:

*I don’t like to discriminate based on being Turkish or Kurdish. The little children like my students are especially sensitive to their teachers’ reactions. I am Turkish, but [if I discriminate], how can I connect to my students then? My students are Kurdish. (int2-S2tea-062014)*

**Ms. Hande Ersu’s philosophy of pedagogy.** Zilan’s family described Ms. Hande Ersu as a well-disciplined and gracious teacher. Even Samet’s mother told me that she admired Ms. Ersu by saying, “*Teacher Metin is a good teacher but teacher Hande is so different*” (enote-S1-2014-05-28). Yet she could not explain what the difference was.

Ms. Ersu liked it when the parents called her to clarify any uncertainties, especially for homework tasks. She strongly believed that her energy to contribute to the students’ success influenced the families, as well. In her words:

*Some families feel obliged to struggle more as, they think, the teacher [herself] works a lot. Some of my kids’ parents asked me to give more homework, so I phone them to give extra tasks. Because they wanted it so. They worked themselves into the ground. Eventually, their kids are better off than their classmates. (int2-S1tea-062014)*

Ms. Ersu used the regular schoolbooks together with other sources that she had found on the Internet. In the second term, she introduced different text types such as poems, riddles, and jokes, and taught reading through those texts. She also used group games to motivate students' reading and writing. Since there were only 16 students in her class, she could create a somewhat free environment to study, where students were allowed to talk with one another while doing in-class tasks. Furthermore, Ms. Ersu occasionally emphasized that reading and writing skills progress as they are used in out-of-school contexts. She gave advice to the parents about how to incorporate reading and writing tasks into daily chores, "*When you are working in the kitchen, ask your kids to read the food packages. Or you can also ask them to write the cooking instructions when you are cooking*" (enote-T-2014-04-18). In accordance with the teacher's advice, I observed on many accounts that Zilan would write shopping lists and greeting cards on her own.

According to Ms. Ersu, another benefit of having students use their literacy skills in daily life is that it helps the students socialize via their literacy skills. She also added that this opportunity depends on what type of home environment the children have:

*While writing and reading out of school, children also learn that they can make mistakes and someone more knowledgeable can correct them. So, they learn that they can come to me during the class and ask for help. But the children who do not develop social skills through reading and writing are not open to such social encounters. Moreover, the opportunities for children to get socialized in their families are also important. I don't think that the underachieving students [Ms. Ersu gives names here] do not have a relaxed family environment where they behave in a relaxed manner, or where they are pampered [with a positive connotation]. (int2-S2tea-062014)*

Ms. Ersu attached particular importance to the girls' education. She thought that all the girls in her class should complete their education. She particularly followed up with her female students after they graduate from primary school. "*When I meet them, I tell them about myself*

*from my own life. I completed my education, I, myself earn my own money*” (int2-S2tea-062014). Ms. Ersu tried to motivate them to continue their education by being an example of a respectable woman.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have described the profiles of the two focal children and their extended families. To demonstrate the social and cultural context of the families, I organized the profiles by using the same headings: description of the households, migration backgrounds, and first and second language histories for both families.

The first focal family, the Polats, consisted of seven people: mother Fatma, father Ayhan, the focal child Samet and his sister Beyza, grandfather Tahir, grandmother Narin, and an uncle Azad. The Polat family is a Kurdish family from a small village in Bahe (a city in southeastern Turkey). They moved to İstanbul 21 years ago. The Polat family is bilingual. The grandparents spoke mostly in Kurdish, and the children spoke in Turkish. The parents communicated with one another, as well as with their children in Turkish because they said that they got used to talking Turkish more than their L1. Since children’s Kurdish abilities were not developed, the content of the communication between the children and their Kurdish-speaking grandparents were limited.

Four adults out of five in the households did not go to school. Instead of going to school, Ayhan and Fatma worked in informal sectors since their childhood because the economic conditions of their families were not good enough to afford their education. Fatma learned how to read by herself. When Samet started school, Fatma developed her reading skills with him. Although Fatma was not proficient in reading and writing, she defined herself a proficient reader

of the Quran. She also learned reading the Mawlid. Ayhan learned how to read and divide words into syllables during his compulsory military service. He described his writing skills as “not developed enough.” He could read aloud by dividing the words into syllables. He was also able to write on a computer because he thought that hitting the letter keys on the keyboard was easier than writing with a pen. Samet’s youngest uncle, Azad, started first grade at eleven years old. He hardly learned reading and writing and eventually dropped out before the fifth grade without a primary school diploma. When Samet finally started school, he was the only one in the family with the chance of receiving a proper education. Therefore, the family, especially Fatma, had high hopes for Samet’s school success and, consequently, a better future.

Fatma took on all the responsibilities of organizing Samet’s schooling. Since she felt sorry that she was unable to go to school, she was determined to support Samet’s studies in any way she could. According to his mother, Samet accomplished all the school tasks with success. Yet, Samet got bored easily with the school tasks and preferred watching cartoons on TV all the time. Although Samet started school in September full of motivation and was able to study by himself during the first term of the school, he almost gave up studying when his teacher stopped giving homework after March. Fatma was worried since her literacy skills were limited, and therefore she could not make Samet study without given structured tasks from the teacher to follow. When the teacher started working with short and simple texts in the beginning of the second term, Fatma was not able to follow or support Samet’s course of literacy development.

The second focal family, the Atays, consisted of three people: the focal child Zilan, her mother Nurcan, and her father Yusuf. Zilan’s grandparents, the Evren family, lived right across from Zilan’s building. Since her mother and father worked full time, Zilan spent most of the days in her grandparent’s house. The Atay family functions as a part of the extended family of

Zilan's grandparents; therefore I described both Zilan's nuclear family and her grandparents' household as two main contexts.

There were fourteen people living in Zilan's grandparents' apartment: Zilan's grandparents, Mihriban and Abdullah, their youngest daughter, five sons, two daughters-in-law, and four grandchildren. Zilan's mother and her family migrated to İstanbul from Bahe twenty years ago, similar to the first focal family. In the Evren family, only four adults out of ten were able to go to the school.

Zilan's father, Yusuf, was of Turkish origin, and moved to İstanbul in 2003. He could not continue to secondary school after he got his primary school diploma due to his family's economic difficulties. Nurcan did not know how to read or write at all since she was working in the textile industry since her childhood. She tried to keep it a secret that she did not know how to read and write.

Zilan's nuclear family is monolingual in Turkish since Yusuf does not know Kurdish. Although the parents talked to Zilan in Turkish, she was a bilingual child because her grandparents' household is bilingual in Kurdish and Turkish. Unlike the first focal child, Zilan liked speaking Kurdish in several interactions with her family members. She was also able to make translations from Kurdish to Turkish.

Zilan was a hardworking student who liked studying on her own. She usually did her homework in the middle of the living room where many people interrupting her studies. Her aunt Berfin helped her finish her writing tasks before her father came home from work. Her father was the main person who supported Zilan's literacy development at home. His schooling experiences facilitated Zilan's learning. Towards the end of the first school term, Zilan was able

to do all homework alone. In the second school term, there were many instances when Zilan wrote independently for out-of-school purposes, such as writing short notes to her friends or typing song names into the browser bar on YouTube. Zilan's mother's contribution to Zilan's literacy learning was very limited because she did not know how to read and write. Yet she was proud of having contributed to the improvement of Zilan's handwriting. Since Zilan was a successful student, her family was determined to support her schooling at any expense.

I have also described the focal children's teachers, including their personal literacy backgrounds and pedagogical approaches. Each teacher emphasized different themes related to literacy. Based on their different personal literacy histories, each teacher demonstrated different approaches regarding the interaction between the community and the school. Unlike the family profiles, the profiles of the teachers are not organized under the same topics. Each teacher emphasized different themes related to literacy. Based on their different personal literacy histories, each teacher demonstrated different approaches regarding the interaction between the community and the school.

Samet's teacher, Mr. Metin Boylan, was a young male teacher with twelve years of teaching experience. He was from a Kurdish family, but he did not know how to speak his heritage language because his parents did not teach him Kurdish. Before Pınarcık public primary school, he worked in many southeastern cities and villages where Kurdish families were a majority. His familiarity with this group helped him connect with his students and their families in a more effective way. He mostly emphasized the difficulties that Pınarcık families struggle with. According to him, putting too much pressure on Pınarcık children to study hard is harmful. Due to the cultural and economic reasons (e.g., parents' low level of education, low income, and the "*behavioral problems*" of Pınarcık children) the majority of his students would not be able to

continue to the higher education. Based on such a perspective, he defended a more relaxed or flexible educational model based on students' discoveries rather than exam-based curriculums, believing that supporting students' autonomy would develop their self-esteem, and help them fight against the difficulties they experience. He preferred student-centered education; therefore, although he taught all the subjects required by the curriculum in the first grade, he prepared teaching materials himself that would make the students talk and interact more with one another instead of regular schoolbooks

Zilan's teacher, Ms. Hande Ersu, came from a well-educated Turkish family. She had six years of teaching experience. She had not worked in any schools other than Pınarcık primary school. She was described as a well-disciplined teacher, admired by many parents in Pınarcık. According to Ms. Ersu, many Pınarcık students lag behind the other students in İstanbul due to the language problems. Their Turkish abilities were not developed enough to fully comprehend the content of the courses. Furthermore, they did not know the conventions of social behavior; most importantly, many of them do not have a well-functioning family at home to support their academic development.

Ms. Ersu defined herself as a dedicated teacher. Unlike other first grade teachers, she organized extra study hours for underachieving students and reading and writing classes to the parents in the community. Although she admitted the difficult conditions of Pınarcık families, she treated parents as her partners, with equal responsibility in their children's literacy development. She believed that, since she worked hard for her students to be successful, parents also need to work hard at home to support their children's success. The parents' responsibilities included bringing children to school as "ready" with clean outfits, and a lunch bag with healthy

foods. At home, it is also parents' responsibilities to switch off the TV and make sure that their children completed their homework.

Ms. Ersu stated that she was against of bringing the ethnic identity to the classroom because she thought that families' ethnic identities were irrelevant in a school context, and hence should be left at the school door. When bilingual children experience problems with Turkish, the only solution would be to improve their Turkish to be successful in later grades.

Ms. Ersu used the regular schoolbooks together with other sources that she had found on the Internet. She also emphasized that supporting reading and writing skills in out-of-school contexts was a must. Hence, she asked the parents to incorporate reading and writing tasks into daily chores, as well. According to Ms. Ersu, another benefit of using literacy skills in daily life is that it helps the students socialize via their literacy skills. When first grade students read and write out of school, they also learn that it is acceptable to make mistakes, and a more knowledgeable person can help them correct their mistakes. This social ability should be supported in homes, and then transferred to the relation between the teacher and students.

## Chapter 6: Results and Interpretive Discussion

In this chapter, I present the results of the analyses. To guide my presentation and discussion of the findings, I have selected representative samples of key themes that define this project: literacy, multilingualism, and schooling<sup>53</sup>. Firstly, I present my analysis about the kinds of messages about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling that are available in the focal children's immediate contexts (i.e., home and school) during their first year in school. Secondly, I discuss the ways in which the relationship between focal children and their families are reconstructed in the context of literacy, multilingualism, and schooling. Furthermore, in the literature, it has been well established that powerful and dominant groups in society determine the codes for power. Schools are one of the main institutions where powerful codes are enacted (Bourdieu, 1991). It is not only students and their families who develop a social positioning and negotiate an identity as a reflection of the codes of power. Teachers who work in non-dominant communities also are affected by surrounding power relationships, and take a stance. Following these arguments, I discuss how the participants in this study (members of both focal households and focal teachers) negotiate literacy, multilingualism, and schooling by taking a social positioning particular to their life contexts. Third, I explain how the literacy practices from two different immediate contexts came into contact and influenced one another. Towards this end, I indicate the catalyzing effect of school literacy that initiated change within two migrant, multilingual, low-income, and low-educated households in a disadvantaged neighborhood in İstanbul.

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<sup>53</sup> Although I tried to focus on issues related to migration in my observations and interviews with the focal families and teachers, it did not appear as a defining theme because the families were not recent migrants.

## **Research Questions**

Based on the purposes of this study, my research questions were stated as follows:

1. What kinds of messages related to literacy, multilingualism, and schooling do the focal children receive in the two different immediate contexts (i.e., home and school) during their first year of school?
2. How are the relationships among the focal participants reconstructed when they are confronted by messages about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling?
3. Do school literacies act as a “catalyst” to initiate changes in the focal families; if so, in what ways does this occur?

## **Themes**

The data collection in the focal homes began at the exact time when the focal children started school and were introduced to formal literacy education. In the literature, it has been argued that when children start school, they initially rely on the meanings, knowledge, and inheritances that they carry from their homes to school. In school, they find another type of culture and other discourses, which may or may not be familiar to them (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000; Moll, 2000). Following these arguments, I first characterize themes in family scripts and teachers’ scripts to understand how concepts of literacy, language, and schooling are represented in the focal children’s immediate contexts (i.e., home and school). As defined as a construct in the sociocritical literacy theoretical framework, scripts refer to specialized discourses determined by people’s social contexts. Scripts are detectable based on patterned interactions that represent both the ways in which people interpret the actions of others and guide

their own actions. Moreover, scripts are closely linked to the power relations interwoven in local settings and the larger society (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995).

As a part of the second research question, I examine the relation among focal participants (i.e., focal children, their families, and teachers). As the focal participants (including focal teachers) come across various scripts about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling in different contexts, they react to those scripts enacted by the home and the school in different ways. In this analysis, I use concepts like “compliance” and “contest” borrowed from the sociocritical literacy framework. The discussion of the second question is an extension of the first question. Since the relation between focal families and teachers is analyzed based on three key themes defined in the first question, I do not discuss the first and the second research questions independently, but blend together in the following section. I should state that I would not argue a cause and effect relationship between the two domains (i.e., home and school). One script is not accepted as the source or the result of the other. Here, I acknowledge the fact that the discourse in both domains is constructed in dynamic and mutual ways.

**Literacy.** The first theme is “literacy.” In this section, I look at how participants, both the focal households, and focal first grade teachers talk about literacy and literate people in their scripts, respectively.

In the home-visits, I observed that the focal children’s entry to school introduced a new routine activity of studying and doing homework in their households. I also observed that with this new type of literacy activity, the abilities of reading and writing were accentuated more than ever. Whenever there was a discussion going on about the ability to read and write, I observed that the non-schooled mothers turned their eyes away or smiled with embarrassment and blushed

when admitting that they had not gone to school. I felt that the inability to read or write caused them shame, as though this lack of skill made them feel guilty. To understand what contributed to their feeling of inadequacy, in the following sections, I first discuss how the term “literacy” was defined by both the families and the teachers. Then, I argue how the non-schooled participants’ reactions to the available definitions of literacy were a joint production of both the community and the school.

***Family scripts: “I don’t know how to read and write but (...)”.*** Family interviews and home observations indicate that the family members in both of the focal households defined literacy differently, depending on their personal history. For the participants who had some kind of schooling, literacy equaled the abilities to read and write, which ensured freedom in going about one’s daily activities. The aunt, Berfin, who had eight years of schooling, for example, defined literacy based on accomplishments. *“Life is very easy for me [because I can read and write]. I can get anywhere I like, I can read the signs on the road so I can find my way easily”* (enote-S2-2014-01-21). Similarly, Zilan’s youngest aunt, Heja, who was also 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduate, gave examples from daily accomplishments such as *“going to the hospital alone”* (int-S2aunt3-062014) when I asked her to define literacy.

Different than Berfin’s focus on reading and writing abilities when defining literacy, the non-schooled family members defined literacy without particular mention of the ability to read and write. Samet’s mother, for instance, defined literacy as *“knowing everything in the world”* (int-S1mot-062014). Similarly, Samet’s grandfather defined literacy as more than just reading and writing. By giving examples from Samet’s education, he said, *“When Samet learns how to read and write, he will have learned the correct manners, like behaving respectfully to elders.*

*This is what he will learn in school, humaneness [compassion and consideration for others]” (int-S1grfat-042014).*

Based on such definitions of “literacy” (i.e., including accomplishments based on reading and writing versus including general knowledge and humanness), the focal participants take up a social positioning particular to their own definitions of “literacy.” For instance, Nurcan (a non-schooled mother) reported the following incident:

*Nurcan told me that Zilan complained to the counselor about herself. She seems upset and told me the details of what happened: Zilan’s teacher informed the school counselor that Zilan was getting quieter and sat still during the classes. So, the school counselor talked to Zilan, and Zilan complained to the counselor that her mother shouted at her a lot. Then the counselor called Nurcan for a meeting. Nurcan did not go to the meeting but sent her husband, instead. Yusuf told the counselor that Nurcan was not able to take a day off from work. But the truth was different. Nurcan did not want to meet the counselor because she did not want her inability to read and write to be discussed. She said to me: I don’t know how to read and write but I know how to treat my daughter in the right manner. (enote-S2-2014-01-07)*

In this account, it is apparent that the definition Nurcan holds about literacy is similar to other non-schooled participants; literacy refers not just to reading and writing but general world knowledge, including knowledge about parenting, as well. This conception of literacy and literate people kept Nurcan from participating actively in her daughter’s education. She was afraid of being judged based on her illiteracy, and assumed that she would be accused of being an incompetent mother due to her lack of literacy skills. Furthermore, she believed that people would ascribe a certain identity to her as an illiterate person, which deemed her vulnerable in social interactions.

Following Gutiérrez’ sociocritical literacy framework, I would argue that Nurcan was creating a counterscript. A script can be defined as a “counterscript” when it builds up on a

script as a response (Gutiérrez et al., 1995). In this interaction between Nurcan and school, Nurcan appropriates assumptions about what literacy entails to form her counterscript. Her counterscript guided her interactions with Zilan's school, which did not comply with the teacher's expectations for appropriate participation. In this sense, Nurcan's understandings of literacy became something for Nurcan to contest against. Consequently, she distanced herself from her daughter's schooling and from the school's expectations.

***Teachers' scripts: "Familiarity" (bilme durumu) versus "consciousness" (bilinç).*** Both of the focal teachers participating in this study, Mr. Boylan and Ms. Ersu, defined the term literacy by referring to problem solving skills. In Ms. Ersu's words, "*literate people are the ones who know how to solve problems*" (int3-S2tea-072014). Interestingly enough, Mr. Boylan defined the characteristics of literate people as being open to new ways of solving problems. In addition, he claimed, literacy provides "*people with communicative skills. Literate people are able to learn new things, so they are able to find solutions for any difficulties*" (int1-S1tea-022014). Following, I argue that the focal teachers' scripts about literacy form the basis of the ways in which they define the Pınarcık community.

Both teachers characterized the Pınarcık community in similar terms: "*illegality, criminal actions, poverty, and low literacy levels*" (int1-S1tea-022014). For Ms. Ersu, "*I would say that the most prominent characteristic of Pınarcık community is illiteracy. The literacy level is really low. All the problems of this place are a result of people's illiteracy*" (int1-S2tea-022014). The teachers also agreed that Pınarcık families experienced serious problems in supporting their children's literacy learning. Mr. Boylan, for example, stated that Pınarcık children did not get the required support from their families:

*Samet, like most children in Pınarcık, sees very few models of reading and writing or of learning new things, in his family. There aren't many reading and writing activities in his family. His parents only say "read it, read it, study more, study more, do it, do it", and this does not have any benefit [to Samet's school achievement]. (int1-S1tea-022014)*

Although the focal first grade teachers had similar understandings about what literacy entails, each focal teacher developed distinct approaches to the Pınarcık community. When the teachers started talking about the Pınarcık community and how parents' illiteracy influenced their children's education there, the terms that they used (i.e., Mr. Boylan's "familiarity" versus Ms. Ersu's "consciousness") differed remarkably.

Mr. Boylan very often used terms that can be translated as "*familiarity*" or "*lack of familiarity*" when he defined Pınarcık community. He said, "[The parents] *do not know* [how to support their children's literacy learning]. *They are not familiar with schooling. They don't have the required skills or the knowledge about education*" (int2-S1tea-062014). Immediately following this, he made connections to his own family:

*This was also all my parents knew [about supporting my education]. They were not able to help me with my lessons because they did not know [how to]. The only thing my family knew was if this kid finished his school he could achieve something. This is the only thing that families know. (int1-S1tea-022014)*

Since Mr. Boylan related the lack of literacy skills in the community with "lack of familiarity," he constantly restated his concerns about pushing families too much to contribute to their children's literacy development (see Chapter 5). Because he thought the families would not know how to support their children's literacy development, he questioned the purpose of asking them to do so.

In contrast to Mr. Boylan, Ms. Ersu made constant reference to the state of “consciousness” of families as the source of the underdevelopment of Pınarcık children’s literacy skills. In one of my school visits, I made the following observation:

*I was waiting at the class door to meet Ms. Ersu. Parents were inside the class, picking their kids up. Meanwhile, Ms. Ersu was trying to organize the school trip with the parents. One mother approached Ms. Ersu. They talked about the school trip. I understood that the mother did not want to send her son on the school trip. Actually, she didn’t want to pay the fee for the trip. Ms. Ersu said it was okay, and turned away. The mother said, “It [the school trip] is not important anyway.” Upon this remark, Ms. Ersu turned back to the mother and said to her, “It might not be important for you but it is important for your son because this is HIS school trip,” in a calm and unsympathetic voice. The mother did not respond. (enote-T2-2014-06)*

Such encounters with the parents led Ms. Ersu to conclude that, “*Pınarcık families do not care at all*” (int2-S2tea-062014). In our meeting immediately following this incident, Ms. Ersu told me about this event and complained about the “*lack of consciousness*” (her words) in Pınarcık families. According to the teacher, “*the Pınarcık families don’t do anything because they believe that we, the teachers, should and are doing everything to educate their children*” (int2-S2tea-062014). Therefore, Ms. Ersu did not like it when parents told her that they were happy with her, since their satisfaction with the teacher hindered the families in taking on any responsibility for their children’s education. For her, the education system was failing in Pınarcık because of “*lack of consciousness*” about education in the community (int2-S2tea-062014).

Ms. Ersu’s script with the key term “consciousness” is in accordance with the dominant ideology. It basically represents non-dominant families (i.e., low educated and multilingual like families living in Pınarcık) as ignorant of their children’s education. By relating the failure in children’s literacy development in the community with “*lack of consciousness*” in families, Ms.

Ersu presents families' ignorance towards their children's education not as socially conditioned but as an innate quality:

*It is not related to families' education or schooling level. I have some children in my class whose parents do not have education but are very conscious. They can foresee the problems in their children's education and call me immediately. Zilan's parents are also very conscious, therefore I don't think that Zilan will fail. (int2-S2tea-062014)*

On the other hand, relating a lack of literacy skills and its effects on their children's education with "a lack of familiarity" foregrounds the social conditions through which literacy practices and low education in the community have been determined. Hence, Mr. Boylan emphasized the families' practices would not change unless the social conditions alter. In this respect, he challenged the prominent understanding and distanced himself from this dominant ideology, by taking a position as an insider, "*These families [in Pınarcık] resemble my own family, Pınarcık resembles my home town. This is my community, in a sense*" (int2-S1tea-062014). Conversely, Ms. Ersu reproduced the codes of power, which position families, themselves, as responsible for their children's poor education. For her, the failure of Pınarcık children could be addressed only by educating the families.

**Multilingualism.** During home observations and interviews, I occasionally focused on what the focal participants tended to think regarding their children and their first language (L1). Thus, multilingualism is the second theme to be examined, based on the ways in which the multilingual living conditions of the families rose to the surface in the data.

**Family script:** "*Everything is in Turkish, what would he do with Kurdish?*". Although all the adult family members (except Zilan's father) knew Kurdish, and used their native tongue proficiently, the Kurdish abilities of the focal children were limited. All the focal participants

thought that it would be good if their children learned Kurdish as an additional language. Samet's mother, Fatma, for example, said that Kurdish came after Turkish because, "*Everything is in Turkish, what would he do with Kurdish. There are not many things in Kurdish. For me, Turkish is more important. What could be in Kurdish*" (int-S1mot-062014). Furthermore, according to Fatma, teaching Kurdish came after teaching Samet to read the Quran (written in Arabic) because she believed that reading the Quran would keep Samet away from the dangers of the Pınarcık streets. In Fatma's accounts, Kurdish was represented as one of many languages. She said, "*In addition [to Turkish and the Quran], I want Samet to learn Kurdish as well. It would be good if Samet knew many languages*" (int-S1mot-062014).

Zilan's mother, Nurcan, expressed the same idea, "*Everything is in Turkish*" (int-S2mot-062014). When I asked the focal mothers whether they wanted their children to get some education in Kurdish, they reacted as if they had not thought about this option before. Nurcan, for instance, said, "*It makes no difference to me (...) but no. I don't want my daughter to take Kurdish language lessons in school because everything is in Turkish*" (int-S1mot-062014). Contrary to Zilan's mother, her aunt, Berfin, believed that her daughters should learn their mother tongue, to be able to communicate with their community. In her words:

*Yes, I want them [my children] learn Kurdish in schools, because I cannot teach it to them now. I am mostly inclined to use Turkish. But when they go to the village in the future, there are our elders who do not speak Turkish. When they get there, my children will need to use Kurdish.* (int-S2aunM-062014)

Like Berfin, the focal families mainly thought that the place of L1 should be confined to their homes and to the community. Fatma told me several times about how she loved talking to her mother in Kurdish. This was something very special between Fatma and her mother, something she could not explain. Yet, when she was asked if teachers should use Kurdish in

lessons to help first grade students whose Turkish was not developed enough to follow the lessons, she said, “*No, otherwise they will get confused and not learn Turkish*” (enote-S1-2014-02-12). Fatma’s understanding was shared by Zilan’s parents. Zilan’s mother did not even believe that minority students in Turkish schools experienced language related difficulties. She said, “*Those kids must be Syrian kids. Today, even in [southeastern] villages everyone, especially the youngsters, know enough Turkish*” (enote-S2-2014-02-22).

The focal parents’ views about using only Turkish in schools was consistent with mainstream ideology. In the mainstream Turkish education system, it has been argued that multilingual families should talk to their children only in Turkish to support their children’s education in Turkish schools. Samet’s teacher, Mr. Boylan, reported that teachers working in multilingual communities advised multilingual families not to speak L1 to their children at home to ensure their success in school. Even though Mr. Boylan was opposed to discouraging families from using the L1 at home, he also supported the idea of using only Turkish in his lessons. I asked him about his strategy with students who did not have enough Turkish in the first grade. He answered:

*I just wait. I don’t do anything special for them [children who do not know enough Turkish]. I teach them the standard reading and writing in Turkish, which is designed for the Turkish students only. I do what has been done for the Turkish students. The non-Turkish students need time to understand what they read. We wait, one year, two years, three years. As children understand more, learn more Turkish, and start speaking Turkish, they gradually become successful in reading and writing, as well. (int1-S1tea-022014)*

Based on my observations of, and interactions with, the children and their families, I would argue that the focal families comply with the dominant ideology regarding their own native tongue. That is, it only belongs in the home, and does not have many functions in society

other than communicating with elders in the village; hence, it should not be taught in schools. This thinking has led the focal participants to assume that their L1 did not have a marketable value compared to the dominant language. Since, as argued by Gee (2005), language is a tool to build identity, the value of L1 ascribed by its own speakers, also affects how people evaluate their ethnic identity. Samet's father, for instance, proudly presented himself to me by saying, "*My Turkish is very developed. When I was doing compulsory military service in the Turkish army, no one ever understood that I was Kurdish*" (int-S1fat-062014), although to me, he had a noticeable Kurdish accent. In this sense, I could argue that the focal participants presented themselves to their children, to the teachers, and to me in ways that reflected mainstream assumptions that non-dominant identities and languages are inferior to Turkish and have little value or importance.

*Zilan's script: "I am not pro- Apo"*<sup>54</sup>. The mainstream ideology about Kurdish language and identity had already been adopted by the focal children when they started first grade, especially by Zilan. I never observed Samet speaking Kurdish or making any comments about it. Samet's indifference toward his mother tongue could be a reflection of the surrounding discourses about his L1, both in his home and in the community. However, unlike Samet, the second focal child, Zilan, used Kurdish in her household. Moreover, she enjoyed teaching me some Kurdish words and showing me the TV channels broadcasting Kurdish music. Even though I observed that Zilan seemed to enjoying speaking Kurdish with her grandmother and singing Kurdish songs while doing her homework, her mother told me that Zilan did not like speaking in Kurdish at all. She explained, "*Zilan even wishes that her grandmother learned*

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<sup>54</sup> Apo is the abbreviated name of Abdullah Öcalan. He is the founder of the organized Kurdish armed groups in Kurdish territories in the Middle East. He was arrested in 1999, and sentenced to life imprisonment in Turkey.

*Turkish, so that she could talk to her grandmother in Turkish” (enote-S2-2013-12-21). The mother reported that Zilan started saying so after she started school, although the teachers did not make any comments about using the L1. According to her mother, Zilan has negative impressions about other Kurdish students in her class. “She [Zilan] finds Kurdish children very dirty. She always talks about them as neglected and poor kids” (enote-S2-2013-12-21).*

Immediately following this, she reported the following event:

*Last week, Ms. Ersu complained that the students did not wash their hands in class and asked them to bring in wet towels. Zilan insisted on taking two packages of it. In class, when Ms. Ersu was checking the wet towels, Zilan proudly said to the teacher “I brought two packages.” So Ms. Ersu thanked her twice. (enote-S2-2013-12-21)*

I previously mentioned Ms. Ersu’s insistence on the importance of students being “clean,” in the previous chapter. I observed Ms. Ersu complaining about students’ dirty fingernails and dirty hair to the parents on many occasions. In the event mentioned above, Zilan tried to impress her teacher by giving special importance to being clean because Zilan knew that this was something very important to the teacher. In other words, Zilan chose to represent herself as a very “clean student” to relate to her teacher. I would argue that Zilan defined her Kurdish classmates as “*dirty, neglected, and poor*” (see Nurcan’s account above), and by foregrounding “cleanness” as a contradictory characteristic of being a Kurdish student, she distinguished herself from her Kurdish identity. Similarly, Zilan also distinguished herself from her Kurdish classmates by distancing herself from her L1. Therefore, Zilan wanted everyone that she loved (e.g., her mother and her grandmother) to speak Turkish.

In my home observations, I noticed two occasions when Zilan demonstrated a similar stance towards her Kurdish identity. The first one was during the initial phases of data collection in November. Zilan and her mother were alone at home. Zilan was painting in her coloring

book and Nurcan was watching TV. I failed to notice what initiated the event, but suddenly Zilan cried out very loudly, “*I don’t like Kurdish and I am not pro-Apo either.*” Nurcan smiled and just said “*Okay*” (enote-S2-2013-11-23).

The second instance was in January, when again Zilan was alone at home with her mother. Like the first occasion, Zilan cried out, “*I am not pro-Apo.*” This time, Nurcan made the following explanations patiently. “*We are Kurdish but are we pro-Apo* [rhetorical question to mean we are not pro-Apo]? *We are the Atays* [their surname]. *Your grandparents also talk Kurdish but are they pro-Apo* [again a rhetorical question]?”

I would argue that Zilan’s “*I am not pro-Apo*” performances could have been directed at me because my “ways with words” (Heath, 1983) were similar to her teacher’s. In other words, I talked, acted, and dressed like her teacher. She knew that I was Turkish, and teaching in a university; therefore, I could argue that by performing a non-Kurdish identity, she tried to align herself with “the teacher’s” group, which, as Zilan believed, contrasted with her family’s Kurdish identity. In Gee’s (2005) terms, Zilan, by making a certain statements, projected herself as a certain kind of person, which also differed depending on the social circumstances. The following quote by Gee (2005) aptly explains how Zilan’s script about her mother tongue and identity represented social justice in society: “The fact that people have differential access to different identities and activities, connected to different sorts of status and social goods, is a root source of inequality in society” (Gee, 2005; p. 22). Since Zilan’s two identities have unequal status in the society, she tried to ensure her access to the powerful and dominant identity through her “*I am not pro-Apo*” performances.

***Teachers' scripts: "Constant conflict in multilingual children's worlds"***. As with the meanings of literacy, focal teachers again stated similar thoughts about the effects of speaking two languages on focal children's lives. Both of the focal teachers agreed that the multilingual children experienced a constant conflict as they transferred from one socio-ecological system to another. Ms. Ersu, for instance, explained it by saying:

*Adults at home talk about Turkish people in a particular way. In the Pınarcık community, for example, children often hear that adults curse Atatürk [the founding leader of modern Turkey]. Children think that what the adults say is right. When children come to school, the school says just the opposite. Therefore, children here have been experiencing a constant conflict. Things that are beyond children's understanding occupy their mind. (int1-S2tea-022014)*

For Mr. Boylan, "*Children realize these things [the tensions between their two worlds] very early*" (int2-S1tea-062014). However, the focal teachers again differed when interpreting the role of the families in the emergence of such a conflict in children's minds. Ms. Ersu conceptualized the families' role by referring to their "lack of consciousness." She asserted that this tension is created by Pınarcık families since they failed to coordinate multilingual environments; that is, the Kurdish speaking community and the Turkish speaking school, in a smooth way. She said:

*I don't think that Pınarcık families care about their children getting Turkish education. They don't make a distinction between Turkish and Kurdish. They don't have that consciousness. If they cared a bit, they would have come to me and talked to me about that. They would have worried and said, "my child doesn't know Turkish, I don't know Turkish either. So, my child is going to experience difficulties in school." These kids may be lagging behind because of their lack of Turkish. They don't have Kurdish abilities, either. So, what have they [Pınarcık families] taught their kids so far? (int2-S2tea-062014)*

She finished with a rhetorical question to imply that Pınarcık families do not teach enough of either Turkish or Kurdish to their children to improve their children's linguistic

abilities. With this statement, Ms. Ersu reaffirmed the dominant ideology by ignoring the non-dominant families' historical and cultural backgrounds, as though they had nothing to transfer to the next generations or to call upon in learning in school. Pınarcık families were also held responsible for the tension that the bilingual children experience between the school and the community.

In contrast to Ms. Ersu, Mr. Boylan thought that bilingual children experienced a conflict when they needed to negotiate two different worldviews, as a result of their families' conscious decisions about their L1. He explained why his family decided not to talk to him in Kurdish, as an example:

*During the eighties and nineties especially, our educated young people [in the Kurdish community] laid claim to their own identity and culture. As a consequence, those people joined the revolts organized on the mountains to fight against the Turkish authorities. This was before me. I am of the following generation; we are the children who were born in the beginning of eighties. One of the biggest fears of our families was that if they raised their children with their own identities, their own cultures, if the children learned their native tongue and their culture they would feel the same conflicts or tensions. My parents believed that if I had good Kurdish, I would be inclined to **choose the mountain**<sup>55</sup> during my university years. This was how our families thought. (int2-S1tea-062014)*

This way of thinking is very common among many Kurdish families (GÖÇ-DER, 2005). To explain how his family's choice of speaking to their children only in Turkish affected his life, Mr. Metin Boylan told me, "*My mother tongue is Kurdish (...) but my mother tongue is Turkish*" (int-S1tea-022014). In a remarkable way, Mr. Boylan used parallel syntactic constructions to express two contrasting states, that is, the tongue of his mother (Kurdish) and the tongue that mother spoke to him (Turkish). This expression perfectly represents the ambivalent feelings that most bilingual and bicultural people have reported so far in Turkey (see, for example, Coşkun et

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<sup>55</sup> This is a verbatim transcription of the Turkish expression meaning that he would join the fighting groups on the mountains.

al., 2010 in Chapter 1). Similarly, Mr. Boylan also mentioned that his conflict had impaired his sense of belonging in other areas of his life:

*Who am I? Where do I belong? This sense of belonging is missing in me. There is no way that I can complete the void in me related to my identity, my culture, my roots. I don't ever know how to feel that I belong in a place. There is no way that I can learn it now. I cannot feel myself belonging to a person either just because of that. I don't have a language or a culture that embraces me. (int2-S1tea-062014)*

Mr. Boylan mentioned that even though he started to learn his L1 later, he was not able to overcome the tension created by the struggle between non-dominant families and the dominant ideology. The multilingual families deliberately cut their ties between language and identity by not speaking in Kurdish to their children. They believed that if their children claimed their ethnic identity, it would cause them life-threatening troubles. Their stance is reminiscent of Skutnabb-Kangas' (2003) arguments about transferring the native tongue to the next generations. According to her, parents do not have a real choice when deciding whether or not to transfer their first language to their children; rather, the social and historical conditions determine this for the non-dominant families. Furthermore, from the perspective of sociocritical literacy analysis, I could argue that the multilingual families mentioned in Mr. Boylan's personal history, distanced themselves from persisting power struggles. They did not participate in the explicit conflicts among various social actors, but tried to fit into the dominant script in a contained form, and refrained from transferring their L1 to the youngsters.

**Schooling.** The last theme to be examined with representative excerpts from the data, is "schooling." My discussion mainly focuses on the meaning of schooling for the focal participants and how home is related to school.

***Family script: “We didn’t have the chance to go to school, therefore we are ready to do everything to ensure that he goes to school”.*** Schooling was of primary importance for the focal families because they believed that it would provide the children with a chance to live differently than their unschooled parents. Zilan’s father, for example, was ready to work even as a toilet cleaner to be able to afford Zilan’s education, at any cost. His only wish was, “*just to let her be educated*” (enote-T-2014-06-school report day). Like Zilan’s father, Fatma said:

*I hope Samet finishes school so he will not live a life of misery like us. I want my daughter to go to school, as well. I want it for my daughter more than I want it for my son, because in Kurdish families, women suffer a lot. If Beyza [her daughter] goes to school, she can save her life. If I could have gone to school, would I be in this condition? Everything would be very different for me. But now it [my life] is out of my hands. (int-S1mot-062014)*

In addition to the families’ concerns about a better future for their children, security was another issue that defined the links between home and school. The focal families perceived the school as a place that had the potential to keep their children away from the bad and dangerous environment of Pınarcık. Fatma always said, “*The night life in Pınarcık is so different than its day time. Here it is so bad at night with drug dealers, street gangs, and prostitutes wandering the streets*” (enote-S1-2014-01-11). Similarly, Zilan’s parents complained that a group of drug addicts met every night in front of their building. As a result, the families were frightened and worried about how to keep their children away from the crime and corruption in Pınarcık. This feeling of insecurity among focal families led them to consider school vitally important, since school was the only place that Pınarcık children could depend on for support against the potential harms of Pınarcık. Mr. Boylan, for example, stated that one of the reasons that Pınarcık families send their children to school, especially in secondary grades, was to keep them away from the

Pınarcık streets: *“Since their kids are in school during the day, they do not need to worry if their kids are involving in some types of dangerous acts in Pınarcık”* (int-S1tea-022014).

In spite of the school’s key position in the community, the link between home and school was rather fragile due to the Pınarcık families’ economic weakness. The parents did not have proper education or job security; therefore, they could not guarantee their children a long period of study without interruptions. Their resources were scarce and could be allocated only to the children if they proved some success. For instance, Zilan’s youngest aunt was taken out of school at the end of grade eight because the family thought that she was not successful enough to continue on to high school (int-S2mot-062014). Samet’s father said that he had two children already, so he would not send Samet to school if Samet failed. He said, *“When Samet turns 10 or 11 years old, it will be apparent if he can continue in school or not. The school or the family cannot give anything to Samet after he turns 11”* (int-S1fat-062014). In that case, Samet would be taken from the school and sent to work. Following, I argue that this reality provides a context to interpret focal children’s personal characteristics.

Samet’s teacher, Mr. Boylan, described Samet as a “tricky” and “quarrelsome” student. For the teacher, Samet had a quick mind and usually tended to pass his duties to someone else in the class. Moreover, the teacher mentioned that Samet was good at deceiving the people around him so he could be in the forefront. In accordance with the teacher’s description, Samet’s mother, father, and grandfather also emphasized that Samet was deceitful most of the time. Mr. Boylan thought that according to the official school ideology, a student was expected to be honest, hardworking, and open to collaboration. Although Samet’s personal characteristics (e.g., quarrelsome, deceitful, and dominating) may seem inappropriate, these features could be considered favorable when one thinks about Samet’s social context. For the teacher, children

like Samet needed to develop skills to overcome obstacles in a clever way, since their ability to be in the forefront ensured that their education would continue. Hence, in Samet's context, which is defined by poverty, low levels of education, and corruption, Mr. Boylan thought, "*It is a good thing if Samet can thrust himself forward in a clever way*" (int-S1tea-022014). Mr. Boylan's statement makes sense mainly when we think of arguments about the relation among space, power, and identity (Janks, 2000; Jenks, 2007; 2014). First of all, it has been put forward that social space is connected to the formation of identities; therefore, people's sense of their identities can be best understood and interpreted in relation to their social contexts (Jenks, 2007; 2014). Mr. Boylan defines Samet's context as determined by obstacles that contribute to the marginalized status of the Pınarcık community. These obstacles in Samet's world restrict his access to academic success, which was seen as an enabling factor of a "better" life. While students like Samet learn to realize and manage the relation between language and power, they also come to "design" various ways that provide access to the academic success (Janks, 2000). Since Samet was lacking the legitimate "ways with words" (Heath, 1983) to have a better place in the classroom, according to Mr. Boylan, he tried to position himself as a successful student by doing "clever tricks." Mr. Boylan's perspective is in accordance with his interpretation of Pınarcık students' academic conditions. While many teachers, including Ms. Ersu, foregrounded "innate" characteristics of Pınarcık people like "lack of consciousness", Mr. Boylan emphasized that how people behave and position themselves was determined by their social contexts.

***Teachers' scripts: Mr. Boylan's feeling of inadequacy versus Ms. Ersu's "starfish" story.*** Both of the focal teachers were aware of the significance of school for the Pınarcık families as a source of hope. For example, Ms. Ersu said, "*In this neighborhood, school is the only place which helps families to save their children from the surrounding corrupted*

*environment*” (int-S2tea-062014). For the focal teachers, although the school has the main responsibility of improving Pınarcık children’s skills and knowledge, its influence is small. During the teachers’ interviews, they constructed contrasting scripts about the role of schooling in Pınarcık community. While Mr. Boylan’s script is determined by his feeling of inadequacy, Ms. Ersu’s script is determined by the very well-known starfish story.

Mr. Boylan mainly posited the effects of the education system as a problem in general. In Turkey, the educational system is based on national exams at every level. To attend better high schools, the students take national exams at the end of middle school. Similarly, students are placed (or fail to be placed) in a university based on the points they get on university entrance exams. According to Mr. Boylan, the students who come from better-educated families, and have the chance of going to better schools, benefit from this exam-based educational system. On the other hand, Pınarcık students are restricted by such an educational system, since they face many obstacles.

Because of the exam-based educational system, Mr. Boylan felt like a babysitter instead of an influential teacher:

*We are just taking care of their kids. I feel like I am babysitting them. The families leave their kids at school for five or six hours, and the teachers look after them. Yet the families are not aware of the fact that the school does not really contribute to their children’s future. (int2-S1tea-062014)*

For Mr. Boylan, these families expect the teachers to change their kids and transform them into what the families want their kids to become. However, Pınarcık families should know that there is quite a large chance that their kids will fail in school. He argued that the families’ influence on children’s schooling is greater than the school’s. The families expect too much

from the school and miss out-of-school opportunities to prepare their kids for real life. The families have to prepare a different future for their kids, beyond making them get a school diploma, because a primary or a secondary school diploma in Pınarcık does not guarantee higher education. For Mr. Boylan, this especially applies to Samet, whose mother does not know much about school but pushes Samet too hard to be among the most successful students in class.

As a consequence of the mismatch between the educational system and students' social realities, Mr. Boylan thinks that his students challenge the education system by not learning. He said:

*The school teaches these Pınarcık students things that are irrelevant to their lives. Therefore, the students here challenge me [the teacher] by not learning, they don't want to learn what we teach. This reaction is the students' way of saying "I don't want to learn this because I don't need this in my life. (int1-S1tea-022014)*

In this excerpt, Mr. Boylan presented Pınarcık children's underachievement as children's "counterscript." In Gutiérrez' framework, a counterscript is produced as a response to the dominant ideology and reflects the social positioning of non-dominant groups in contact with the codes of power (Delpit, 1988; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Gutiérrez, Rymes & Larson, 1995). So, in Mr. Boylan's account, students' underachievement in Pınarcık is constructed as a resistance to the position imposed upon them by the educational system. Mr. Boylan felt helpless and inadequate because when the Pınarcık children failed the national exams they felt like failures. He was worried because he believed that there was nothing to do for the majority of the Pınarcık children.

When explaining his pedagogy, Mr. Boylan made constant references to his life, which, he thought, was not very different from the lives of the children in the Pınarcık community. He

was a “lucky” student (in his words), who “achieved” on the exams, got a university education, and ended up working as a primary school teacher. He compared his situation with his friends, who ended up being either drug addicts, street gang members, or helpers in barber shops at the best. He asked, “*I was the lucky one. What would the majority of the students get out of schools? Is the education only for just one or two lucky students to be successful?*” (int2-S1tea-062014).

Ms. Ersu would answer Mr. Boylan’s question with a strong yes:

*If one student out of ten becomes successful here, this is good enough for me. You know the starfish story? There may be thousands of starfish at risk that I cannot save but when I save one of them, it makes a difference to that one.* (int2-S2tea-062014)

For her, doing the opposite would be wasting students. With this perspective, Ms. Ersu considered herself an idealistic teacher. Although most of the teachers working in the Pınarcık community school, as she reported, gave up hope for these children, she believed that starfish story<sup>56</sup> gave her the endurance to support the Pınarcık community.

Based on the two teachers’ accounts about the purpose of education in the Pınarcık community, it would not be wrong to contend that both focal teachers challenge what the educational system enforced upon them and their students, albeit in different ways. I would argue that Mr. Boylan challenged the dominant educational system in a disruptive way. Despite being a representative of that system, as a teacher, he distanced himself from it and argued that

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<sup>56</sup> This is one of the many versions of the full story adapted from Eiseley (1969): A young girl was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement. She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, “Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can’t save all these starfish. You can’t begin to make a difference!” The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, “Well, I made a difference to that one!” (taken from <https://www.cityyear.org/about-us/culture-values/founding-stories/starfish-story>)

the system should be changed to serve the “unlucky” majority. Ms. Ersu also challenged the educational system that selected the best students coming from educated middle class families to progress to higher education. Yet her challenge was not disruptive but contained, as she tried to prepare some of the Pınarcık students to be included in the system, hence turning them into the lucky ones to continue their education.

### **School Literacies as a Catalyst**

The third research question asked about the effects of school literacy on low educated and non-schooled households. I use the term “catalyst” in my research context, to describe school based literacy activities, and to foreground their potential to initiate change. In this section, I categorize my analysis of school literacy acting as a “catalyst” in two ways. First, I look at the interactions between school literacy and the types of literacy activities prominent in the focal homes. For the purposes of this dissertation, I focus on the religious literacy practices in Samet’s household, and the ways in which Samet’s mother, literate in religious text, transferred her skills and knowledge to a less-skilled area of school literacy. Following, I discuss how power dynamics in the focal households were affected as a result of the children learning to read and write as the second catalyzing effect of school literacy in low-educated households.

**Different literacies at home.** In Samet’s house, in addition to Samet’s school texts, religious texts had a prominent status because Samet’s mother, Fatma, read the Quran almost every day to fulfill her religious duties. Since I observed that reading the Quran was a prominent literacy practice at the focal home, I also noted how Fatma engaged with religious texts:

*It was Saturday afternoon. There were not many people at home, only the children and the mother. The mother had already finished her home chores. The children and I were sitting in the living room. The children were watching TV. The mother went to the hallway and grabbed the Mawlid book [a religious book], opened it, and started reading*

*silently. Before getting started, she tidied her headscarf. While reading, her lips were moving silently, and she was following the lines with her index finger. (enote-S1-2014-01-18)*

Reading the Quran and the Mawlid were important activities in Fatma's life because she believed that the angels protected the houses in which the Quran and the Mawlid were read occasionally. Although Fatma's formal literacy skills were not very developed, she described herself as competent in reading religious texts. There were mainly two different books that Fatma was reading: the *Quran* and the *Mawlid*. Fatma learned how to read the Quran from a neighbor after she got married several years ago. The Quran that Fatma read was in Arabic written with Arabic script. During my data collection period, she was learning to read the Mawlid, which was the life story of the Prophet Muhammed. The language in Mawlid is Kurdish, but it is written in Arabic script like the Quran. Although Fatma could read the Arabic script in the Quran, she was not able to read the same script in the Mawlid, since she was not taught how to read the script but mainly memorized the words she saw in the texts. Moreover, she could not read the modern Arabic script found on some food packages. This was mainly because she did not learn the Arabic language. Therefore, I could say that Fatma was not able to "read" the Arabic script in the sense we understand it as a school-based activity, but "recited" the words found in religious texts. Putting it another way: she was memorizing or reading aloud without understanding the content of the text.

To understand the differences between Fatma's religious-based literacy activities in comparison to Samet's school-based activities, I also observed Fatma's Mawlid instruction sessions in her neighbor's house. The first difference was that, while school-based formal literacy activities comprised both reading and writing, religious-based literacy activities only

involved reading (not writing). Therefore, in Mawlid instruction sessions, there were no pens or notebooks, but just the book and a hand-made pointer from a calendar page. The instructor<sup>57</sup>, who was also an unschooled Kurdish woman, followed the words with the pointer while Fatma tried to read the words she pointed out, aloud. When Fatma made a mistake, both women commented on what she did wrong and why. “*Keep the words in mind*” and “*repeat with patience*” were the two phrases that repeatedly came along in their comments. Fatma kept reminding herself, “*I need to read and repeat at home, otherwise I cannot memorize them*” (enote-S1-2014-01-21).

Second, school-based literacy activities contain texts that are “improvable” objects, which should be understood to be questioned first, reviewed, and, eventually, revised (Wells, 2000). Although it was hard to assert that this was the case in the Pınarcık School, these criteria were also emphasized as one of the Ministry of National Education’s teaching objectives in the primary schools (Ministry of National Education, 2009). Yet, Samet did not observe any correspondence between what is promoted in school versus what is practiced at home with prints. In one of my home visits, I asked Fatma to read me the first page from the Mawlid:

*Fatma read the first page aloud to me. When she finished, she described the Mawlid: “It tells the life story of the prophet Muhammed. Each page [section] tells a different story.” She translated one sentence to Turkish: “Amine went to see her mother.” Then, I asked who Amine was. She said, “Amine was the wife of Abdullah.” She didn’t know that I knew the story, and I knew who those people were. I again asked who Abdullah was. She answered, “Abdullah was the youngest son of the Prophet Muhammed. He wanted to get married.” I just listened and didn’t say she was wrong. She, herself, must not have been satisfied with her answer, and started reading and scanning the pages to find the right answer. After a while, she said, “I don’t know, I don’t understand. (enote-2014-01-18)*

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<sup>57</sup> Fatma’s Mawlid instructor did not get money for teaching the Mawlid. She had a new baby and taught the Mawlid for the sake of God as a debt of gratitude for having a new baby.

Based on this incident, I would argue that Fatma did not read the Mawlid to understand it. In Samet's home, texts are read not as something to be understood but as a ritual performance. Fatma and other neighborhood women's social purpose of reading the Quran and the Mawlid were mainly done to show gratitude to God. It was believed that reading them would protect the family members from the evil eye or bad luck. Therefore, the family hung excerpts from the Quran, written in Arabic script, on the walls of their apartment. Reading the Quran was a religious duty and provided Fatma with patience against the difficulties in her life (enote-S1-2014-03-04).

In addition to reading religious texts, Fatma also engaged with school literacy activities through Samet's school tasks, to help him with his homework. Yet, school-based literacy and religious-based literacy belong to two different domains, which require two different practices. For Fatma, helping Samet out with his homework and school tasks was a lesser-known activity, since Fatma did not go to school or did not take any formal literacy instruction. However, I observed that she made transfers from a more familiar area (i.e., religious literacy) to an unfamiliar and unknown area (i.e., school literacy).

To analyze the ways in which Fatma made use of her skills in religious literacy to help Samet's school-based tasks, I use the concept "transfer of learning," borrowed from education and learning theory. Perkins and Salomon (1992) define transfer of learning as "when learning in one context or with one set of materials impacts performance in another context or with other related materials" (p. 3). Based on this definition, I argue that Fatma's learning within religious practices equipped her with certain skills that she could use when helping Samet with homework. On the other hand, if Samet's school task was not similar to the ways in which Fatma practiced in Quran reading, she failed to understand the activity itself.

First of all, Fatma's success in learning and reading the Quran provided her with motivation and self-confidence towards other learning tasks. Once she told me that her husband discouraged her from learning how to read and write since he thought that she was too old to learn something new. Yet, she answered him proudly, "*I even learned the Quran at this age, why can't I learn how to read and write*" (enote-S1-2013-12-04). Similarly, Fatma made constant references to her religious literacy skills while talking about school-related literacy tasks. Since, unlike Zilan's mother, Fatma was used to studying on her own to learn the Mawlid, I could argue that she knew the importance of having a study environment for Samet while he was doing his homework. In Zilan's home, the TV was usually on during her homework time. Yet I observed that Fatma switched off the TV to mark the start of homework time, no matter how difficult it was to do this because it was against Samet's will. She described Samet's homework time like this: *I certainly sit down beside Samet. I finish all my chores. I sit down next to him, and read with him. I read with him like I read my Quran, the same way* (int-S2mot-062014). Like her Mawlid instructor, Fatma also used a pointer to show Samet the words for the reading tasks. She patiently showed each word, and waited for Samet to read it before they moved on to the next word (enote-S1-2013-12-18). Similarly, when Samet and I were working on counting numbers in English, Fatma could understand more easily than Samet that there was no one-to-one correspondence between the spelling and pronunciation in English. "*Yes, I got it, this is like the Mawlid. It is read differently*" (enote-S1-2014-05-28). Thus, since religious literacy was a reading-only activity, Fatma did not experience difficulties when helping Samet with reading tasks in the beginning of the school term.

On the other hand, Fatma's literacy skills in the social domain of religion did not provide her with the skills necessary to handle text-based activities in school, which required

understanding, questioning, and reorganizing the content of the text. In the literature, it has been stated that since the skills of working with a written text are mainly developed as a result of schooling, non-schooled adults usually experience difficulties in understanding the differences between real world knowledge and the knowledge presented in the text (Luria, 1976 (as cited in Vygotsky, 1962); Scribner & Cole, 1981). For instance, when I participated in the reading and writing classes Ms. Ersu provided for the adults in the community, I observed that Ms. Ersu struggled to teach comprehension question activities, based on a written text. From my field notes:

[In Ms. Ersu's adult literacy class] *The class read a short story, then started answering the comprehension questions. Ms. Ersu was wandering around the adult students to check their answers. One comprehension question was about the main character in the story: How many friends does Ali [the main character] have? Ms. Ersu saw one woman was struggling with that question. She read the question aloud to explain:*

*Ms. Ersu: You wrote "five" here. How many friends does Ali have?*

*Woman: I have five friends.*

*Ms. Ersu: Look at the text. The question asks Ali's friends not yours. You should write how many friends Ali has in the story. It's not about you. It's about the story.*

*Then other women joined in and they started discussing about the text (enote-TEA-2014-02-25).*

Likewise, for Fatma, text-based comprehension activities were unfamiliar. As a result, she failed to understand text related activities in Samet's homework, as shown in the following observation:

*Samet brought a handout from school. It was a one-page story. Samet gave it to his mother and said, "Ask me a question [from that story]." This was also what the teachers suggested families do at home. Fatma got confused, didn't know what to do. She asked back, "Question? How? What will the question be like? What part is the question? Is this whole line a question?" Then she said, "Did I ever go to school [a rhetorical question]? Damn it!" (enote-S1-2014-05-06)*

Although Fatma was perfectly competent with following Samet's reading tasks in the first school term, she was not able to help Samet in the second school term. This is because the first-term reading tasks that Samet brought from school were similar to Fatma's religious literacy practices, while the second-term text-based comprehension activities were not. Therefore, I could argue that she could transfer her learning and skills from the religious literacy domain to the domain of school literacy when the task was similar. Most interestingly, it seems like Samet enjoyed these kinds of encounters. The previous event continues:

*Following his mother's regret about her illiteracy, Samet suddenly asked his mother a subtraction question, although they were not doing mathematics. When Fatma used her fingers to do the calculation, Samet laughed at her and interrupted her by saying, "Don't count on fingers" [like it is discouraged in school]. So his mother quit. (enote-S1-2014-05-06).*

Based on such incidents, in the following section, I argue that these confrontations provide the focal children with a space to challenge the authority of their parents based on literacy skills.

**Reconstruction of relationships.** The second research question asks about how the relationships among the focal participants (i.e., the focal children, their families, and the focal teachers) are reconstructed when they are confronted by messages about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling. I provide evidence for the ways in which school-based abilities determined the categories of identity as forms of favorable and unfavorable self-definition for the focal participants. So the superiority of adults over children based on "authority" may not have been an unchallenged status but were under constant challenge as a result of the participants' changing social conditions.

Firstly, it was a big thing for the focal families when their children started school, as the parents kept repeating on every occasion, they were ready to make sacrifices for their children's education. Consequently, starting from the first days of the first grade, the focal children acquired a privileged status in the household.

*Zilan just got back to her grandmother's house from school. She was sitting on the floor in the middle of the living room, and taking her school stuff out of her school bag. Her two younger cousins, Ebru (4) and Ozan (2) were standing over her, watching. Zilan was taking out her work sheets, pencils, and eraser. It caused curiosity among the younger kids. Ozan leaned over Zilan very closely. It seems that Zilan was glad that her cousins were watching her, so she took them out slowly. It became like a big display; Zilan was proudly displaying her school stuff for her cousins. (...) Ebru and Ozan, now, sat down on the floor beside Zilan. The younger kids were watching Zilan very carefully. One of the aunts put her son, Onur (5), next to Zilan, saying, "Sit here, listen to her and repeat what she says carefully, so that you can learn something." (enote-S2-2014-01-21).*

These sorts of displays, using school materials, were prevalent in both focal houses. Similarly, in Samet's house, Beyza (4) liked watching Samet's organization of his school materials, and usually sat down beside Samet when he was doing homework. Zilan's activity of reading and writing is interesting to other children because there are not many reading and writing activities at home. Because Zilan and Samet got increased attention from other members of the family after they started school, they became important figures in the household, someone to be watched and learned from.

As another reflection of their access to school, the focal children started thinking that they knew more than the older family members who were unschooled or not literate enough even in minor aspects of life. For instance, Zilan was surprised when she found out that her grandmother also knew the antonym of the word "long." From my field notes:

*While doing homework about antonyms, Zilan was trying to find the antonym of the word "long." Her grandmother whispered "short" in Turkish, then Zilan asked in wonder,*

*“how can you know it, you did not go to school.” The grandmother did not say anything but smiled. (enote-S2-2014-03-28).*

Since Zilan’s grandmother did not know how to read, write or speak Turkish, which were prestigious assets for Zilan, she assumed that her grandmother did not possess life knowledge when it was expressed in the books, either. Putting it differently, having the chance to go to school, Zilan saw herself as more knowledgeable than most family members. I would argue that this assumed self-definition was usually put forward by the focal children when they were faced with something undesirable:

*[In Zilan’s grandparents’ home] Zilan’s grandmother had guests. One of the women called out to Zilan, “You will be my bride in the future” [meaning: I will marry you off to my son]. Zilan got angry and said, “You don’t know how to read and write. I am going to school. I can beat you up.” The woman said something to the other guests in Kurdish. (enote-S2-2014-03-28)*

Zilan’s courage to challenge the neighbor in a culturally important issue like marriage resulted from her schooling and her literacy skills. She put forward her going to school as an asset that enables her to stand out against the community. So, literacy empowered Zilan while it disempowered others like unschooled Kurdish women in the community, which in turn, led Zilan to assume that other people that she judged as “lacking much formal education” have lower positions than herself. According to Zilan, those people could be challenged or even made fun of:

*Zilan was doing her homework. Her mother told me about her husband’s recent illness. When I said, “you are lucky because your husband works in a hospital [as a janitor],” Zilan jumped into the conversation. “My father does not work in a hospital; he is a sweeper [a degrading word for janitor].” She laughed and repeated, “he is a sweeper” several times on her own, making fun of her father. Her mother reacted to her by saying, “Then, go to school and don’t be a sweeper.” (enote-S2-2014-06-07)*

In this excerpt, Zilan was able to make fun of his father and his occupation (i.e., something which was important for the father) (see the family profiles). Here, Zilan's mother presented "going to school" as an asset to ensure higher status in the society, something her father was lacking. I would argue that her mother's connecting school and a better position, which could not be degraded, bolstered Zilan's assumption about the power status of schooling.

In both families, focal children appeared not to miss any chances to aggrandize themselves in relation to their unschooled parents. In December, although it had been only three months since Samet started school, he began rejecting her mother's corrections when he read or wrote something wrong, by claiming that his mother actually learned from him and had only been imitating him. The disputes between Samet and his mother could be resolved after they consulted a literate neighbor (enote-S1-2013-12-18) or after Samet's mother retreated by saying, "*Yes, I don't know because I didn't have the chance to go to school. But I am learning it now. Since you are going to school now, you should know it better than me*" (enote-S1-2013-12-04).

Unlike Samet's mother, Zilan's mother did not retreat easily. She tried to keep her authority and control over Zilan's schooling by opening up a new area of dispute based on school materials. The mother thought that good handwriting was a must; therefore, from time to time, she made Zilan erase the whole page when she found Zilan's handwriting was unsatisfactory. Nurcan proudly said to me, "*If she has good handwriting, it is thanks to me. Once, I got Zilan to write the same thing three times over and over again until she wrote it well*" (enote-S2-2014-01-13). Yet, Zilan's mother's attempts to intervene in Zilan's education resulted in Zilan's counterattacks. Among many instances, the following excerpt is exemplary:

*Nurcan [the mother] is checking Zilan's homework:*

*N: Which one did you do? Shall I make you erase this part?*

*On one page, Zilan's handwriting was good but she had lots of spelling errors. But Nurcan said:*

*N: OK, you did this page well.*

*She turns to the next page. On the next page, Zilan's handwriting was not so good but she didn't have any errors. This time, Nurcan says:*

*N: This page is bad. Write it again.*

*Zilan objected to it loudly.*

*Z: You don't understand it.*

*N: I do.*

*Z: You never went to school, how can you know?*

*Then, Zilan takes her book to her mother, and shows her a letter:*

*Z: Is this a?*

*N: [nods to say yes]*

*Z: No, that is not a, that is b. Can you write "many" for me? OK, write "many"*

*N: shut up and go away. (enote-S2-2014-06-07)*

To sum up, a constant discussion was going on in both of the focal families regarding the literacy abilities of various family members. The source of this discourse is the unequal status of focal children who go to school and their un- or under-schooled family members. It seemed that when the focal children started school it disrupted the ways in which power was distributed among family members. The focal children, since they were learning how to read and write, gained a privileged and powerful position, which also allowed them to act as superiors. Especially when they felt threatened or challenged by adults, they made claims for power by foregrounding their identities as those of literate people. In this way, literacy skills empowered the focal children in opposition to many of the people in their small social circles, such as the younger children around them, their parents, grandparents, and neighbors, all of whom were un- or under-schooled.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

In the previous chapter, I represented the data as a case narrative to locate the focal participants and their activities in their social, cultural, and historical contexts. In this chapter, I sought to discuss the analyses of the cases guided by the following three research questions.

**Research Question 1: Messages from home and school about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling.** To begin my analysis, I determined the following three themes that occurred repeatedly in the data: literacy, multilingualism, and schooling. I chose the themes according to their potential to represent the ideologies prevalent in different socio-ecological systems, mainly home and school, in which my participants inhabit and operate. As Gutiérrez (2005) states, ideas and practices meet, combine, and come into conflict while people proceed across different contexts. Following her, instead of creating binaries between home and school, I tried to foreground what messages my participants adopted and reacted to by participating in various ecologies simultaneously.

The first theme is the definition of literacy. As Scribner and Cole (1981) state: “Definitions of literacy continually change with changing social conditions” (p. 51). Thus, I analyzed the participants’ understandings of literacy and how these guided their social interactions in order to draw attention to the relation between people’s discourses and their social experiences. Zilan’s mother, for example, held a broad definition of literacy, and thus was hesitant to be judged as an incapable parent due to her lack of literacy skills. I also argued that the focal teachers’ definitions of literacy were very much influenced by the community they worked in. Both focal teachers defined literacy as a skill to solve problems. The focal teachers also characterized the Pınarcık community with many problems related to education. In viewing

the community based on its lack of literacy, the Pınarcık community was not regarded as able to solve its own problems, since, according to the teachers' scripts, only literate people could find solutions to their problems.

Secondly, since the Pınarcık community was a migrant multilingual population, I also analyzed the relations between multilingualism, identity, and social context. In a neighborhood like Pınarcık, the school appeared to be one of the main institutions where people acquired the dominant ideologies about class, gender, and ethnic identity. To be able to operate in Turkish speaking society, multilingual people tended to believe that their children would not need their L1, since their L1 was viewed as a language which mostly belonged to the intimate sphere of home. Learning Turkish had the priority and the L1 was represented as “*one of many languages.*” However, according to the teachers, Pınarcık children experienced tensions between their L1 speaking homes versus their Turkish speaking school. In time, they could develop damaged feelings of belonging, like Mr. Boylan, since they would not feel that they belong to either their L1-speaking home or their Turkish speaking society.

Lastly, the third theme, “schooling,” is argued to be relevant to this particular population because there were many people in the community who had not gone to school. I analyzed the perceptions of unschooled focal members of the Pınarcık community about school and their children's education. They believed that school would save their children from the insecurities of the environment, and provide them with a future to prosper in, a future very different from their own lives. Yet, due to the economic instability of his family, Samet, for example, had to develop particular personal characteristics to overcome the obstacles in his way of getting an education. According to Jenks (2008; 2014), places are one of the factors that determine the context for identities. In Pınarcık, the social conditions of the neighborhood need to be taken

into account in order to understand people's various senses of self because they are responsible in determining people's access to the dominant forms of practices (Janks, 2000).

I also discussed the focal teachers' approaches to schooling for this particular community. Both teachers thought that an exam-based education system in Turkey impoverishes non-dominant groups and contributes to their failure in school. Yet they again differed from each other in terms of how they resist it. Mr. Boylan emphasized the feeling of helplessness and ineffectiveness, believing that his students could not adapt to the expectations of school and he did not have a way out of this system, which wasted the majority of the students. On the other hand, Ms. Ersu was motivated by the possibility of saving even one student in her class. As she said, "*it makes a difference to that one*" (int2-S2tea-062014).

#### **Research Question 2: Reconstruction of relationships among the focal participants.**

The themes identified through the first research question allowed me to discuss how the relationship among the focal participants (i.e., the focal children, their families, and the focal teachers) are reconstructed as a result of surrounding messages about literacy, multilingualism, and identity. One interesting finding of this study is how focal participants' scripts about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling defined their social positioning with respect to one another. The participants' perceptions about literacy, as an overall skill encompassing general world knowledge, provided them with the criteria to judge whether certain skills were viewed as adequate or lacking. Furthermore, when people think that their first language is associated with a group of people discriminated against in the dominant ideology, they tend to present themselves to other people in certain ways to forge alignments with an alternative group, as, for example, in Samet's father's or Zilan's scripts.

Although the members of both focal families shared similar conceptions of literacy, multilingualism, and schooling, the focal teachers expressed contrasting ideas about what these themes entail. The main source of difference in the teachers' scripts was related to having the feeling of being an insider or not. Mr. Boylan foregrounded the similarities between his family and the Pınarcık community, hence developing an insider view towards his students and their families. He reported that he had firsthand experience of the conditions and obstacles that created and contributed to the marginalization of Pınarcık people. Having aligned himself with a non-dominant group, he was focused, maybe overly, on the marginalizing conditions. He felt "helpless" against the social system, which he argued to be the source of those disadvantageous conditions because he did not know how to help his students overcome their unfavorable conditions:

*These students do not love school [...] I don't know [...] If I cannot help them love the school [...] I mean [...] if they come to school reluctantly, what is the point of gathering them in a class and giving them education [...] I don't know [...] I mean, how do we have them love school? [a long pause] I think the system itself is wrong in that matter. What we have been doing is completely wrong. We give kids 15 years of education, but this 15 year-period is useless. People do not get any benefit of it and fail in life. (int2-S1tea-062014).*

When I asked if his students in Pınarcık could manage not to fail in life he answered: "*I hope they will, but only the lucky ones*" (int2-S1tea-062014). He had witnessed thus far that only a few people in his community could manage to overcome what the system decided for them by some luck. The reason that he connected "success" with "luck" for this kind of population is that he saw them as helpless as himself and hence lacking agency in the overall system of social rules in favor of the dominant groups. He said repeatedly: "*The system decides for us*" (int-S1tea-022014).

Ms. Ersu, on the other hand, easily aligned herself with the dominant ways of being, doing, and acting, that is, “discourses” in Gee’s terms (1996; 2005). Being a well-educated, Turkish woman, I would argue that she tended to be less attentive to the negative effects of social conditions. For her, academic success of children depends on a productive collaboration between parents and the teacher. In her formula of “school success,” the teacher has the leader role, and the families who were “conscious” of what is expected from them need to align with the teacher’s expectations. That is why she was moved by the “starfish story” as a teacher who is supposed to save the starfish lying passively on the ground.

**Research Question 3: School literacies acting as a catalyst.** This study specifically looked at a period of time when the focal children from low-educated homes in Pınarcık started school. This period was chosen because it was a time when the focal first graders experienced school-based literacy activities, which were different from those in the focal homes. The third research question is provoked by the theoretical orientations that define social and cultural contexts of people’s activities as formed by multiple, layered, and conflicting interactions. As a result, like any activities of learning, children’s literacy learning in school is regarded as a multi-actorial process that generates new forms of activities and participation (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Gutiérrez, 2008, Rogoff, 2003). To understand any effects of school literacy in my research context, I analyzed the interactions between school literacy and the home environment in two parts: (a) literacies specific to the home and (b) power struggles based on conceptions of literacy and literacy skills.

***Literacies in Samet’s home.*** First, I studied the interactions between Samet’s school literacy activities and Fatma’s religious literacy activities in order to understand how people regulate their skills through different socially patterned activities. My analysis was based on the

ways in which Fatma transferred her religious literacy skills from one domain of practice to another, to help Samet with school tasks. I argued that her skills, acquired in the context of religious texts, were enabling when employed in a similar practice (e.g., Samet's reading tasks). Since she had been taught a particular kind of reading through religious texts, she was capable of helping Samet with reading tasks. On the other hand, Fatma could not comprehend the Arabic script, hence her religious-based readings did not contribute to any further skills of constructing meaning from a text. Thus, her literacy practice within the social domain of religion was restricting when confronted with a text-based activity, which required understanding and responding to the text. Consequently, I argued that Fatma's learning to read within her religious practices had impacts beyond the context of religion.

*Power struggles based on literacy skills.* As the second catalyzing effect of school literacy, I also used several excerpts to illustrate how the power dynamics in focal households appeared in the data. The accounts of multiple confrontations between schooled focal children and their unschooled (or low schooled) family members, provided an additional insight about the ways in which literacy empowers some people while disempowering others. Both Samet and Zilan assumed the identity of literate people as a result of their reading and writing abilities, which eventually enabled them to contest the powerful status of the adults. Lisa Delpit (1988) wrote that, "There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a culture of power" (p. 283). Drawing from her argument, I argued that the focal children, as a result of their participation in school, are empowered since they are the ones who had the chance to learn the codes of power enacted in schools. When compared to their unschooled mothers, they struggled to position themselves as the presenters of the culture of power, which influenced how power worked in the focal homes.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions

This study examined and described the first year of schooling of two focal children coming from non-dominant families in Pınarcık, a community in Istanbul, Turkey. The two focal families were chosen according to the language they speak at home and their education level to understand the effect of schooling in two minority families who were un- or under-schooled. I began with a description of the life contexts of two focal families, including their daily lives and personal histories, to provide an overall picture of some of the migrant, multilingual families in this impoverished neighborhood. Following this, I sought to discover the explicit and implied messages related to literacy, multilingualism, and schooling available in the focal children's two different immediate contexts, that is, home and school, during their first year of school.

The perspective that guided my analysis is that people are exposed to various ways of being, doing, and acting while they actively participate in different ecological systems. At the same time, the nature of events and discourses in one setting influences the composition of other settings in mutual ways (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Goodnow, 1999). As a consequence of participation in the sociocultural activities of different settings, people acquire social codes of constructing meaning (Gee, 2005; Heath, 1983). They learn what is valued and important, versus what can be ignored, as they develop awareness of the relations between events in different contexts (Janks, 2000).

The socially constructed nature of meaning invariably suggests that meaning is determined by the social identity and social purposes of actors: the actors in a social event adapt their language according to “who they are” (i.e., their identities), and “what they are doing” (i.e.,

their activities) (Bakhtin, 1986; Gee, 2005; 2014b). Similarly, meaning making practices, identities, and power relations are also socially constructed. As people participate in the activities of particular communities, they learn how to appropriate power relations. Eventually, power becomes a part of their identities (Bourdieu, 1991; Wenger, 2008). Framed by three theoretical perspectives: sociocultural-historical theory, ecological theory, and sociocritical literacy, this study focused on the participants' various senses of their identities as a reflection of their socially situated activities and power relations dominant in their society while they traveled across two ecological contexts (i.e., home and school).

## **Conclusions**

When the focal children started school, they, together with their low-schooled, migrant families, encountered a new setting (i.e., school) and thus, a new domain of interactions between home and school was formed with a number of different patterns. Bronfenbrenner (2000) argued that the nature of attitudes and practices prevalent in one setting influences people's participation and social positioning in other settings. Furthermore, according to Bakhtin's (1986) framework of "situated dialogue," social interactions are assumed to be inherently multi-voiced. The scripts of different social contexts come into contact as people travel from one ecological niche to another. Drawing from such a theoretical perspective, I tried to understand the kinds of attitudes and knowledge existing in different social contexts (home and school) which affect the focal participants' identities and social positioning according to three themes: literacy, multilingualism, and schooling.

People's discourses cannot be discussed separately from the power dynamics in society because they are both the result of how power is constructed in different ecological systems and,

at the same time, they provide the impetus that perpetuates power dynamics (Janks, 2000). Power, in this research study, is described as situated and dynamic (Gutiérrez, 2008; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Power relations, which emerge in multiple ways, are learned and shape one's social positioning as people participate in specific practices and seek to align themselves with particular communities (Gee, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991). With this perspective, I also used the scripts to examine how the focal participants reconstructed their relationships to one another when they were confronted by explicit and implicit messages about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling. In the following section, I examine the scripts available both in the focal homes and in school. In addition, I also discuss the reconstruction of social relationship among the focal participants (focal children, family members, and focal teachers) about literacy, schooling, and multilingualism.

**Family scripts about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling.** In the focal households, literacy was defined differently, depending on the participants' education level. For the schooled family members, literacy was considered as reading and writing skills, which ensured access to opportunities. Conversely, for the non-schooled members, literacy was defined with broader terms, such as "*knowing everything in the world.*" Based on such a broad definition, determined by values and practices in the context of community, Nurcan, for example, developed a specific way of participating (or non-participating, in her case) in the school context. She thought that literate people would judge her parental qualifications based on her lack of literacy skills.

Second, I also argued that beliefs and attitudes about their non-dominant language in different contexts led the multilingual focal participants to regard their home tongue as "*one of the many languages, which was confined to home and village.*" Specifically, the family

members' attitudes about the value of the home language in comparison to the dominant language led them to construct their identity in a particular way. Similar to their parents, the focal children were also influenced to take a social positioning as a result of the various scripts prevalent both at home and in school. For instance, when Zilan began her formal education she had already adopted the idea that her family's ethnic identity should be kept secret from the public. In addition, as a result of the influences from the scripts in her school about non-dominant ethnic identities, Zilan chose to distance herself from her family's background. Similarly, Samet's indifference with regard to his mother tongue, and the lack of communication between Samet and his grandparents, could also be interpreted as taking a dismissive stance toward his background.

In the literature, it has been described that minority children especially in the United States separate themselves from their families' cultural traits not to be seen different from their school friends. Hoping that they would get accepted by their peers if they look like American, they stopped using the family language and changed their names, clothing, and haircut which used to represent their family (Wong-Fillmore, 2000). However, in the Pınarcık Primary School, all of the students came from the similar socioeconomic group. In addition, majority of the students also shared the same ethnic background with the focal children. Therefore, Zilan, for instance, did not distance herself only from the home language but also from her classmates by using concepts like cleanness to perform an identity, which would be affirmed by her teacher, Ms. Ersu. In her case, the teacher became the presenter of the dominant ideology to be aligned with.

The third theme: the focal children's schooling, appeared to be a primary concern of the focal families as a reflection of their personal histories of participation in society as non-schooled

people. The focal family members exclusively reported their lack of schooling as the main reason for their undesirable living conditions. They believed that the only way their children could escape from a life of poverty would be through success at school. The focal families were ready to make sacrifices to support their children's education, since they had high hopes that their children would have respectable jobs in the future.

Furthermore, the Pınarcık students' failure in school, compared to the students in other areas of İstanbul, was interpreted as the Pınarcık students' counterscripts to the codes of power that pervade the school. Mr. Boylan argued that the learning outcomes that students in Pınarcık attained in school were not satisfactory because the school failed to provide this particular group of student with meaningful content, which would help them in their real lives. However, although the focal families, like most of the Pınarcık families, believed that success in school was essential for their children to forge a better life in the future, there was a risk that the focal children would drop out, due to the families' economic difficulties. Therefore, it was also argued that the focal children needed to develop certain strategies to overcome the difficulties and gain success in school. For instance, as Mr. Boylan argued, Samet's personal traits (i.e., deceitfulness and being quarrelsome) should be interpreted as Samet's rejection of the student role assigned by the school (e.g., honesty and openness to collaboration). This especially resulted from the mismatch between Samet's social conditions and the expectations of school.

**Teachers' scripts about literacy, multilingualism, and schooling.** Although teachers were expected to present the school ideology, the focal teachers in this study adopted different roles as a result of feeling like an insider to the Pınarcık community or not. Mr. Boylan, who had a similar family background to Pınarcık families, foregrounded socially structured factors, like not being familiar with school and school related skills. His relationship with the parents was

determined mainly by his insider perspective. On the other hand, Ms. Ersu's script identified the "lack of consciousness" in Pınarcık families, which appeared to determine her approach to the community in many areas. For instance, while describing the problems in the community and the case of multilingual students in school, she made reference to the Pınarcık families' indifference as a result of their lack of consciousness. I would argue that Ms. Ersu's script of "lack of consciousness" silenced the dialogue between the school and the parents in the community. As Delpit (1988) maintained, non-dominant families who are categorized as being "unconscious of their responsibilities" are left out of the dialogue about the education of their children. As a result of this silencing pedagogy, the families were disempowered since their control over their children's schooling was denied by the teacher's script.

Mr. Boylan's insider perspective influenced his script about multilingualism, as well. He described how children coming from multilingual families were forced to make a choice between their two languages as a result of their families' decision to speak only Turkish to their children. For him, the conditions of Pınarcık people are determined by the social system, which prioritizes the dominant forms (i.e., dominant languages, dominant varieties, and discourses) while at the same time marginalizing others. Mr. Boylan presented himself as a "lucky" student because, although he was raised in an under-schooled multilingual family, he managed to become a primary school teacher.

Although the focal teachers had differing perspectives on the community, they both challenged the education system for the benefit of their students. Mr. Boylan believed that pushing the families too far beyond their limits would harm the majority of the students. He felt that both Pınarcık families and teachers are immune to the ability of changing their conditions, which promote the dominant groups. He argued that the education system should be completely

changed for the advantage of the majority of the students coming from non-dominant families. For him, education should target the majority of the students in the country, not just a few lucky ones. Although most of his students learn reading and writing, the same majority would be unable to integrate into the system. This is mainly because they do not have access to the dominant forms that a literate person raised in a mainstream family would have.

In comparison to Mr. Boylan, Ms. Ersu believed that teachers and families “*who were conscious of their responsibilities for their children’s education*” should work together to ensure that their children would be among the successful students. Contrary to Mr. Boylan, she believed that teachers were able to provide Pınarcık students access to the dominant forms of language and literacy practices. She saw academic success as the main force to end marginalization of Pınarcık children.

**School literacies as a “catalyst” in focal households.** In the focal homes, school literacy was found to interact with family practices in various ways. First, I looked at the ways in which people transfer skills and knowledge between different kinds of literacy activities. Out-of-school literacy practices, such as Fatma’s religious literacy, could open up an enabling space where family members could transfer their learning in one domain of practice to another. For instance, Samet’s mother, Fatma, was able to make use of her religious literacy skills to help Samet with his reading tasks. However, I also argued that Fatma’s religious literacy practices had a restricting potential when Fatma needed to understand and respond to the text as in Samet’s reading comprehension activities. As the literature has been pointed out, people use familiar practices to enter and act in other social contexts through “recontextualization” (Dyson, 2003). In this study, Fatma’s act of borrowing, translating, and reframing her religious literacy skills to participate in Samet’s school literacy activities can be seen as a type of

“recontextualization.” By recontextualizing her skills in another domain, Fatma was able to make some connections with school, which was not a familiar domain for her.

The second area in which school literacy initiated a change in family dynamics was arguably the power struggles among focal children and their family members based on literacy skills. In the theoretical framework section, I discussed the idea that power appears in many different forms. It is also manifested in how literacy is shaped through people’s social practices. The conditions of accessing literacy and its uses are all controlled by the power dynamics in a society (Collins & Blot, 2003; Street, 2001). Moreover:

Power has “microscopic” dimensions, small, intimate, everyday dimensions, and these are constitutive as well as regulative; they are the stuff out of which senses of self as a private individual as well as a social entity in a given time and place, are composed and recomposed. (Collins & Blot, 2003; p. 5)

In an analysis of various encounters between the focal children and their unschooled mothers, I saw that by participating in various ecological systems, the focal children, Zilan and Samet, learned that having access to literacy learning determined who could claim power in social interactions. Gaining literacy in school empowered the focal children while disempowering their un- or under-schooled parents. I believe that this kind of perspective sheds a different light on the implications perpetuated by the Western-based parent-child interactions around literacy, which are comprised of literate and more experienced adults and novice, child learners.

## **Implications**

There are two kinds of implications of this study. I begin by offering suggestions for educational specialists working with families from non-dominant communities. Finally, I comment on the theoretical implications of my findings.

**Educational implications.** In my home visits, I observed that there were not many print materials in either of the focal houses. Schoolbooks were the main texts that the focal children used. Samet did not have any books to read apart from the ones given by the school. Zilan had several second-hand reading books, but they were kept inside a sofa base, and were seldom taken out. Apart from schoolbooks, there were calendars, legal documents such as social insurance and healthcare statements, wedding invitation cards, and playing cards. I observed that the school related materials dominated the print-based activities in the focal households. Since the education levels of the focal families were low, the families refrained from writing. Reading activities, although being not very frequent, were more prevalent than writing activities in focal homes. In such an environment, focal families experienced difficulties in meeting the expectations of the school. Focal teachers, for example, asked families to follow their children's reading tasks and to generate comprehension questions from the readings given to home. During the study, I observed that although parents who had lower literacy skills could read the school texts, they were not able to generate comprehension questions like "who did what to whom" based on the readings. Since this type of activity is particularly a school-based activity, it may pose some difficulties for the people who were not familiar with school literacies. This observation is important because it demonstrated that teachers' assumptions about "more knowledgeable parents working with their children" may yield wrong policies. School-based literacy activities rest on particular types of literacy which could be lacking in out-of-school

contexts, like students' home. Therefore, educators should ask how to develop ways of parental support which are reflective of the social, cultural, and historical practices of the respective community (Auerbach, 1989). Some questions implied in this study could be: How can parents support their children's literacy development, if school-based literacy activities like reading are not a cultural practice at home? What are the ways to encourage families to share their oral stories and histories with their children? How can the materials from parents' cultural repertoires be used in children's literacy development?

Moreover, I observed a gap between L1-speaking older generations (i.e., grandparents) and L2- speaking youngsters, as a result of the messages the focal children received about the importance of Turkish in society both from school and from their parents. This generational gap has widened and has resulted in the elders' withdrawal from the education of younger generations. As Rogoff (2001) states:

The elders will decide when and if they will contribute their knowledge to this process. Before they do so, they must be satisfied that the information is being used appropriately, will be protected [...], will be respected, and will contribute to the education of their young people. (p. 7).

So, when the elders' contribution is regarded as trivial, any interventions from the educators may not get positive responses from the community. As a result of their silence, the "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 2000) of the previous generations fail to be transferred to the coming generations. Diverse cultures, which melt together into a uniform human culture, are destined to get lost. Yet, for learning and development, humanity needs the diversity of various cultural ways as a resource to endure the unpredictable challenges of the future (Rogoff, 2003). Thus, educational specialists and policy makers need to understand how alternative forms of knowing are silenced and marginalized because they are closely linked to the power relations

interwoven in local settings and in the larger society (Gutiérrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). This understanding opens up the opportunity of creating reconciliation between the previous generations and their children.

Although this study did not provide any answers about how to encourage a balance between two generations, it demonstrated that parents and grandparents were not accepted as active participators in their children's schooling. For Mr. Boylan, for instance, they did not have agency to affect what the education system offered their children due to their lack of familiarity in this process. On the other hand, Ms. Ersu emphasized that previous generations in Pınarcık households, different from mainstream families like her own family, did not possess the essential "*consciousness*" to support their children's academic success. Hence, she expected a full compliance from the parents with her teaching. As a result, both of the focal teachers, even though they had different perspectives, tended to exclude parents and other family members. This finding raises the following questions: Is it possible to include family members who have little or no formal education in children's literacy development? What are some possible ways of reestablishing the intergenerational transfer of knowledge, wisdom, and ways of doing things for this particular group of people? How do teachers contribute to the establishment of a balance between students and their families who are lacking much formal education? And finally, what are the best types of support for the children of these families?

Ball (1994) suggests that, "policy is (...) a set of technologies and practices which are realized and struggled over in local settings" (p. 10). Therefore, developing an understanding about what happens in local settings is essential for implementing policies for practices in broader contexts. Otherwise, bringing in policies and education models from abroad to a country like Turkey, is likely to have detrimental effects on the local resources. Instead, literary

traditions that have local validity provide better tools for formulating literacy interventions for people from various cultural, religious, and social environments.

**Theoretical implications.** The theoretical basis of this study is provided by the following frameworks: sociocultural-historical theory, ecological theory, and sociocritical literacy. These theoretical perspectives provided me with the tools for analyzing how people from different communities participate in literacy related activities that are transformed through generations of use in peculiar social, cultural, and historical contexts.

***Sociocultural-historical theory.*** This study relates to the sociocultural-historical theory in three dimensions. The first dimension is the primacy of social interactions in children's learning. The sociocultural-historical theory states that children mainly learn by participating in the sociocultural activities of their communities. By observing or taking part in instances of situated dialogue, children acquire social codes of constructing meaning (Bakhtin, 1986; Gee, 2001; 2005). Typically, more experienced adults are described as facilitators of learning activities, hence bearing a more powerful position in interactions with their children (Cole, 1996). However, in this study, the focal adults were not more experienced readers and writers than their children. Therefore, I argue that this study offers a different view of the ways in which unschooled adults organize their children's learning activities. The focal children, unlike their parents, had the opportunity to go to school. Their parents did not have such an opportunity when they migrated to İstanbul as children with their families, because they needed to work for family income. Although the focal families were still economically challenged, they believed that Turkish education would provide their children access to the facilities that they were lacking (e.g., permanent jobs, steady income, and more freedom to make their own decisions). Hence,

the focal parents reported that they put high importance on their children's education in Turkish at the expense of their L1.

As Heath (1983) and others have shown, when children start school, they initially rely on the meanings, knowledge, and inheritances that they carry from their homes to school. In school, they find another type of culture and other discourses, which may or may not be familiar to them. The differences between language and literacy practices in the home environment versus school are likely to produce academic failure for children coming from non-dominant families (Cummins, 2014; Heath, 1982; 1983; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000; Moll, 2000). Viewed from this perspective, analyzing various messages that the focal participants came across in different contexts is important to understanding people's meaning making processes in Pınarcık community. Therefore, in this study, I looked at the kinds of messages related to literacy, multilingualism, and schooling determined by the focal participants' life contexts. Moreover, I argued that those messages prevalent during the focal children's first year of school influenced how focal participants positioned themselves in respect to others.

This argument becomes more apparent based on the accounts of how "literacy" was defined by the focal participants. In this study, I observed that the definition of "literacy" included more than reading and writing abilities. For instance, Zilan's mother was worried about whether she was judged as an incompetent mother by the school counselor due to her lack of literacy skills. This broad definition of "literacy" was also prevalent among focal teachers: they both emphasized the relation between literacy skills and problem solving abilities. Such a broad definition was also utilized by the focal teachers when they needed to define the Pınarcık community. The focal teachers agreed that the problems in the community originated from

people's low literacy skills, and were hard to ameliorate due to Pınarcık people's lacking literacy.

Based upon how literacy was defined in both immediate contexts that the focal children attended, I argued that the focal children made claims to power in family dynamics by foregrounding their identities as literate people. Compared to their un- or under-schooled family members who were lacking the essential linguistic and social capital (i.e., proficiency in Turkish, formal schooling), the focal children, who were becoming literate through formal schooling, had the chance of "*knowing everything in the world*" (as stated by Samet's mother) and "*knowing how to solve problems*" (as stated by the focal teachers). As a result, I would argue that the schooled focal children aggrandized themselves against the unschooled adults in their households based on the definitions of what literacy entails.

The second premise of sociocultural-historical theory is that language and literacy activities are situated practices (Heath, 1983). Literacy skills are built within multiple and complex human activities in social life, so there are multiple ways of being literate (Purcell-Gates et al., 2004; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Furthermore, people's experiences from different socio-cultural contexts are not static but transformative. Within the framework of sociocultural-historical theory, learning and literacy activities are viewed as changing participation mediated by social interactions and cultural tools (Rogoff, 2003; Scribner & Cole, 1981). For instance, Fatma's case provides an example of the ways people recontextualize their multiple literacy skills. Fatma was literate in religious texts, and was able to partially reframe her religious literacy skills to participate in a new context, that is, Samet's schooling. She was able to actively participate in Samet's education when Samet's school task was similar to her practices with religious texts. As Fatma (and other non-schooled family members) failed to help Samet with

advanced school-related tasks, Samet, since he was learning how to read and write, believed that he could act as a superior to his unschooled mother. Consequently, the interactions between the focal unschooled mothers and the focal children were transformed as a result of the focal children's schooling.

***Ecological theory.*** Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model is the second theoretical perspective that helped me formulate the role of social and cultural contexts in the focal children's literacy activities. This theory focuses on the nested and interconnected nature of environments. Each environment forms a system with its own rules and regulations (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). People constantly shift to different roles and settings while they move from one ecological system to another. When the focal children started school, this was argued to be an "ecological transition" for both their families and the children, themselves. The school as a new setting introduced new roles for the focal households, which at the same time influenced how focal participants acted, thought, and felt. Besides the focal homes' connecting to a new setting (i.e., school), the focal teachers also made new connections to the out-of-school contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Mr. Boylan, for instance, felt like an insider to the Pınarcık community since he believed that his family resembled the families in Pınarcık in terms of their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. He constantly referred to his own personal history to develop his social positioning in relation to the community. He felt sorry for the "unlucky" students coming from non-dominant families because he thought that the education system would not benefit them. On the other hand, Ms. Ersu who was foreign to this community failed to notice the impact of structural factors that contributed to the troubles of the Pınarcık families. Instead, she foregrounded the families' ignorance towards their children's education, not as socially constructed, but as an innate quality. This finding supports the

interdependencies between two different ecological settings suggested by the ecological model. Throughout their life spans, people participate in different microsystems, such as home and school; consequently, they take up different perspectives in each setting. Their participation in different ecological systems influences their activities in the others.

***Sociocritical literacy framework.*** From the perspective of the critical literacy framework, the power status of literacy should be understood and made visible in order to recognize historically and culturally generated learning styles that children bring to school. Furthermore, the sociocritical literacy framework adds that people's interactions are reflected in various *scripts*, that is, specialized discourses of social spaces, like the discourses of teachers and those of students in classrooms. In other words, scripts are an array of patterned interactions that represent both the ways people interpret the actions of others and guide their own actions. Social settings that people participate in become "scripted" through people's various scripts. Based on Gutiérrez' arguments, I argue that analyzing people's scripts and their orientation in scripted environments would reflect the dominant ideology in the larger system, as well as how people positioned themselves in the face of that dominant ideology. For instance, Ms. Ersu focused on the "lack of consciousness" in Pınarcık families when they were expected to support their children's education and to coordinate multilingual environments. The concept of cleanliness was one of the main themes in Ms. Ersu's script, used to focus on the differences between what was expected by the dominant ideology versus what was missing in the Pınarcık community. The focal child, Zilan, adopted Ms. Ersu's concept of cleanliness and used it as a tool to align herself with the dominant group.

Furthermore, as it has been argued, to prepare children to build better futures for themselves, educators need to have an understanding of the various identities and habits of

meaning making that students from diverse groups bring to their learning (Heath, 1983; Hyland, 2005; Moll, 2000). In that respect, teachers coming from the background similar to the children may have some advantages. For instance, Mr. Boylan, who came from similar social context with Pınarcık students, developed an alternative perspective about what this particular group of students need as opposed to what is suggested by the education system. Since the system is formulated based on middle-class Turkish students, Mr. Boylan could be attentive to its possible harms for non-dominant families better than teachers coming from different backgrounds like Ms. Ersu.

On the other hand, teachers who shared similar social context with their students may have certain handicaps, as well. When their understandings of various identities and habits of meaning making prevalent among non-dominant communities is not supported by a critical perspective, teachers like Mr. Boylan may overemphasize the disadvantages of different ways of saying, doing, and thinking compared to the dominant forms (Gee, 2005). A critical stance definitely emphasizes how literacy reinforces the conditions of inequality. Yet, it is especially needed to evaluate the inherent capacity of literacy in empowering people to transform equalities without contributing the hegemony of the dominant forms in the broader society (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gilbert, 1993; Janks, 2000). Moreover, teachers who have acquired critical understanding also help learners analyze themselves as socially and culturally situated selves (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993; Larson & Marsh, 2005). Consequently, this study argues that a critical perspective is needed for teachers working in non-dominant communities, since it first enables educators to be aware of relations between education and power. Second, and most importantly, it supports educators against the feeling of helplessness by providing tools to reinvent themselves and their students. Based on this finding, the following questions are worth

consideration: What are the ways of supporting teachers like Mr. Boylan to develop a critical perspective? What kinds of critical tools help educators challenge the system and reinvent themselves together with their students? What are the ways of empowering learners in non-dominant communities like Pınarcık?

Like any other ethnographic study undertaken in various contexts, this study is also an attempt to rebuild the inseparable links between theory and the real life practices. Freire (1970) stated that theories illuminate everyday human activities as everyday activities transform cultural and social conditions. In accordance with a Freirian perspective, this study was carried out with the belief that any attempts to understand the cultural and social conditions of non-dominant communities make such a transformation possible.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study is an endeavor to advance a multifaceted understanding of literacy as a social, cultural, and historical construct. Although just a scratch on the surface, my attempt definitely points to the need for further research into multiple and layered activity systems, such as home and school, with their various interconnections. While this study has illustrated the account of the focal non-dominant families (migrant, multilingual, and low-educated), when moving across different ecologies, a further focus on the manifold ways in which people's practices and identities travel and shift across multiple settings is worth consideration.

The focal group in this study consists of two multilingual households with a low education level. This study suggests that school-related, print literacy activities dominate in low-schooled families. Moreover, since the medium of instruction is Turkish in public schools, the dominance of school books in multilingual homes also accelerated home language loss. This

finding calls for additional studies to be carried out with educated, multilingual families speaking one of the minority languages of Turkey. What happens in multilingual homes, where parents are more literate in both Turkish and their home languages, remains to be investigated in a further study.

Street (2004) stated that teachers, students, and parents bring “sedimented” features of their life experiences into their ways of interacting and participating. Inspired by his perspective, my study focuses on the challenges that non-dominant students and their families face as they move across home, school, and community settings. Due to the complexities of social activities, further studies are needed that investigate the additional effects of teachers, peers, and other adults on students’ ways of interacting and participating in different activities.

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