

Running head: EDUCATIONAL BRICOLAGE: INTERDISCIPLINARITY, CULTURE

Educational Bricolage: Interdisciplinarity, Culture and Complexity in a Longitudinal Study of  
English Language Literacy and Acquisition

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## Abstract

Members of the Project English Language Literacy Acquisition (Project ELLA) interdisciplinary research team elaborate on the concept of bricolage as qualitative research with Latino English language learners (ELLs) participating in a controlled and structured English as a second language intervention, and being served in either a structured English immersion classroom or a transitional bilingual education classroom. The objectives of the paper discussion include: (a) continue the discussion initiated by Lincoln (2001), Kincheloe (2001), Pinar (2001), and McLaren (2001), regarding bricolage as a framework for managing complexities of doing research in the postmodern era (Berry, 2006); (b) discuss, with the aid of a visual representation of our nine, 5 foot by 5 foot data canvases, how the postmodern ethic of research as bricolage informed our research design and application; (c) present samples of the data from ELLs, parents, and Project ELLA paraprofessionals, as an opportunity for participants to more closely analyze the framework; and (d) invite those who join us in the paper discussion to participate as members of an *active audience* (Gergen, 1999) in the ongoing, dialogical, and interpretive process of the ELLA BRICOLAGE. The primary data source is a reproduction of our approximately 225 square foot bricolage canvas, and accurately sized images of data created by research participants, including students, parents, and Project ELLA paraprofessionals.

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We preface this paper by acknowledging Joe Kincheloe, who Lincoln (2001) hailed as a *bricoleur* who “looks for not yet imagined tools, fashioning them with not yet imagined connections” (p. 693). As almost everyone who reads this paper already knows, Joe Kincheloe died of coronary artery disease on December 19, 2008 in Kingston, Jamaica. He, along with Kathleen Berry (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004), welcomed comments and critiques from the educational research community (and beyond) regarding the bricolage and their “attempt to move research to a new level of complexity, rigour and usefulness” (p. xii). As a multidisciplinary group of educators, researchers, and practitioners, we regret that we will not have the opportunity to ask Dr. Kincheloe questions about visions he may have had, but not yet shared, about bricolage theory and practice. With appreciation for the work he began, and that continues to inspire us, we dedicate this paper to Joe Kincheloe.

Educational Bricolage and Project ELLA

*bricolage* ~ do it yourself (jobs); patched-up job.

*bricoler* ~ to do odd jobs; to do DIY jobs; to potter about; to fix up; to tinker with; to doctor, fix.

*bricoleur, euse* ~ handyman/woman, DIY enthusiast.

– Collins French Concise Dictionary [2004]

The term *bricolage* was first used by cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966) to describe characteristic patterns of mythological thought. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) expanded the original meaning to include the notion of researcher as handyman/handywoman making-do

with the tools at hand. Educational researchers – most notably Kincheloe and Berry (2004) – set out to further develop the emerging concept of bricoleur. Echoing the themes of the 2009 Annual Conference, Lincoln (2001) observed that the evolving bricoleur “is searching for the nodes, the nexuses, the linkages, the interconnections, the fragile bonds between disciplines, between bodies of knowledge, between knowing and understanding themselves” (pp. 693-694).

The multiple participants involved in Project English Language Literacy Acquisition (Project ELLA),<sup>2</sup> a four-year controlled and structured English as a second language intervention, from kindergarten through third grade, with students being served in either structured English immersion classrooms or transitional bilingual education classrooms, inspired thoughtful consideration by our research team regarding possible methods of qualitative inquiry. The sheer magnitude of the demographics of the intervention loomed large; by the final year of the project, 265 limited English proficient (LEP)/English Language Learners (ELLs), 18 teachers and 12 paraprofessionals, situated in classrooms across nine campuses of a large urban school district comprised the Experimental group alone. We were interested in gathering qualitative data from parents, paraprofessionals, intervention students, their classmates, research team members, as well as principals and teachers from both the Experimental and Control group campuses. The transformative development of multiple identities, competencies, and relationships over the four-year study strengthened our commitment to qualitative inquiry informed by postmodern sensibilities of *relational responsibility* (McNamee & Gergen, 1999) and *collaboration* (Gehart, Tarragona, & Bava, 2007; Irby, LeCompte, & Lara-Alecio, 1997).

Research as bricolage reflects what Gergen (1999, p. 167) called a postmodern “profusion of practices.” In bricolage, these practices include:

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. . . multiple *theories* and *methodologies*: multiple ways to collect, describe, construct, analyze, and *interpret* the object of the research study; and finally multiple ways to *narrate* (tell the story about) the relationships, struggles, conflicts, and complex world of the study that maintains the integrity and reality of the subjects. (Berry, 2006, p. 90).

The objectives of this AERA paper and paper discussion include: (a) continue the discussion initiated by Lincoln (2001), Kincheloe (2001), Pinar (2001), and McLaren (2001), regarding bricolage as a framework for managing complexities of doing research in the postmodern era (Berry, 2006); (2) discuss, with the aid of a visual representation of our nine, 5 foot by 5 foot data canvases, how the postmodern ethic of research as bricolage informed our research design and application; (3) present samples of the data from ELLs, parents, and Project ELLA paraprofessionals, as an opportunity for participants to more closely analyze the framework; and (4) invite those who join us in the paper discussion to participate as members of an *active audience* (Gergen, 1999) in the ongoing, dialogical, and interpretive process of the ELLA BRICOLAGE.

### Theoretical Framework

Rather than envisioning postmodernism in terms of “anti-modernism” (i.e. anti-scientific, anti-logical, anti-empirical), we ascribe to Gergen’s (2001) view of postmodernism: “The point of postmodern critique... is not to annihilate but to give all traditions the right to participate within the unfolding dialogue” (p. 808). Among postmodern researchers, however, there is a thread of consensus regarding theoretical concepts. Contemporary postmodern approaches to understanding human systems (Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Goolishian, 1992) and research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gehart, Tarragona, & Bava, 2007), are distinguished by a skeptical

stance towards universal knowledge and dominant discourses, and by an appreciation for local knowledge. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), with postmodernism's focus upon "more local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and specific situations" (p. 20), the concept of researcher as aloof observer was abandoned in favor of valuing "epistemologies from previously silenced groups" (p. 20). Similarly, Shawver (2005) noted:

Even in books, the postmodern author does not self-present as the only expert on a subject. The reader is an expert too. . . . In postmodernity, all voices have some power in a network of ideas, and there is a continuous weaving and reweaving of ideas so as to refresh understandings and keep them current and up to date. (p. 63)

From this perspective, research as bricolage is a fitting metaphor for the postmodern methodological design, which was oriented by our desire to privilege the participants' voices regarding the structured intervention and its impact upon their oral language development and general use of English

French cultural anthropologist Lévi -Strauss (1966) first articulated bricolage as a form of *structural* analysis of cultural myth, ritual, and social custom. As Lincoln (2001) aptly noted, current adaptations of research as bricolage by educational researchers appear to be "very much a *poststructuralist* project, or at the very least, a combination structuralist and poststructuralist analysis" (p. 695). This discussion reflects the theoretical centrality of interdisciplinarity, intertextuality, and *blurred genres* (Geertz, 1973). In other words, bricolage is grounded in a postmodern tradition that seeks to replace a search for truth with a "celebration of the multiplicity of (equally valid) perspectives" (Burr, 1995, p. 185). Furthermore, bricolage, according to Kincheloe (2001), "does not simply tolerate difference but cultivates it as a spark to researcher creativity" (p. 687).

According to Kincheloe (2001), bricoleurs share with other postmodernists an appreciation for complexity, as well as a commitment to critical examination of invisible artifacts of power and culture. Berry (2006) similarly emphasized “criticality for social action and justice” as the orienting principle for bricoleurs, along with relationality, multiplicity, and complexity (p. 113). Moreover, the social critique that informs bricolage methodology includes feminist, deconstructive, cultural, race-gendered, and postcolonial criticism.

Kincheloe and Berry suggested (2004) that beginning bricoleurs develop a Point of Entry Text (POET). As envisioned by Kincheloe and Berry,

The POET acts as the pivot, the axis for the rest of the application of the bricolage. It is anything that has or can generate meaning – a picture, a book, a photograph, a story, a theory. . . . Each threading through from the different areas of the bricolage map challenges the truths, knowledge of the original POET but never destroys it" (p. 108).

“While there are many ways of employing the bricolage,” said Kincheloe (2008), “we suggest that researchers take their POET and *thread* it through a variety of conceptual maps,” which might include discourses of social theory, research genres and methodology, cultural and social positionalities, disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledges, philosophical domains, power modes, and knowledge sources (Beginning the Process, ¶ 1). Kincheloe and Berry (2004) saw this threading process as one of feedback looping, and one in which monological voices and means of knowledge production are challenged.

The bricolage is dedicated to multivocality and non-linearity. With feedback from faculty, colleagues, classmates (and we would suggest including research participants, as well) beginning bricoleurs make their way through different domains. T.S. Eliot’s (1942) verse in “Four Quartets: Little Gidding” could be taken as a metaphor for the feedback looping process:

“And the end of all our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And to know the place for the first time.” As Kincheloe (2008) described feedback looping,

As the POET travels through these different domains, it circles back to its starting point. . . . Every time the POET threads itself back through the concept maps its original composition changes. . . . What emerges after a few loops may surprise the bricoleur in its uniqueness and unanticipated qualities. The POET’s confrontation with these diverse knowledges and vantage points move the researcher to a higher and more complex level of understanding.” (Beginning the Process, ¶ 3-4).

Speaking of postmodern research in general, Hoffman (1977) articulated the spirit of the feedback-looping process of the bricolage: “Reality – even so-called scientific reality is woven and re-woven on shared linguistic looms” (p. *xii*).

*Our Roads Diverge*

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

– Robert Frost [1920]

One of the authors on this paper, Sallie Helms, is the proud parent of an aspiring young poet who formerly interned at The Frost Place, Robert Frost’s homestead and site for poetry readings, workshops, and residencies in Franconia, New Hampshire. According to our ‘insider information,’ Frost’s famous poem, “The Road Not Taken,” is often interpreted inaccurately: that is, that in hindsight the traveler reflects and recognizes that he, indeed, chose the ‘better’ road. Our interpretation is that Frost was decidedly postmodern in his perspective that either choice, really, would have led the traveler along a path of possibilities of the not-yet-known.

Instead of viewing the roads through a dichotomous lens of *either/or* or *good/bad*, Frosts' perspective created space for appreciation for the potentialities embodied by *both* roads. It is in this spirit that we offer our view of a hermeneutic, interpretive process in bricolage research, a different road than Kincheloe and Berry's (2004) feedback looping process. We do not claim superiority of one road over the other.

In the article in which she recognized Joe Kincheloe as "an emerging new bricoleur," Lincoln (2001) concluded with the following qualifying note:

It should be remembered, however, that Lévi-Strauss' intention in recommending bricolage was, in part, a structuralist project, requiring structuralist analyses. Kincheloe's (2001) adaptation appears very much a poststructuralist project, or at the very least, a combination structuralist and poststructuralist analysis. (p. 695)

We agree with Lincoln (2001) that Kincheloe's adaptation (2001) appears to be informed by both structuralist and poststructuralist influences. For example, Kincheloe and Berry (2004) illustrated the bricolage feedback looping process by referencing Lorenz' "butterfly image of complexity" (p. 113). Edward Lorenz, known as the father of chaos theory, described *chaos* as "something that is random in appearance only" (p. 5). Gleick (1987/2008) described the *Lorenz attractor* in this way:

It traced a strange, distinctive shape, a kind of double spiral in three dimensions, like a butterfly with its two wings. The shape signaled pure disorder, since not point or pattern of points ever recurred. *Yet it also signaled a new kind of order.* (p. 31) [italics added]

For the purposes of this discussion, we propose two postmodern metaphors as lenses through which we view of the feedback looping process of the Kincheloe and Berry (2004) bricolage model: (a) the rhizome theory of French postmodern philosophers Gilles Deleuze and

Félix Guattari (1987), and (b) hypertext theory as described by Nelson (1974), Nielsen (1995) and others. Because of the scope of this paper, we will provide only a brief introduction to these orientations, and not an in-depth philosophical discussion.

### Rhizome Theory

In their book, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) articulated their antihierarchical philosophical stance by contrasting the metaphors of “rhizome versus the tree” (Anderson & Hoffman, 2007, p. 573). For Deleuze and Guattari, the *tree* stands for representational thinking, judgment, and symmetrical structure (Massumi, 1987, p. xi). The *rhizome* (think of examples such as crabgrass, bulbs, and tubers) stands for connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and flattening of hierarchies.

In addition to the tree and rhizome metaphors, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) discussed the image of the *radicle-system*, or *fascicular* root. A fascicle is a bundle or a cluster, such as a nerve bundle or a fascicular whorl of pine needles on a branch. The fascicle is a unity, according to Deleuze and Guattari, with “reflexive, spiritual reality” that demands an even more comprehensive secret unity” (p. 6). While the multiplicity of a radicle may be “perfectly valid in one direction . . . a unity of totalization asserts itself even more firmly in another, circular or cyclic, dimension” (p. 6). Literary examples include William Burroughs’s “cut-up method: the folding of one text onto another, which constitutes multiple and even adventitious roots (like a cutting)” and “Joyce’s words . . . [which] shatter the linear unity of the word, even of language, only to posit a cyclic unity of the sentence, text, or knowledge” (p. 6). In other words, Deleuze and Guattari critique theories and practices that claim postmodern nonhierarchical affiliation, but are directed by “secret unity” or hidden structure (p. 6). At this intersection of Kincheloe and Berry’s (2004) feedback looping process, and associated “cyclic unity” of the “butterfly image”

(p. 113) of the Lorenz attractor, our interpretive roads diverge from Kincheloe and Berry's feedback looping process.

### *Hypertext Theory*

According to Moulthrop (1994), "Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome-book may itself be considered an incunabular hypertext" (p. 300). Seminal hypertext theorist, Ted Nelson (1974) quite simply defined hypertext as "non-sequential writing" (p. 159). Following is a distillation of the rationale for his definition:

Ordinary writing is sequential for two reasons. First, it grew out of speech and speech-making, which have to be sequential; and second, because books are not convenient to read except in a sequence. *But the structures of ideas* are not sequential. They tie together every which-way. And when we write, we are always trying to tie things together in non-sequential ways. The *footnote* is a break from sequence. . . . We no longer *have* to have things in sequence; totally arbitrary structures are possible. (pp. 159-160)

Nielsen (1995) noted, "Hypertext provides several different options to readers, and the *individual* reader determines which of them to follow *at the time* of reading the text" (p. 2). A footnote, then, is a classic form of hyperlink; "It's up to the reader to read . . . or to skip it" (Müller-Prove, n.d.).

For clarity, we return to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) for four brief theoretical points before we move to a discussion of how our research team envisioned and enacted our bricolage: (a) Deleuze and Guattari saw a rhizome as a "collective assemblage of enunciation" (p. 7); in other words, "It is a multiplicity" (p. 4); (b) Furthermore, "a rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded" (p. 9); (c) Deleuze and Guattari emphasized that the essence of the

rhizome is to have multiple entryways (p. 14); (d) Finally, “the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system” (p. 21). Informed by Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of “transformational multiplicities” (p. 11), the focus of data analysis, rather than a process of mining themes or highlighting similarities, is instead one of learning through segmentarity and local funds of knowledge. Moulthrop (1995) saw this rhizome principle as “proto-hypertext.” As with a hyperlink, it will be up to the “reader” of the “text” to skip-over, or to read and engage with any of the 324 data cards.

### Research Questions

Essential to the interpretive aspect of our research as bricolage is the bilingual pedagogical theory that informs the Project ELLA longitudinal study (Lara-Alecio & Parker, 1994). A central hypothesis concerns developmental bilingual education (DBE, or one-way dual language) and its potential for eclipsing transitional bilingual education (TBE) in maintaining students’ L1 while enhancing their English (i.e., L2) (Irby et al., 2008). The choices we made regarding bricolage methodology, then, were informed by bilingual pedagogical theory, as well as the orienting questions of the Project ELLA longitudinal study, particularly the following two questions:

1. How effective are the structured English immersion and transitional bilingual education programs in developing English proficiency and reading achievement for ELLs whose first language is Spanish?
2. Is there a difference in the effectiveness of each model type when instruction provided is enhanced to reflect best practice in language and literacy instruction as compared to instruction typically provided with each program type?

In order to avoid confusing our research with the more general bricolage discussion, we will refer to the research artifact, which we describe in the following section, as the ELLA BRICOLAGE. The questions that guided our inquiry reflect our interest in (a) the effectiveness of Project ELLA, (b) the bricolage research process, and (c) the experiences of the students, parents, and paraprofessionals who participated in the research process of the ELLA BRICOLAGE:

1. How has participation in Project ELLA contributed to the epistemology and ontology of the participants, including students, parents, and paraprofessionals?
2. How has participation in the ELLA BRICOLAGE research contributed to the epistemology and ontology of the participants?
3. How might participation in the ELLA BRICOLAGE benefit those who collaborated in the research, including paraprofessionals, parents, students, and Project ELLA research team?
4. How might this research contribute to educational and societal contexts and discourses? (i.e., bilingual education, qualitative research, appreciation for multiple voices and funds of knowledge within demographic groupings)?

#### Methods

Kincheloe (2008) spoke of the power of the bricolage to help researchers “overcome the limitations of monological reductionism” (The Subversive Nature of Bricolage, ¶ 2). Similarly, our commitment to Bakhtin’s (1984) notion of “a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices” (p. 6) informed how we conceived, applied, and enacted our bricolage. As we designed our methodology, we hoped to engage voices not traditionally privileged in descriptive studies (i.e., the paraprofessionals, third grade experimental group students, and their parents). In addition to

polyvocality, Kincheloe (2005) emphasized the centrality of interdisciplinarity, along with multiple perspectives and methodological approaches to research as bricolage.

### *Paraprofessionals*

During a research meeting, which turned out to be a crash course in bricolage theory and practice, we invited the project paraprofessionals to join us as co-bricoleurs.<sup>3</sup> Summarizing key points from the Kincheloe and Berry (2004) model, we introduced the bricolage by elaborating upon orienting concepts of Kincheloe and Berry's bricolage methodology: relationality, interdisciplinarity, multiplicity, complexity, and criticality for social action and justice. A quote from author Jeanette Walls (2008, March 6) approximates the postmodern context, as we presented it to the paraprofessionals, of our bricolage methodology: "Truth is not a solid. It's a liquid, and it takes many forms."

As Kincheloe (2008) acknowledged, "The critics are probably correct, such a daunting task cannot be accomplished in the timespan of a doctoral program" (Power in the Ruins, ¶ 4). We wish Joe Kincheloe could have seen the reaction of the 11 young Latina women (and one man) who, for the most part, joined the Project ELLA team after graduating from high school and completing a minimum of 48 hours of undergraduate studies. (Many paraprofessionals complete their undergraduate degrees while working for the research project.) In other words, the paraprofessionals rose to the challenge of the theoretical and methodological complexity of the bricolage. They listened intently, and asked probing questions; since they stayed with their student groups as they advanced through grade levels and the longitudinal study, the

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<sup>3</sup> The title *paraprofessional* enjoys widespread use in the district that employs them. We ascribe to the postmodern view that "Language creates reality" (Bruner, 1986), and prefer the title *co-researcher* as more accurate, and perhaps more respectful, description of this aspect and role of their work. At the same time, we understand that changing the title may cause confusion for educators who are more familiar with the term paraprofessional. For the purposes of this paper, and in order to avoid confusion, we will use the generally accepted term.

paraprofessionals offered invaluable suggestions – particularly regarding the classroom activity, logistics, bilingual translations of research documents and questions, and suggestions regarding cultural competencies. Not only did the paraprofessionals agree to be co-researchers in the ELLA BRICOLAGE, they enthusiastically agreed to coordinate all of the parent interviews, and beyond that, to conduct the semi-structured interviews themselves in the instances when scheduling conflicts prevented other members of the research team from joining them.

Paraprofessionals completed their own data cards during the research/professional development meeting. They were asked the following: “Write or draw something that would help illustrate an example of (a) your most meaningful contribution to Project ELLA, or (b) what about Project ELLA has impacted you the most.” At the conclusion of the ELLA BRICOLAGE research activities, the paraprofessionals joined one of us for reflection and conversation regarding the following questions: (a) What was this research process like for you? what has worked for you? what has not worked?; (b) how would you describe your experience as co-researcher?; and (c) as we look through the cards your students created, which ones stand out for you? why?

We recorded and transcribed these conversational interviews. The paraprofessionals’ answers to the third interview question (i.e., “As we look through the cards your students created, which ones stand out for you? why?”) narrow the focus of the multiplicities, which comprise the POET of the ELLA BRICOLAGE. Guided by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), we envision our POET as acentered and nonhierarchical (in that the paraprofessionals, rather than Principle Investigators or Research Coordinators selected the multiplicities that constitute the POET).

*Experimental Students*

Paraprofessionals presented a scripted 25-minute classroom activity to the Project ELLA experimental students (both bilingual and structured English immersion conditions) and their classmates. The students were given 7 inch by 7 inch cardstock squares, and asked to draw and write their response to one of the following questions: (a) How has Project ELLA helped you to read in English?, and (b) how has Project ELLA helped you to speak in English? At the conclusion of the activity, the paraprofessionals told the students, “Your cards are going to be put together in a HUGE piece of artwork that will look sort of like a really big quilt. . . . [In order to give the students an idea of our vision for the ELLA BRICOLAGE, we showed them a photo of a composite canvas of children’s art on display at the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, Georgia.] Your cards will show teachers, principals, and other people how you think Project ELLA has helped you read and speak in English.”

*Parents*

Parents were invited for interviews with the project’s research assistant for qualitative data analysis and/or their child’s classroom paraprofessional. Nine parents came to their child’s campus for individual interviews, and two groups of parents (one group of six, and one group of seven parents) met with their respective Project ELLA paraprofessionals and the project’s qualitative research assistant. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and for the most part conducted in Spanish. (See Table 1 for parent interview questions.) At the conclusion of the interviews, we discussed with the parents the following:

A part of this research will be a large canvas, almost like a large quilt, of the ideas of parents, students, paraprofessionals, and research coordinators who have been involved in Project ELLA. It will look something like this: [We showed the parents the same

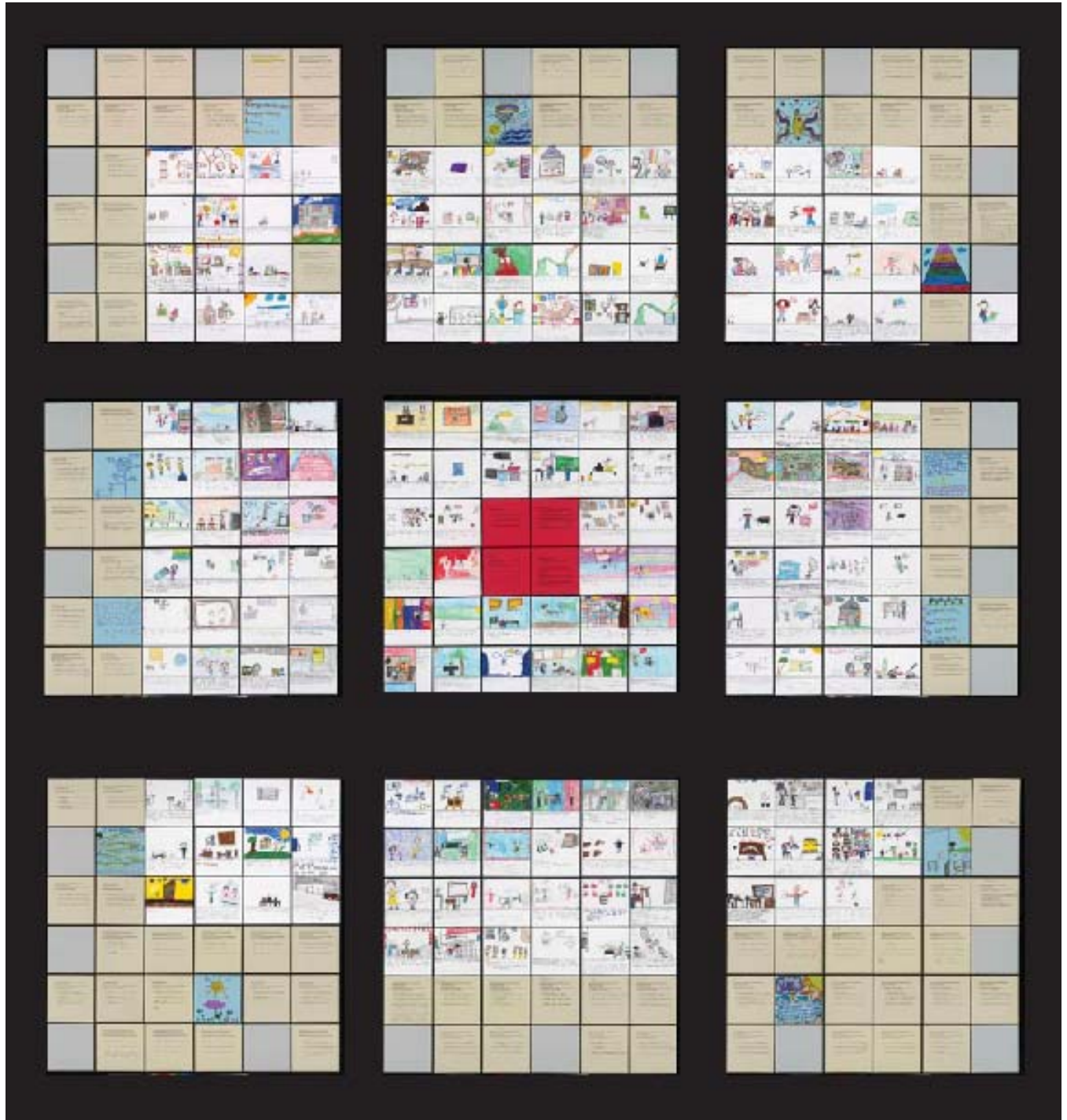
photograph of a composite of children's art on display at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, Georgia]

We then asked the parents to please answer the question listed on the parent data cards: "List three ways your child's participation has improved her/his English." We offered parents the option of writing the answers themselves or of telling the interviewer(s) their answers, which the interviewer(s) then recorded on parent data cards. Hoping to maximize our parent data, we also sent parent data cards home with students, along with letters (written in Spanish on one side and English on the other) asking parents to complete and return them.

### The ELLA BRICOLAGE

Once we collected data associated with 18 classrooms, housed on nine campuses, we mounted all 324 data cards (including four center cards, which included the research activity and interview questions listed above) individually by hand, and then had them affixed to nine, 5 foot by 5 foot panels. Taken together, the composite of panels is the artifact of the ELLA BRICOLAGE (see Figure 1). Guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) expanded ecological scheme of nested systems that surround and shape the development of the child, we situated the student data cards (which are grouped according to campuses, classrooms, and intervention type) in the center of the composite. The assemblage of student cards is surrounded by cards from 98 parents, 12 paraprofessionals, and 26 blank cards, which represent multiple entryways for theoretical perspectives, as well as ongoing inquiry, critique, appreciation, and feedback by audience participants. Eventually, the panels will be installed in a large public space at Sam Houston State University.

Figure 1. The ELLA BRICOLAGE



Lincoln (2002) noted that the emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research are relational: “that is, they recognize and validate relationships between the inquirer and those who participate in the inquiry” (p. 331). One of Lincoln’s standards for judging quality (i.e., *community as arbiter of quality*) inspired us to invite all the longitudinal research community – participants, educators, administrators, and researchers – to an after-school viewing of the ELLA BRICOLAGE. We advertised and introduced the ELLA BRICOLAGE to the Project ELLA community as a sort of *community quilt*, designed to highlight the importance of the multiple voices of the students, parents, and paraprofessionals. In the spirit of a gallery exhibit opening, celebrating the bricolage art collaboratively created by the Project ELLA community, we invited students, parents, paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators, to an after-school reception, replete with appreciative commemoration of four years’ participation in the longitudinal study and trays loaded with refreshments.

#### Data Sources

The primary data source for our paper discussion is one of the three cruise-scanned banner reproduction panels of our approximately 225 square foot bricolage canvas. In addition, discussion participants will have access to booklet of the 12 student data cards selected by the paraprofessionals, as well as the 12 paraprofessionals’ data cards, and 12 randomly selected parent data cards.

In his discussion regarding the role of social constructionism in cultural analysis, Gergen (1999) put forth the metaphor of the *active audience*. An active audience, according to Gergen, is “. . . active, thoughtful, searching, and critical. . . . They appropriate and reconstruct” (p. 199). Similarly, Bresler (2006) noted that in arts-based inquiry, the idea of co-creating meaning through dialogical relationship is intensified by the expectation to communicate with any

audience, thereby creating a *tri-directional* relationship: “(1) Connection to the phenomena or artwork, which propels (2) a dialogic connection to oneself. This dialogue is enhanced by (3) connection to the audience” (pp. 53-54).

In addition, Bresler (2006) viewed arts-based qualitative research, and the audience experience of art in general, through the lens of Gadamer’s notion of *horizons of understanding*. According to Gadamer (1975/2004):

Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other. (p. 304)

Gadamer stated that the horizon is “something into which we move and that moves with us” (p. 303), and that . . . “we must always have a horizon in order to be able to transpose ourselves into a situation” (pp. 303-304). From her reading of Gadamer, Bresler (2006) surmised, “In seeking to expand our horizon, Gadamer suggests, we have to open ourselves to the full power of what the other is saying” (p. 57).

Guided, then, by Bresler’s (2006) discussion regarding aesthetics, connectedness and interpretive processes in arts-based educational research, we invite the active audience of our paper discussion to enter into dialogue regarding the data samples, which together form the POET of this paper discussion. Our view of the interpretive process of the ELLA BRICOLAGE is further informed by Gadamer’s (1975/2004) emphasis upon *questioning* rather than arguing, and bringing out the *strength* of what is said, rather than trying to discover weakness. Herein lies another important difference between the hermeneutic, interpretive process of the ELLA BRICOLAGE and the feedback looping process of Kincheloe and Berry’s bricolage

methodology, particularly as described by Berry (2006). The primary distinction, as we see it, is situated in the centrality of *strengthening* in Gadamer's hermeneutic interpretive process, compared with Berry's (2006, pp. 102-105) emphasis upon *problematizing* the details of the bricolage research text.

As Gadamer (1975/2004) said, "The essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open" (p. 298). Based upon van Manen's (1990 pp. 42-46) notion of orienting the question, and Gadamer's discussion regarding *logic of question and answer* (1975/2004, pp. 363-371), we developed the following questions for ongoing dialogue and inquiry with active audiences of the ELLA BRICOLAGE:

1. What is your *hermeneutic horizon*? What presuppositions and lived experience orient you to the POET?
2. What is the POET asking of you?
3. In what ways does the POET speak to you as a *Thou* rather than an *It*?<sup>4</sup>

In conclusion, Bresler (2006) highlighted "the aesthetic exigencies that are part of a social interaction, and specifically, how an *I-Thou* empathy operates within a commodious, private/public, three-dimensional space" (p. 62). Our intention in presenting one of the banner reproductions of a three-panel column of the ELLA BRICOLAGE, as well as a booklet of actual-sized images of 36 student, parent, and paraprofessional data cards, is – to paraphrase Stout

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<sup>4</sup> In reference to Buber's, 1970, treatise on the nature of *I-Thou* and *I-It* relationships, Gadamer (1975/2004) noted that while a text does not speak in the same way as does a *Thou*, "we who are attempting to understand must ourselves make it speak" (p. 370).

(1999) – oriented by an appreciation for ongoing dialogue, which opens space for unfolding curiosity and a growing concern for the world in which we live (p. 23).

*Data Cards and I-Thou Notions of Humanness*

“A Thou is not an object; it relates itself to us. . . . This kind of experience is a moral phenomenon.”

– Gadamer [1975/2004, p. 352]

Similar to Gadamer’s (1975/2004, p. 352) comment in the preceding epigraph, Kincheloe and Berry (2004) spoke of the relational significance of bricolage methodology: “In this new textual domain we trace the emergence of not only creative narratives but also new notions of humanness” (p. 22). Martin Buber’s (1970) notion of *I and Thou* – “the unfathomable kind of relational act” (p. 134) that “happens to us in the encounter” (p. 124) – approximates the almost ineffable significance that we attempt to articulate with a short story about *Ernesto*,<sup>5</sup> a student who participated in the transitional bilingual education (BIL) experimental group.

Ernesto’s classroom teacher brought him to the Project ELLA Community Quilt (ELLA BRICOLAGE) after-school reception. His teacher was interested in viewing the data, and Ernesto’s mother, a custodian on the campus that hosted the reception, planned to meet him there. Ernesto and his teacher were the first to arrive. With around 15-20 ELLA research team members (principal investigators, coordinators, and paraprofessionals) and no other students, Ernesto looked as if he just realized that he left his invisibility cloak at home. Trying to make him feel comfortable, one of the authors, Sallie Helms, asked him if he’d like to show his teacher and her the picture he drew for the ELLA BRICOLAGE. He quietly replied, “I didn’t do one.”

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<sup>5</sup> For purposes of confidentiality, fictitious names will be substituted for the actual names of students and parents.

Some of the students were absent the day of the activity, so Sallie assumed he must have been one of them. She offered him chicken nuggets and lemonade, and he shyly shook his head “no.”

“Well,” she said, “would you like to see my favorite drawing?” She led Ernesto and his teacher to Panel 5, the central panel. As they crossed the room together, Sallie hoped her chatter would ease the awkwardness of the situation: “I almost had t-shirts made of this drawing. I love it so much!” She pointed to the brightly colored picture with a little flourish, “This is the one!” A shy grin slowly took over Ernesto’s 10-year-old face. In a whispered voice, he admitted, “That one is mine.” There was some confusion, as his teacher and Sallie exclaimed their surprise and delight, and then tried to solve the mystery of why he didn’t claim his work from the beginning. Whether Ernesto’s reticence was because of shyness in an awkward situation, embarrassment over how his work might be judged . . . We still don’t really know. We *do* know that all of us – Ernesto, his teacher, his mother when she was able to join us at the reception, and Sallie – all recognized that we were part of ‘an unfathomable kind of relational act, which happened to us in the encounter.’

Ernesto’s teacher and Sallie were a quietly attentive and appreciative audience, as he told the meaning of the picture that he drew on his student data card (see Figure 2), with its frame of brilliant blue waterfalls and angel hovering in the sky. Near the angel, a sun emanating a dozen rays peeked out from behind fluffy clouds. Two fish, as if in a game of aerial tag, leaped out from one side of the waterfall. At the bottom of the image, Ernesto drew a boy lying on his back with his head resting on a boulder; he appeared to be reading a book, while at the same time looking up at the angel. The caption simply read, “Ella helped me to know how to read better.” Ernesto told his teacher that he drew the picture because “It is a miracle that I can read English so well.”

Figure 2. Ernesto's Student Data Card



Ernesto's confident smile radiates from photographs we took of him standing in front of his drawing, with his teacher's arm proudly circled around his shoulders. Ernesto is one of 192 students whose art and written reflections compose the assemblage of the ELLA BRICOLAGE. According to hypertext theory, "the reader gains autonomy over the text as she is free to decide whilst reading where to proceed in the text when a hyperlink marker shows up" (Müller-Prove, n.d., ¶ 1). We see each of the data cards of 184 student, 98 parents, and 12 paraprofessionals as metaphoric hyperlinks, which offer the reader or audience virtually limitless possibilities for hermeneutic dialogue and interpretation. Conference-goers who stop by our paper discussion will have the opportunity, as previously noted, to participate as an active audience with a purposive sample of images from our larger POET. For individuals who are reading the paper without attending the paper discussion, however, we are including in this paper two sample images from parent (see Figure 3) and paraprofessional (see Figure 4) data cards.

### Conclusions

We are mindful of Kincheloe's (2001) combined warning, assurance, and objectives regarding research as bricolage:

The critics are probably correct, such a daunting task cannot be accomplished in the time span of a doctoral program; but the process can be named and the dimensions of a lifetime scholarly pursuit can be in part delineated. Our transcendence of the old regime's reductionism and our understanding of the complexity of the research task demand a lifetime effort" (p. 681).

Figure 3. Sample Parent Data Card

Please list three ways your child's participation in Project ELLA has improved her/his English.

Favor de escribir tres maneras en las que su niño(a), por la participación en el Proyecto ELLA, ha mejorado su Inglés.

- ❖ El Proyecto Ella ha ayudado a mi hijo ser más responsable.
- ❖ He notado que mi hijo habla los dos idiomas bien que es Español y Inglés.
- ❖ También veo que mi hijo tiene mucho interés en leer libros todos los días.

## Translation:

- Project ELLA has helped my son to be more responsible.
- I have noted that my son speaks both languages well, Spanish and English.
- I also see that my son has a lot of interest in reading books every day.

- *Figure 4.* Sample Paraprofessional Data Card



Our conclusions are informed by our experience of the transformational potential of this relational and non-linear method of inquiry, which privileges the *local knowledge* (Geertz, 2000, p. 133) of the traditionally “unasked” (Lincoln, 1993, p. 44). It is the content of the data, however, which indicates the overall confidence, hope, and increased self-agency that students (as well as parents and paraprofessionals) attribute to their participation in the controlled and structured English as a second language intervention project.

### Importance of the Study

We believe that our research is important to the cutting-edge development of theory and application of postmodern research as bricolage. Berry (personal communication, January 30, 2008) stated that while many studies and dissertations *reference* bricolage methodology, our educational research is the first she is aware of that attempts to *apply* research as bricolage to a study of this magnitude.

Most important, we believe that research that privileges the voices of the researched “is a hallmark for quality in interpretive work” (Lincoln, 2002, p. 337). The students’ drawings and writing eloquently represent their multivocality, experiences, competencies, as well as potential areas for focus and improvement in bilingual pedagogical interventions with ELLs at the thresholds *and* borders of English proficiency and reading achievement. Vygotsky (1978) saw language as a gift to the child from culture or society. We believe that our work significantly contributes to the English proficiency and reading achievement of the ELLs in this study and to the growing edge of bilingual education research. We hope that our work helps emphasize the authority of the voices of the participants involved in our research and to generate further dialogue regarding creative and relationally responsible postmodern inquiry in general, and more specifically Kincheloe and Berry’s (2004) bricolage methodology.

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Table 1

*ELLA BRICOLAGE Parent Interview Questions*

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1. Can you provide specific examples of your child's growth in speaking English, since s/he has been in Project ELLA?
  2. Can you provide specific examples of your child's growth in reading English, since s/he has been in Project ELLA?
  3. Project ELLA is designed to impact children's learning. Can you think of any other abilities or attitudes of your child that Project ELLA may impact?
  4. What have you done to support your child's learning that has made the biggest difference?
  5. In 10 years your child will be 18? What dreams do you have for your child and his/her education at that time – 10 years from now?
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