

**BECAUSE THEY SAID SO: LIFE STORIES OF FOUR COLLEGE STUDENTS  
IN PUERTO RICO AND THE INFLUENTIAL FACTORS  
IN THEIR ENGLISH LEARNING PROCESS**

By

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## Abstract

This investigation used life history to understand the different factors that have influenced the current motivations to learn English and perceptions about this language of several learners at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus (UPRM). Four first-year students were purposely selected to include students from both public and private educational settings, a return migrant and an international student were also part of the sample. Life histories were collected through a series of interview protocols and a focus group. The data was analyzed using a model of instrumental/integrative motivational orientations for learning a second language. Parents and teachers were found to be the greatest influence in these students' language acquisition. Participants however, reported that teachers were mostly responsible for the amount of English that they had learned. In addition, other motivational orientations such as technological and leisure were also found to be present in the lives of the participants.

## Resumen

Esta investigación utilizó historias de vida para entender los factores que han influenciado las motivaciones para aprender inglés y las percepciones de varios estudiantes en el Recinto Universitario de Mayagüez (UPRM). Cuatro estudiantes de primer año fueron seleccionados intencionalmente para incluir participantes que estudiaron en escuelas públicas y privadas. Un estudiante que vivió en Estados Unidos y un estudiante internacional también fueron parte del grupo. Las historias de vida se compilaron a través de entrevistas y un grupo focal. Los datos se analizaron utilizando un modelo de orientación motivacional dividido en motivación instrumental e integrativa. Los padres y maestros resultaron tener la mayor influencia en el aprendizaje de inglés de estos estudiantes. Sin embargo, los participantes reportaron que los maestros eran mayormente responsables por el inglés que estos aprendieron. También se encontró que otras orientaciones relacionadas al uso de tecnología y pasatiempos estuvieron presentes en las vidas de los participantes.

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Finally, thanks to Arlene Hernández for sharing with me her wonderful poem. You are an outstanding poet. My best wishes go to you!

## Dedicatory

I have always believed that finding true love is a precious accomplishment that must be greatly cherished; even more so when more than one is able to find a true soul mate. For this reason I also always prayed that I could find that person in my life. Now I can gratefully say that I consider myself one of those fortunate people that have the blessing of having found their soul mate. That is why I would like to dedicate this thesis to my beloved husband. Toño, if there is someone, above everyone else, that I must thank is you. Throughout this entire process you have been by my side, from brainstorming ideas and giving me feedback, to bringing home all those sweets and goodies that you knew I very much needed in order to finish this thesis, Thank you for your patience and your caring love and for showing to me, more than ever before, that you are the most wonderful man on the face of this earth. No words can accurately express my love and gratitude for you. Thank you for being such an exceptional and supportive husband. Gracias por todo mi vida, te amo.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Spanish

My mother tongue

My mother's only tongue

Nuestro inglés

A testament

Of what she

Couldn't do

Wanted to

But was afraid

To be laughed at

To be looked at...

-Arlene Hernández, “My Mother Tongue, My Mother’s Tongue”

These lines from Arlene Hernández' poem portray some of the identity issues that English learners often face during their second language learning process as well as other factors that can influence this process. Such is the case of several generations of Puerto Ricans who have grown in educational and social environments in which both Spanish and English are considered as official languages of Puerto Rico. Although the language used in everyday life in Puerto Rico is Spanish, learning English is imposed on all students from the moment that their formal education begins. Regardless of how many years have passed, Puerto Rican students learning English today are still affected by the contested status of English that has lasted over the last one hundred years of Puerto Rico's history. As a result, learners today hold different perceptions toward English and the reasons why they have to learn it. At the same time, their motivations to

learn this language are also strongly tied to the different ideologies that are a result of the long-lasting disputes over the language issue in Puerto Rico.

The Treaty of Paris was signed between Spain and the United States in December of 1898, putting an end to the five centuries in which Puerto Rico was under Spanish sovereignty. This treaty ended the Spanish-American war and in it Spain ceded Puerto Rico, among other islands, to the United States. This event, along with many others, resulted in the propagation of different political ideologies among Puerto Ricans (Algrén de Gutiérrez, 1987). Despite such differences in the ideals of millions of Puerto Ricans, both in Puerto Rico and the United States, living life in two languages is a common reality for all of them. Puerto Rico has been a commonwealth of the United States since 1952, and as a consequence, thousands of Puerto Ricans travel back and forth from Puerto Rico to the United States and vice versa, creating an unavoidable relationship between both cultures and a need for bilingualism that serves different purposes to those that migrate and those that decide to stay in Puerto Rico (Barreto, 2000). This is a long established relationship that cannot be avoided regardless of differences in ideologies or the current language situation in Puerto Rico.

Since 1900, six different educational policies have been implemented for the teaching and learning of English (Algrén de Gutiérrez, 1987; Maldonado, 2000). In 1947 commissioner Mariano Villaronga developed a new policy, which he implemented a year after. Spanish became the language used as the medium of instruction and English would be taught as a subject for all school levels. This is the policy that is still used today in the public schools of Puerto Rico.

However, after more than one hundred years of teaching English in Puerto Rican schools, and approximately sixty years of the implementation of Villaronga's policy, even many college level students still show difficulty with this language. Political ideologies and identity are some

of the possible explanations for the apparent poor acquisition of the English language among Puerto Rican students. Nonetheless, precisely because of the particularity of this language situation there are many other possible factors that could also explain why students have difficulties learning English.

A wide variety of research has been conducted among Puerto Rican students in Puerto Rico as an attempt to further analyze and understand possible reasons behind this phenomenon. Many of these have been conducted by specialists in areas such as language learning and Pedagogy. These seek to benefit learners and educators of English by contributing to the possible reasons why Puerto Rican students are not learning as much English as they are expected to (López Hernández, 2007; Rodríguez, 2000; Vicente, 2000).

By using the results from a 1997 College Board study, Maldonado (2000) discussed the current issue that higher learning institutions in Puerto Rico face regarding students entering without the necessary skills in the English language. She argued that students have a range of proficiency, regardless of whether they come from private or public educational settings. She found that there was “a low level achievement in English among those students who continue[d] their studies at both private and public universities” (p. 489). This discrepancy between low and high English proficiency is only reinforced at the college level.

Many students entering college are placed in either remedial and lower level English courses because their placement tests scores show that they need to reinforce their skills in English in order to fully comply with what the institution will academically require of them. However, regardless of the fact that students begin college with such a variety of proficiencies in English, their motivations to learn this language seem to be quite unanimous. Previous investigations (López Hernández, 2007; Rodríguez, 2000; Vicente, 2000) have reported a high

motivation among Puerto Rican college students for learning the language. These results indicate a discrepancy between the proficiency of English learner's at UPRM and their reported motivation to learn English as a second language.

### *Objectives of this Research*

I intend to contribute to the field of second language acquisition with this life history research project, which focuses on the motivations and perceptions of college level learners of English as a second language in Puerto Rico. When speaking of *motivations* I refer to the reasons why students in Puerto Rico might want to learn English. The term *perceptions* refers to how they feel about English inside and outside of Puerto Rico, how they visualize themselves as learners and users of English and how they describe prior experiences related to their language acquisition. Motivations and perceptions are two topics that have been widely studied in Puerto Rico, since they are considered to be of great importance in the acquisition of a second language (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Saville-Troike, 2006).

I have compiled the life stories of four first-year students at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus, with the intention of providing them with a space in which they can speak openly and share their opinions about how their prior life experiences regarding English have influenced their current motivations and perceptions on this language. Puerto Rican students are seldom allowed to partake on such decisions (Algrén de Gutiérrez, 1987; Mateu Zayas, 2007) and they are the ones who can better direct our research.

Aside from providing this space for students, I also used the unique characteristics of life stories in order to clearly show the factors that I found to have influenced the language acquisition process of these four students. Although this investigation only had four participants, the specific profiles of the participants in this study intend to recreate a realistic sample of the

profiles of many other first-year students currently attending universities in Puerto Rico. These participants are: two Puerto Rican students, a male and a female, who experienced both private and public educational settings in Puerto Rico, a Puerto Rican return migrant, and a foreign student.

#### *Justification for Conducting this Investigation*

Despite the fact that Puerto Rican college students are often the focus of studies about language acquisition, non-qualitative data collection instruments, such as questionnaires, are commonly used for such studies and as a result, the participants' voices are seldom present in the final reports. Lance (1996) stated that "a questionnaire can become an obstacle to achieving ... natural and spontaneous dialogue" (p. 139). Thus, although questionnaires are a valid and useful method for gathering data, their nature leaves no space for the participant's direct voice to be present in the research. Consequently, much of the existing research on language learning in Puerto Rico is unable to provide deep knowledge of the origins of the motivations and perceptions of its participants for learning English as a second language.

If more opportunity is given to students to provide their past experiences in their language learning process, the research field can be enriched by direct information provided by the language learners. Such experiences are successfully portrayed through thick descriptions. The term *thick description* refers to the process of providing detailed descriptions of the data that is collected (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). They "lend themselves to accurate explanation and interpretation of events rather than relying on the researcher's own preferences" (p. 405). Because of how enriched they are, these descriptions provide specific details about the life of the participants of this study with regards to the processes by which they learned English.

Studies (López Hernández, 2007; Rodríguez, 2000; Vicente, 2000) have reported a high motivation among Puerto Rican college students for learning the language and yet the amount of college students entering at the pre-basic and basic level English courses show that their proficiency is not up to par with their apparent motivations. Among the already substantial research about motivations and perceptions regarding English learning in Puerto Rico, I was unable to find current life stories of students about this topic. Thus, I decided to use life stories as my methodology for this case study because there is not enough data that allows for the voice of the students to directly explain why they have or have not learned English and how they feel about the formal and informal English education that they have received. The use of this research methodology is helpful in providing more insight regarding the discrepancy between the motivations and perceptions that students might hold towards the language, and other external elements that might be interfering between these and their ability to acquire the language.

I selected some of the possible factors that could have influenced the participants' language acquisition and their current perceptions of this language at the college level. Among these are their formal education, the influences of family members as well as sociocultural and socio-economic factors. Moss (1996) has expressed that "it is axiomatic that [history] is essential to coping with the present and planning for the future" (p. 108). Yet, the students' voices are rarely present in the majority of the policies and studies that have been conducted in relation to the learning experiences of students in Puerto Rico (Algrén de Gutiérrez, 1987; Mateu Zayas, 2007).

Conducting research that is more personal, descriptive, and nuanced about second language learners' motives to learn English and experiences in English education is thus beneficial and necessary to the field of bilingualism and language acquisition in Puerto Rico.

That is why this investigation is mainly focused on the collection of the life experiences of four students with different backgrounds. Their direct voices are the principal component of this document, since acquiring them was the main purpose for carrying out this research in the first place. Allowing these students to openly discuss their ideals and experiences will contribute to understanding the current English learning phenomenon in Puerto Rico.

### *Research Questions*

The fact that the students' voices are not often included in the language studies conducted in Puerto Rico led me to an interest in conducting research that would give my participants that opportunity. Such research would allow me to work with the *why* instead of the *what*, that so many other researchers of my topic of interest have already discussed in their studies. There were four research questions and four sub-questions that I pursued in my study. These were designed to understand the perceptions and motivations that my sample of participants reflected regarding the English language and the possible sources for these, based on the participants' life experiences. My research questions were:

1. What are the experiences that English learners of different educational, cultural, socio-economic and family backgrounds have had in formal and informal English learning?
2. How do these second language learners define English competence?
  2. a What are the values that they attach to English competence?
  2. b How do they perceive their own competence in the language?
3. What are the opinions these students have about the purpose of English in their lives?
  3. a What might account for the differences and similarities in these opinions?
4. What might be the motives these students have to learn English?
  4. a What might account for the differences and similarities in their motives?

## Chapter II: Literature Review

The areas of research that I selected for my investigation are motivations and perceptions of English language learners. Because I was interested in the external factors that influenced the language acquisition process of the participants, the role of family members, teachers and the learning environments and its relation to the student's motivation were essential in my research. Thus, other topics are also discussed in this chapter, with the purpose of providing the background information needed in order to better understand the previous experiences of the participants in my study. I hold two main purposes for providing the following review of the existent literature in these areas. The first one is to inform the readers of the fundamental current theories regarding these topics and the second one is to provide an overview of significant research that has been conducted within the topics of motivations and perceptions and that is relevant to my study. I have therefore divided this review of the literature in several sections that will better explain the topic of my research.

### *Motivations for Learning a Second Language*

Over the last decades, the field of motivations in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has become a popular area for researchers who have grown interested in the influential factors of a learner's process for acquiring a second language. Although the motivations of a second language learner have been discussed as possible influential factors in SLA, no investigations had yet been conducted to measure or prove what was then proposed as a hypothesis. Gardner and Lambert (1959) were among the first researchers to look at motivation as an influential aspect of language acquisition. They suggested that although "researchers have mentioned that motivation and interest probably play important roles in second-language acquisition, ... perhaps because of difficulties in measuring them, these aspects have not been given systematic

attention” (p.266). They thus developed an Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMBT) which finally allowed them to measure these two factors.

In the case of motivation, Gardner and Lambert sought to actually measure the levels of motivation and the motivational orientations of second language learners. This would allow them to verify if indeed there was a relationship between language learning and motivation. The motivational orientations were divided in two, instrumental and integrative. Motivation as defined by Masgoret and Gardner (2003) is:

A goal directed behavior [in which] the motivated individual expends effort, is persistent and attentive to the task at hand, has goals, desires and aspirations, enjoys the activities, experiences reinforcement from success and disappointment from failure, makes attributions concerning success and/or failure, is aroused, and makes use of strategies to aid in achieving goals. That is, the motivated individual exhibits many behaviors, feelings, cognitions, etc., that the individual who is unmotivated does not. (p.173)

They defined integrative motivation as language learning because of identification with the community that speaks this language. Instrumental orientation, though, represents practical reasons for learning the target language, without any interests in becoming part of the community that speaks this language.

Because of the findings from previous research (Gardner & Lambert, 1959), Gardner established integrative motivation as a strong component in language acquisition. As he explained, having an authentic desire to be accepted or integrated into a group “Implies openness, on the part of the individuals, that would facilitate their motivation to learn the material” (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Therefore, if a language learner has an integrative

orientation to learn the language he will make a greater effort to learn it than one student who only seeks to learn it for practical purposes.

Gardner and Lambert clearly stated that motivational orientation is not the same as the motivation. For instance, when it is said that a student has an instrumental or integrative orientation, it is simply being stated that this is the reason why the student might feel inclined to learn the language. This does not mean however, that the student has the motivation required to learn the language. Thus, although Gardner established that integrative motivation seems to be more helpful to students interested in learning a second language, a learner who portrays an instrumental motivation could learn that language faster and better if they have the required level of motivation to do so.

Upon the development of his instrument, Gardner and Lambert (1959) used the AMBT to look at both the student's aptitude or abilities and their motivation for learning English. Since the test battery allowed them to measure motivation, they were able to determine that motivation did have a direct influence in the learner's progress. They reported that students who reflected an integrative motivation acquired the language better than those who simply sought to learn the language for other purposes. This led Gardner and Lambert to the conclusion that if an integrative motivation exists, it will be more helpful to a second language learner than instrumental orientation.

With the results of this prior study, Gardner then developed the Socio-educational model in 1985 in which he proposed that there are three main components that influence the learner's motivation. These are integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, and motivation. In his studies, Gardner used the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to measure the existence of these components. Integrativeness is measured in three areas which are (a) Attitudes Toward

the Target Language Group, (b) Interests in Foreign Languages and (c) Integrative Orientation.

In the case of attitudes towards the learning situation, these are measured in (a) Attitudes toward the Language Course and (b) Attitudes toward the Language Teacher.

Another aspect of Gardner's research that informed my study was an investigation in which he analyzed the role of the language learners' parents (1968). Gardner divided the participation of parents in this process in two types, the active and the passive role. As he explained it, a parent plays an active role when he or she:

Actively and consciously encourages the student to learn the language. In the active role, the parent monitors the child's language-learning performance, and to the extent that he plays their role he attempts to promote success. That is, the parent watches over the child and makes sure he does his homework, encourages him to do well, and in general reinforces his successes. I believe it is safe to assume that differences in the extent to which parents vary in this encouragement function would have some influence on the child's performance in any learning situation. (141)

Although at first hand it might seem that an active role is beneficial to the learner, Gardner believed that the passive role could be more important than the active one, specifically because of the subtleness that characterized it. He argued that the passive role could be much more influential than the role of the parents who just play an active role.

By the subtle role, I mean the attitudes of the parent toward the community whose language the child is learning. These attitudes are important, I believe, because they influence the child's attitudes, ... toward the other language community [and] are influential in motivating him to acquire the second language. (141)

For Gardner the passive role could be played by the parent unconsciously, yet its influences are stronger than those of the active role because the learner perceives them and adopts them. Thus, even if a parent plays an active role in the language-learning process of a student, if that parent holds a negative attitude toward the culture that uses the target language, the student will be influenced by this and it will affect his language acquisition process.

A learner in such an instance might develop an instrumental motivation because his or her parents constantly remind him or her of the need to learn the language. However, this learner will not develop an integrative motivation because there is a lack of that positive attitude that accompanies the parents' passive role. This is the attitude that creates an integrative motivation for the student and this is why such learners are more inclined to learn the language better; there is a real interest to learn the language rather than just a learned instrumentality for it.

Gardner's contribution to the field was without a doubt a significant one. Nonetheless, other researchers soon became interested in it. Dörnyei agreed with Gardner in that integrativeness is a strong influence in learning a second language, but he also disagreed with other aspects of his theories. Dörnyei (1994) stated that although researchers greatly appreciated Gardner's significant contribution to the field of motivation, it only focused on social factors and it lacked a pedagogical approach. He included new theories and concepts, related to motivation that had not been included in Gardner's theories. Among them are teacher, group and course specific motivational components. With such terms he refocused Gardner's social perspectives to a more educational-based concept.

Whereas much of Gardner's research was conducted in Canada and examined an environment of English as a Second Language (ESL), the setting for Dörnyei's research was Hungary, and the environment of these learners was of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Csizér and Dörnyei did an investigation in Hungary (2005), in which they reported that for this population integrative motivation was clearly stronger than instrumental and they agreed with Gardner in the sense that integrativeness appeared to be a decisive factor in a learner's language acquisition. Because of the differences in the research environments of these investigators, Csizér and Dörnyei were able to make a clear distinction between both concepts. They explained that what marks the difference between one and the other is that in an ESL setting there are socio-political implications embedded in the target language, whereas the EFL environment there usually are not. Such is the difference, for instance, between ESL students in Puerto Rico and EFL students from Venezuela.

#### *Current Research on Language Learning Motivations in Puerto Rico*

Because of the growing interest in language learning motivation, various studies on this topic have been conducted in Puerto Rico, (López Hernández, 2007; Vicente, 2000) and even more specifically within various campuses of the University of Puerto Rico. This prior research in Puerto Rican settings has shown that of the two orientations defined by Gardner, instrumental and integrative, instrumental orientation is more predominant among college-level students in Puerto Rico. These investigations, however, though they have provided substantial data that show the inclinations toward that motivational orientation, focus on the existence of the phenomenon rather than a possible explanation for it. The following are two thesis projects with the University of Puerto Rico as their setting.

López Hernández (2007) researched the attitudes of UPRM learners in the Basic English track toward the English language, whether these attitudes differed across the English language track and if there were attitudinal differences toward English between students who begin in the Pre- basic course and those who begin in the Basic course. Although the main topic of this thesis

was attitudes, López Hernández also investigated the students' motivations. She reported that the main motivation of the students enrolled in Basic track English courses at UPRM was instrumental, although there was also a lesser amount of students who portray and integrative motivation as well. The researcher stated that being proficient in English represented, for many students, an instrumental benefit which can lead them to desired job positions upon graduation.

On the other hand, Vicente (2000) provided data from college students in different English level courses, which also reported a higher amount of students with an instrumental motivation for acquiring the language. The main purpose of this research was to study a possible relation between student's political affiliation and their attitudes and motivations toward the language. Among her findings, Vicente's study indicated that there was a relationship between the political affiliations of the student or of relatives and that although Puerto Rican students preferred Spanish as the official language for Puerto Rico, they were aware that English was necessary in order to communicate with other people worldwide. She also found that regardless of the participants' political affiliations, they still gave importance to the English language.

### *Perceptions of English Learners*

Although much has also been written about attitudes, as I have already mentioned, I am most interested in the perceptions that English learners have about different factors and environment that could influence or contribute to their language acquisition. I would like to distinguish between these two concepts. When speaking about the *learner's attitude* toward the learning situation, Masgoret and Gardner (2003) defined it as "the individual's reactions to anything associated to the immediate learning context in which the language is taught" (p. 172-73). For the purposes of this study *Perception*, rather than being defined as a reaction, is the way in which the learners view the learning situation or environment and how they evaluate the

factors that influenced their language acquisition based on their own prior experiences. The perceptions of learners will determine how they feel about the target language and the learning environments.

Savignon and Wang (2003) conducted a study in which they focused on Japanese students' perceptions and attitudes. They established that there is a need for more studies in this area because the majority of the existing research is based on the perceptions of the teachers rather than the students and these show a discrepancy between the teachers and students' perceptions. Because of this, they developed a questionnaire which was distributed to 174 first-year college students with the intention of understanding their attitudes and beliefs about language learning and their prior experiences learning English. They reported that students' perceptions about the class indicated that they preferred a more communicative competence focus rather than the grammatical focus that they had received in their schools. They also noted that prior studies have also shown that such discrepancies can affect the learner language acquisition.

Furthermore, Foscolos (2000) studied the perceptions of high school students in French-speaking Canada, regarding learning English as a Second Language. The researcher sought to answer the question of how ESL students perceived their high school learning experience. Among the factors for student motivations and perceptions she added that the quality of students' experiences might depend of factors such as time, sociocultural influences, instructional support, and personal motivations. Overall she found that the common variable among the participants was the perception of the importance of English. The researcher also reported that the factors mentioned above were significantly important to the participants. In accordance with Gardner's

reports, her participants stated that sheltered classroom and support from teachers and parents were essential in their language learning process.

#### *Current Research on Language Learners' Perceptions in Puerto Rico*

These studies are similar to some investigations that have focused on second language learners in Puerto Rico. As I have already mentioned, there is a rising interest in understanding students' beliefs about learning a second language. In the case of Puerto Rico, students are required to learn English as that second language and as a consequence many language learning issues arise among Puerto Rican students. It is thus important to study them in order to better understand the language issue in Puerto Rico. Although many studies focus on students attitudes, not many study perceptions. After my research I found one dissertation that focused primarily on the perceptions of English learners in Puerto Rico.

This study was conducted among freshmen students at the University of Puerto Rico-Utuado. Rodríguez (2000) explored Puerto Rican first year college students' beliefs about the English language and their experiences learning it before they started college. Rodríguez was able to find the origins for the perceptions and motivations of the participants of her study regarding their English learning outcomes. Her selection of methods for collecting data permitted her participants to explain that for the most part, they held their prior school English teachers responsible for negative experiences with learning the language. They also reported that these experiences had led them to their current knowledge of the language since their teachers had never given them proper language skills and as a result, when they began to take college courses that required them to use English they realized some of the language problems they had.

### *The Teaching of English in Puerto Rico*

As I have already discussed, the language situation in Puerto Rico is a complicated one. Since 1898, the United States entered Puerto Rico and began a “civilization” and Americanization plan (Barreto, 2000). From their perceptive, one of the first actions in order to successfully meet this goal was to teach Puerto Ricans how to speak English. Thus, since 1900 the Puerto Rican educational system has had six different policies for the teaching of English, each with a different perspective of what was the best approach for Puerto Rican students to learn English. I thus provide a description of all six policies as have been presented by Maldonado (2000).

In 1900 Martin Brumbaugh, who was the first commissioner of education in Puerto Rico, presented the first policy. It consisted of using Spanish as the language of instruction from first through eighth grade. For the following grades, ninth through twelfth, subjects were to be taught in English and Spanish was used only as a subject for these grades. Five years later, in 1905, Commissioner Roland Faulkner instituted what was known as the English-only act. This policy eliminated Spanish from the schools and English was the medium of instruction for all grades. The English-only policy was used until 1931 when Commissioner Paul Miller changed it once again.

This third policy was organized in the following way: from first through fourth grade Spanish was the language used as the medium of instruction. The fifth grade served as a transition in which both languages were used and then from sixth through twelfth grade, English was used as the medium of instruction. However, English and Spanish were taught as subjects in all grades. Commissioner José Padín created the fourth policy in 1934. In this one, Spanish was used as the medium of instruction in elementary school and in the seventh and eighth grade the

English subject was taught for ninety minutes instead of forty five. In 1937, three years after this policy began to be used, Commissioner José Gallardo changed it once again and in this case there were some subjects taught in English and others in Spanish. The language of instruction for elementary school was changed to Spanish.

Finally, in 1947, Commissioner Mariano Villaronga changed the policy for the last time. Spanish would be used as the language of instruction for all school levels and English would be taught at all levels. This policy was implemented in 1948 and it is the current policy that is used in all Puerto Rican public schools. From kindergarten, or even head start, all public and private schools in Puerto Rico teach English as a subject. There are, however, some private institutions that have developed full immersion programs in Puerto Rico. In addition, there are also a handful of bilingual public schools. For such schools, English is used throughout the entire curriculum rather than being just taught as one of the subjects.

All these changes of teaching policies surely influenced the perceptions, motivations and attitudes of students at that time. It would also make sense to state that those who lived under these policies have probably passed these feelings to other generations. The different approaches that have been used to teach English in Puerto Rico have influenced the identity of many generations of Puerto Ricans, those who have stayed in Puerto Rico and also those who have migrated to the United States.

#### *English as a Second Language in California*

Because one of the participants of this study is a return migrant, I believe it is important to provide a background overview of the ESL program in California during the time in which this participant lived there. In June of 1998 a new act was passed in the state of California, eliminating the bilingual teaching policy and substituting it for an English-only policy. The

consequence of the approval of this act was the eradication of bilingualism in all California schools.

The “English for the Children” act has been implemented and used in California since then. Attinasi (1999) stated that the goal of this law was to force children to speak English as quickly as possible, without relying on their mother tongue to do so. Although the law proposes a one-year immersion program, it is generally accepted by language acquisition experts that academic English cannot be learned in such a short time. Results from a study based on a questionnaire, which was distributed among principals of schools in California, (Basurto, Wise & Unruh, 2006) show that after years of the implementation of this law, principals still favor bilingual education instead of the new English-only policy. This is proof that the feelings toward bilingualism is agreed upon by professionals and parents of these students, among other groups.

#### *English as a Foreign Language in Venezuela*

I was unable to find substantial information about the teaching of English in Venezuela. As Blanco (1999) explained it, information on this topic is not available for researchers:

La información respecto a la instrumentación del enfoque comunicativo en los distintos niveles de la educación venezolana es desconfiable y contradictoria. El contexto venezolano está lleno de limitaciones en cuanto a la circulación de información científica del campo del EFL/TEFL. [...] Es difícil para un investigador debatir respecto de esa temática, pues no hay tratamiento de la misma en publicaciones regulares y confiables.<sup>1</sup>  
(p. 95)

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<sup>1</sup> "The available information regarding the instrumentation of the communicative focus in the different levels of education in Venezuela is unreliable and contradictory. The Venezuelan context is filled with limitations for properly circulating scientific information on the field of EFL/ TEFL. [...] It is difficult for a researcher to debate about this topic since the reliable and regular publications do not provide articles on the topic."

English is taught as a compulsory subject in Venezuelan schools. Yet, unlike in Puerto Rico, where it is taught as a second language and at all school levels, schools in Venezuela start teaching English after elementary school and it is taught as a foreign language. Private schools, on the other hand, teach the subject in all its grades. However, the quality of the education that the students receive is not necessarily the best. In the case of private schools, the education will depend on the prestige of the school and of course, this also means that such an institution will be more expensive than other private schools where English is taught very poorly. Some parents enroll their children in additional private programs or tutoring centers in order to compliment the school course. In Venezuela English is not used on a daily basis and thus, it is used as a medium of communication and a tool for other matters such as doing businesses and traveling. It is more commonly used by members of the higher social classes since the lower classes have no need to speak English regularly in Venezuela.

The literature that was presented in this chapter shows that a vast amount of research has been previously conducted in the field of motivation. However, not much has been said about the influential factors that are portrayed in the motivations that college students in Puerto Rico have to learn English as a second language. This is precisely the area in which my investigation contributes to the current research in the field of second language learners' motivations.

## Chapter III: Methodology

The purposes of this investigation required that the methods chosen for collecting and analyzing the collected data were highly descriptive. As such, both the methods and the theoretical framework selected for this research focused on the participants' experiences and the relationship between these and the different environments in which their experiences took place.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This investigation is informed by two theoretical frameworks. These are narrative inquiry and sociocultural theory. The theory for my research has been selected based on the nature of this study. Because I am using life stories to look into the previous experiences of the participants and the influence that several entities had in their lives, both frameworks are pertinent.

*Narrative inquiry.* Narrative inquiry is a theory that has been shaped by theorists such as John Dewey, Mark Johnson and Clifford Geertz, among others. It has been defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as:

A way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated [...] narrative inquiry is stories lived and told.

Narrative inquirers seek to find the life experiences of their participants and how these experiences were shaped by different environments and settings. Such researchers understand that experiences belong to a time frame within the lifetime of a person and that there were other

experiences before the ones that they have found and there will also be others in the future lives of these participants that will continue to shape their lives.

Narrative inquiry is relevant to my investigation because it entails specifically what I seek. I searched for specific experiences in the life of my participants that could help me understand their current language learning situation. As Clandinin and Connelly argue, “education and educational studies are a form of experience. For us, narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience.” (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 18). There is then no better way to understand and portray the origin of my participants’ motivations and perceptions than through their direct experiences.

*Sociocultural theory.* Sociocultural theory looks at those specific environments in which the participants’ experiences took place. This theory is founded on several theorists, Lev Vigotsky being just one of them. Vigotsky argued that understanding the social environment of a student is imperative in order to better understand that child as an individual. Lewis, Enciso and Moje (2007) have established that “sociocultural theory has allowed researchers to explore the intersection of social, cultural, historical, mental, physical, and more recently, political aspects of people’s sense making, interaction, and learning.” (p. 2). In my case, I looked specifically at the social, educational and familial influences of the participants in their learning process.

This theory attempts to establish a relationship among different aspects in the life of a student that have shaped him or her into what he or she is. One of its major arguments is that “we not only need to reinforce the importance of attending to the sociocultural nature but we also need to focus on how identities are shaped by and shaping of social and cultural contexts.” (p. 6). My investigation focuses on such a relationship, attempting to understand how the participants

and their environments led to new identities of these learners and new perceptions of their learning environments.

### *Case Studies as a Research Methodology*

A case study, as defined by Merriam (1998), is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit” (p. 21). The purpose of this intensive analysis is to enable the researcher to provide substantial description of the specific case that is being studied, in order to better understand the phenomenon that is taking place within a specific place, person or group of people that portrays it. In this instance, the case study allows the researcher to gather specific data that can help him or her scrutinize the possible factors that are involved in or that explain the phenomenon.

From an educational perspective a case could be, “a child, a clique, a class, a school, a community. It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 253). Therefore, by utilizing case study as a methodology, the researcher can gather data that is more explicit and descriptive than with other methodologies that are more quantitative. The case study allows for the representation of participant’s perceptions regarding the phenomenon that is being studied.

### *Cross Case Analysis*

The phenomenon under study in this investigation was the participants’ perceptions regarding English, their motivations to learn this language and the relationship between these factors and their current knowledge of English. Several influential factors were being studied in order to better understand the origins of these motivations and perceptions. Because I had four different participants, with diverse profiles and backgrounds, I decided to conduct a multiple

case study of the four. I wanted to look at the individual cases but I also wanted to analyze these as a whole. Hence, I decided to conduct a cross case analysis that would allow me to study these four cases together, looking for similarities among them. In my research, I first collected the life stories of the participants and then analyzed them to find aspects in which their experiences were similar or different.

Indeed, four participants are too small of a sample to be able to make any generalizations about the experiences of the students at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez (UPRM). However, my intention with this study was not to generalize but rather to better understand the particular experiences of these four students. Doing so allowed me to focus on important information, such as the factors that seemed to have influenced them the most, and use it for further research in specific areas of the phenomenon of motivations to learn English that is present among Puerto Rican students.

### *Life Stories in Educational Research*

Life stories are a type of case study in which “the researcher conducts extensive interviews with one person for the purpose of collecting a first person narrative” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 56). Life stories focus on gathering data on a specific aspect of the life of a person. This data is collected through interview protocols that allow the researcher to conduct deep research of the phenomenon that is being studied within the life of the participant. One of the main advantages of using life stories as a research methodology is the fact that it generates thick description. The term thick description refers to “the complete literal description of the incident or entity being discussed” (Merriam, 1998, p.30). This complex description of the experiences of a person can be helpful when trying to analyze how the influence of different stages of his or her life can explain the phenomenon that that is being analyzed.

Because of my research questions and the purpose of my study, using life stories was the most appropriate methodology for my research. Life stories began to be used as a methodology in sociology at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Goodson, 2001). These were first used to collect autobiographies of Native American chiefs and afterwards began being used in other disciplines such as Humanities. Goodson argued that although the use of this methodology has increased and decreased at different times, “within the field of educational studies, … life history has been seen as particularly useful and appropriate” (p.133). In my case, I specifically decided to use what has been defined by Plummer (2001) as researched life stories, in which “the stories have to be seduced, coaxed and interrogated out of subjects” (p. 397). In this type of life story the researcher is looking for specific aspects of the participant’s life, and prepares interview protocols that lead the participant to share parts of his or her life that are related to the topic or phenomenon that is being researched. For the purposes of this study, the collected stories are mainly based on the participants’ educational backgrounds and additional experiences that are related to their English learning process.

In my research, the selection of this methodology for a study conducted in Puerto Rico is significant because during my field research I only found one previous study in which life stories were collected. In that study, Williams (2004) reconstructed the memoires of five Puerto Ricans, members of the oldest living generation in Puerto Rico, who were taught English in public schools during the English-only Policy. She allowed for the voice of the participants to come through her study and it was the inclusion of thick description of their experiences in school which successfully presented the reasons why they successfully learned English.

Besides that study, I was unable to find any research that specifically used life stories as a methodology to investigate student motivations and perceptions about SLA at the college level.

After reporting the findings from her study, López Hernández (2007) recommended that in further studies researchers should “interview the students about their required English courses; the teaching materials being used, language laboratory, professors, English skills they are improving, and the English skills they want to improve” (p. 115-116). This recommendation suggests that there is a lack of descriptive studies where the participants are the main source of information. Furthermore, the researcher recognized that students feel a need to contribute to the improvement of the teaching of English in Puerto Rico.

As Stables (2002) argued, life stories should be used more often as a method that can provide a diachronic portrayal of how students have been influenced by their education. He also suggested that “current forms of formally evaluating educational policy and practice take insufficient account of subjective experience of education” (p. 59). As I have already stated, there are several elements that can contribute to the reasons why an individual might not be acquiring a second language as expected. By using this methodology, I was able to thoroughly examine the possible elements that could have influenced the perceptions and motivations of my participants towards the English language. Acquiring the individual life stories of my participants allowed me to better understand the possible reasons for their second language acquisition outcomes in relation to their prior educational settings and sociocultural environments.

### *Sampling Method*

There are two primary factors that were decisive in terms of the sample of participants that I selected for my research. These were the participants’ sociocultural backgrounds and their prior educational settings. The compilation of a participants’ life story requires extensive hours of interviews that can provide sufficient data. Because of this I needed to conduct enough

individual interviews that would allow me to reconstruct the life experiences of my participants in relation to their acquisition of English as a second language and the other two factors already mentioned above. It was important for me that these students came from different backgrounds within Puerto Rico, not only in terms of their educational experiences, but also in terms of their demographic profiles, because this would allow me to have a varied sample of participants with possible different experiences. I also included one participant whose nationality was not Puerto Rican, because this participant's data can be compared to the Puerto Ricans' in order to examine the possible differences in their perception and motivations based on the political and cultural difference of both nationalities.

Because I was looking for specific characteristics in each participant, I employed purposive sampling in my research project. Purposive sampling as explained by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), is "often a feature of qualitative research, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the basis of their judgment of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought" (p.114-115). My sample consisted of four first-year college students enrolled in two different levels of English courses, basic and intermediate, at UPRM. I was originally seeking two Puerto Rican students with different educational backgrounds in Puerto Rico; one who had studied in a private educational setting and another student who was educated in a public school environment. However, after I found and selected these two participants, they told me that they had been in both settings and had spent similar amounts of time in the public private school environments. In the end having these participants that came from both educational systems was quite beneficial for this study, since they were able to provide their perceptions about the two different settings and the teaching of English in each. These students, Viviana and Sandiel, were selected from a pre-basic English course. My third

participant, Héctor, is also Puerto Rican but he migrated to the United States. He lived and studied in the United States for three years and then came back to Puerto Rico. Héctor was placed at the intermediate level English courses. The fourth participant is Roger, a Venezuelan student who moved to Puerto Rico one year before he started college. The English courses that he is currently taking are part of the basic level track.

The reason for choosing this purposive sample was to have four participants that would have had different language learning experiences. The University of Puerto Rico has a variety of students with different academic and cultural profiles. Although the majority of them come from Puerto Rican private and public schools, there are also students that come to study from different countries and whose experience with English are different to those of students who have always studied in Puerto Rico. Yet, the requirements are the same for all students regardless of any of these differences. This sample of students attempts to represent the possible profiles of other students taking English courses at UPRM. By comparing across these four cases I seek to obtain a more informed understanding of the salient factors that influenced the language learning process of these students that are now at UPRM, taking into consideration differences and similarities in sociocultural and learning environments, among other factors.

#### *Data Collection Methods*

Because my methodology required substantial data gathering that would allow me to understand the experiences of these students, my period of data collection was one month and a half. I conducted my research interviews during those six weeks in the Fall of 2008. I met with each participant individually on a weekly basis for about a time span of one hour. I used four different individual interview protocols and one focus group protocol. My methods for gathering data were divided in four stages of interviews which were first unstructured and then semi-

structured, followed by focus group interviews and finally individual discussion of my findings with each participant. These interviews were voice recorded for the purpose of preserving the data and ensuring the validity of the students' direct voices. Field notes were also taken during each interview and afterwards I also wrote memos about my observations of the participants and the experiences and anecdotes that they had shared with me on that day.

*Unstructured interviews.* Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) have stated that the unstructured interview normally follows an informal protocol where the interviewer initiates a conversation with a participant of the study about a topic of interest that is relevant to the study that is taking place. I used the unstructured interviews as the first stage of my data collection. I used this protocol during the first interview with my participants as a means to get acquainted with each participant and to achieve a level of comfort between them and me. This protocol had questions related to the participants' fields of study, interests and perceptions about English and self competence<sup>2</sup>. According to Fontana and Frey (2005) "unstructured interviewing can provide greater breadth than do the other types [of interviews] given its qualitative nature" (p. 705). The unstructured interview was essential in setting a tone for the researcher-participant relationship that was going to be taking place during the study.

*Semi-structured interviews.* I also prepared semi-structured interviews which were conducted after the unstructured interviews had provided the participants with a clear idea of the topics that I wanted to further elaborate on. With the information that I gathered from the unstructured interviews, I obtained an overview of my participants' profiles. This helped me design the questions that I wanted to use during the following interviews. I opted for semi-structured as the second stage of the data collection because the participants of my study were

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<sup>2</sup> Please refer to appendix A.

reconstructing their life experiences with the English language and if any significant memories or comments were added by the participants, the semi-structured interview protocols provided them the space to further elaborate on these. I prepared a protocol with topics that I was interested in regarding the participants' experiences and their possible relationship with English language acquisition. These protocols were divided into school levels because I felt that it would be easier for the participants to remember their experiences if they focused only on one school level during each interview. Therefore, I designed three different semi-structured interview protocols, each focusing only on one of the school levels of the students, elementary, intermediate, and high school<sup>3</sup>. I was, however, quite flexible if the protocols were altered during the interview, due to other significant information provided by the participant.

*Focus group interviews.* The focus group interview took place after the individual interviews were over. The purpose for the focus group was to corroborate and further investigate on specific data pieces that still needed to be researched deeper after the individual interviews were over<sup>4</sup>. Aside from this, having all the participants together allowed for a group discussion of the issues that they had been sharing in the prior interviews. In other words, it was a way to know if their ideals were similar or not. As stated by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) “focus groups facilitate the exploration of collective memories and shared stock of knowledge that might seem trivial and unimportant to individuals but that come to the fore as crucial when like-minded groups begin to revel in the everyday” (p. 903). The focus group was a helpful tool for the discussion of the materials, and teaching methods that were used to teach the participants as well as to compare across other aspects of the different students’ backgrounds. As Cohen,

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to appendix B.

<sup>4</sup> Please refer to appendix C.

Manion and Morrison (2007) explain, “the participants interact with each other rather than with the interviewer, such that the views of the participants can emerge” (376). My data was enriched by discussions about their teachers’ approaches to the English language and how they, as students, perceived these and other factors related to their family members and culture, among others.

The last stage allowed the participants to learn about my preliminary findings and to provide feedback about these. This was an essential step in order to ensure that the students played an active role in my study and that their voices were really being taken into account. The students actively participated in my analysis of their life experiences and how these contributed to their language learning process.

*Research site and time period.* I met with my participants at the premises of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. The meetings took place in comfortable rooms where only the participant and I were present. The individual interviews took place on a weekly basis. Although my data collection period was six weeks, I designated three months of my research for this process because I was aware of the possible issues or restrictions that could affect my research. I knew that because I was using life histories as my research methodology, the interviewing period could be long since I would be seeking for all prior experiences at different stages of the participant’s life that could explain their current perceptions and motivations towards English. In order to provide the thick description that is required when life stories are being re-constructed, I wanted to ensure that I planned for sufficient time within my period of data collection to obtain all the information that I needed from each participant.

*Methods of validation.* I chose to incorporate several data gathering methods in my research, in order to increase its validity. While the individual interviews provided information about each participant and their unique experiences, the focus group interviews clarified several aspects of these interviews. These also served as a means to find similarities and differences among the experiences of each participant. The use of both interviews also helped to corroborate ideas and beliefs about the perceptions that the participants have as learners of English in Puerto Rico. To further contribute to the validity of my study, I also discussed my data analysis with each participant to corroborate that my interpretation of their lives was congruent with their own perception of these and if these were not, then this would also be acknowledged. Triangulation as defined by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) is “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behavior” (p. 141). I thus implemented triangulation by using individual and group interviews as my main data gathering methods, as well as discussing my analysis of data that was provided by each of them.

#### *Researcher’s Reflexivity*

As a researcher in this investigation there were aspects of my own life that made me identify with the participants of the study and that influenced my role in this investigation. I am both an ESL student and a return migrant. Aside from this I am also an English teacher and have taught students like my participants at high school and college levels.

As an ESL student, both in Puerto Rico and in the United States, I am acquainted with the teaching and learning of English in public schools of these two settings. Every time Héctor, Roger, Sandiel, and Viviana narrated experiences related to their teachers, their school and their community, I understood them and could locate myself in their place because I had also experienced similar instances. Furthermore, whenever Héctor shared an anecdote or an event

about his life as a migrant in a school in California, I also felt as if he was narrating my own life story. Every experience he told me made me become that child that I once was, feeling as isolated and helpless as Héctor once was.

Regardless of my efforts to be the neutral researcher that I was expected to be as a novice investigator, I was inevitable for me to continuously react sympathetically whenever these participants narrated a new story. Many were the occasions in which I ignored my protocol for awhile because I grew interested in much more than what the questions printed on my paper sought to investigate. I relived my life through the testimonies of these participants. As a result, the portrayal of these participants, the findings of this study and my analysis of the data collected, are closely tied to my own experiences as an ESL student and a return migrant. I am inevitably one of the participants some years ago; with their same concerns, needs, their perceptions of English and motivations to learn this language.

## Chapter IV: Participants' Life Stories

The backgrounds and ideals of the students that participated in my investigation are fundamentally what served as my main instrument to understand their specific environments and how these influenced their acquisition of English. Because of this I introduce the four students who have given life to this research project.

### *Héctor*

Héctor has a copper toned skin that is well complemented by his dark round eyes and his thick dark hair. At times looking at him is almost like going back in time and looking at one of the thousands of Taino Indians that once populated Puerto Rico. Although at first glance Héctor appears to be a shy and quiet guy, he is actually quite talkative. Many were the stories that he shared with me during every meeting, and all of them contributed to my understanding of who he is and what he has been through. Aside from being a committed student, Héctor is also a talented athlete who plays several sports. However, the one sport that he has focused on the most is baseball. This is so even to the point that when he chose to move school that was designed for baseball players. Aside from this interesting school, Héctor has also experienced learning in other educational settings that have deeply influenced his life.

Héctor is a mechanical engineering major at UPRM. His father is an engineer who graduated from the same institution. He is enrolled in the intermediate level English track which, according to the UPRM undergraduate catalogue (2008), is the level for students who have scored above 570 point in the English section of the College Board exams. This would be the expected level of a student like Héctor because of the language skills that he has acquired throughout his life.

This young man went to public schools until he was in ninth grade. However, when he was in fifth grade his father was offered a job position in California and the family moved to that state. This was when he stopped being just another kid in a Puerto Rican public school and become an immigrant student in a Californian school. Once there, he realized that he did not know as much English as was required of him and this affected his academic life greatly. His grades started to become drastically lower and with this his life was also affected. Héctor had to learn English if he wanted to continue being the student and the child that he had always been.

Soon after starting in his new school, he realized that he was the only Puerto Rican student there and that although there were other Latino students, no one spoke Spanish to him. Even as an athlete he had to develop strategies that would allow him to understand and follow the dynamics of his team members without having to rely on English. He learned how to negotiate this language until he was able to use it. In the meantime, there was a teacher who played a crucial role in Héctor's life.

Because of his language situation Héctor was unable to maintain the same academic standards that he had already set up for himself when he lived Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, when Héctor moved to California the act known as Proposition 227 had already been implemented among the schools of that state. This act eradicated bilingualism from Californian schools and students and teachers were required to use only English as the medium of instruction and communication. For Héctor this meant that no one was allowed to use Spanish around him and as a consequence he would not have any support at school during the time that it would take him to get used to English and his new life. However, there was someone who dared to help him during such a difficult situation.

When he met Mrs. A, his life started to get back on track. She was his regular English language arts teacher who, fortunately for Héctor, was a Spanish speaker. She used to teach him English as a subject but after she was done explaining to the entire class, she would go to Héctor and explain everything to him in Spanish, to make sure that he understood the class. She also did this for other subjects such as math. During Héctor's English Language Development Class (ELD), Mrs. A would also help him with exams and assignments for his other classes. Mrs. A made a difference in his outcomes as a student during this difficult situation. This teacher became a language broker for Héctor, helping him understand his assignments and alleviating his frustrations as an ESL student. She also formulated for Héctor an image of what a good teacher is and she still is one of the teachers that he uses as a frame of reference when evaluating his other teachers.

After some months in California, Héctor started to feel more comfortable while using English and he met new students who were also immigrants from other countries and did not speak English. These friends of his helped him understand that there were many other students in his position and this contributed greatly to his continual development as a student and an ESL learner. Three years later, Héctor's father was offered a new position in Puerto Rico and so the family moved back. Having been in so many different settings, Héctor became quite critical about his teacher and his learning environments. He constantly shows what he learned regarding the materials and techniques with which he believes ESL students, and specifically Puerto Rican students, can learn better. Not only did this happen inside a formal school environment, but also in other settings. His parents, teachers, and his social environment, were all factors that influenced Héctor's current perceptions and motivations to learn English. These factors also had an impact in Héctor's identity through certain stages of his language acquisition process.

### *Roger*

As soon as he walks into a room, everyone knows that Roger has arrived. Filled with charisma and humor, his personality distinguishes him from any other average guy. His interviews are embedded with the laughter and sarcasm that identify this Venezuelan student. Roger always finds a funny and interesting way of expressing himself. It is precisely through this sarcasm and his jokes that he reveals many of his experiences as a student of several schools in Venezuela. He also shares his perceptions about the differences between the educational system in his country and in Puerto Rico.

Roger's somewhat long and wavy light brown hair portrays him as the casual and sociable guy he is. His charming and straightforward personality can be fascinating to anyone, as would be his innate ability for storytelling. His usual dress style is composed of t- shirts, shorts and tennis shoes, which go along very well with one of his favorite hobbies, playing tennis. He is majoring in computer engineering because both of his parents have careers that are related to computers and as a consequence he also became interested in this field. He entered UPRM at the Basic English course sequence. The undergraduate catalogue at UPRM (2008) establishes that these courses are designed for students who score below 570 and who, according to the College Board Exam, portray a low proficiency level in English. When Roger was close to graduating from high school in Venezuela, his father asked to be transferred to a new job site, mainly because of the current political situation that Venezuela faces<sup>5</sup>. When he was offered a position in Puerto Rico, the family decided to move because Roger's father had already worked in Puerto Rico some years ago and was already familiar and comfortable with the place and its culture.

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<sup>5</sup> Currently Venezuela is being governed by President Hugo Chávez. His presidency has caused controversy among Venezuelans. While some support his actions and believe in the change that his government will bring, others think that Chávez is too harsh and that his decisions are affecting the country rather than helping it.

Roger always studied in private schools in Venezuela, although, as he explained, these schools varied greatly in quality. His parents always encouraged him to learn English and his father, specifically, always reminded him that knowing this language could help him in several ways, including obtaining a good job. That is mainly why his parents enrolled him in a private English learning program in Venezuela. This is where he acquired most of the knowledge that he has of this language. Little did he know that soon he would be using English more often than he ever thought he would.

In Venezuela, English is taught as a subject but outside of the classroom there is little usage of this language. The official language in Venezuela is Spanish, although there are also several indigenous dialects that are spoken in different regions of the country and that are accepted as official languages under the Venezuelan constitution. However, Spanish is the language used by the majority of Venezuelans for their every day life. At first glance the use of Spanish in both Puerto Rico and Venezuela does not sound too different; they both have Spanish as one of their official languages and English is also taught in schools. However, the dynamics of college level institutions in the two countries are different.

Puerto Rico is officially bilingual and as a result, in its universities many faculty members speak and teach in English. Even in the cases in which professors use Spanish as the medium of instruction, it is common to see that the materials that are selected for the courses, such as textbooks, are in English. As Roger grew up, he always thought that he would be going to a university in Venezuela, where the classes and materials are in Spanish. As a consequence of studying in a Puerto Rican university, he now has to use English on a daily basis in his academic life; something that he never expected to have to do.

When Roger's family moved to Puerto Rico, he only had one more year left to finish high school. In his country, the school system is designed so that students go through thirteen grades instead of the twelve that students in the United States and Puerto Rico go through. This became a problem for Roger because no private schools wanted to accept him into their programs due to the fact that they needed to design a special curriculum for him, in which he took only the courses that he was missing based on the discrepancy in years and material. Among these courses were history of Puerto Rico and the United States and the English, Mathematics and Spanish courses that were pertinent to the twelfth grade in Puerto Rico. His only option was to join a remedial program where students who could not go to school regularly finished their high school. This program was designed for students who were, for instance, athletes or artists and whose schedules could not be accommodated in order to allow them to attend a regular school. On a weekly basis, students would pick up their work for each subject and work on it on their own. Although the program was not academically challenging to Roger, he was able to finish the high school requirements and after finishing this program he decided to apply to UPRM.

Aside from his classes, Roger has always used English in other social settings. He is an avid video gamer, which has led him to use this language as a tool for playing video games. Not only does he play individual games in English, but he also plays over the internet with other friends who live in the United States and who only speak English. Videogames have been one of the main reasons why Roger has learned to negotiate his English usage. Furthermore, his family tends to vacation in the United States and in such occasions, Roger has also experienced an authentic need for the use of English.

Contrary to the other three participants in this study, Roger learned English as a Foreign Language and in another country. Thus, his contribution to this study is remarkable in the sense

that he provides the perceptions and motivations of a student in a Puerto Rican college who was taught English in a context that is different to the environment in which the majority of the students enrolled at UPRM learned it.

*Sandiel*

Although he is already in college, Sandiel could very easily still pass for an intermediate school student. His soft tone of voice, his green eyes and blonde hair give him a child like appearance. These, at the same time, convey an angelic complexion that could be described as the portrayal of pure innocence. Sandiel still carries an innocence that many other young men of his age have already lost. Although somewhat shy, he is also very careful about how he expresses himself and of his behavior when he is around others.

He is meticulous about his selection of words, always making sure that these successfully convey what he intends to express. As a consequence of this, he is constantly worried about how he sounds and what he says. He shows that he was well educated and that his parents have greatly contributed to his personality, his values and his education. Sandiel was raised in a town that is located in the southern region of Puerto Rico. His expressions and ideals portray that he grew up in a very traditional family as well as in a religious environment. These religious beliefs are a great part of Sandiel's life and also of the education that he has received.

Sandiel is a crop and soil science major and although he is mostly passionate about meteorology, he opted for this field because he chose it as his second option for college admittance and this was the program that he was accepted in. Upon finishing his undergraduate work in this field of study he plans to go to the United States in order to pursue a masters' degree in meteorology, in which he is able to combine both professions. When he entered UPRM he was placed at the pre-basic remedial English course. This is the course where based on this college's

catalogue (2008), students who have scored 469 or below on the College Board Exam are placed. It is a zero-credit intensive training in English. Sandiel is completely aware of the need that he has of learning English, if he wants to study in the United States, and he is truly interested in learning it.

Having studied in public and private schools in Puerto Rico, Sandiel remembers experiences, from both settings, regarding the teaching of English in Puerto Rico and his school environments. During his first and second grade, Sandiel went to a private school. However, when his parents realized that the workload was overwhelming for him, they decided to change him to a public school. He was there from third through seventh grade and then once again his parents transferred him to a private school. These changes of environment have influenced his current perceptions on education in Puerto Rico and on his English teachers.

In Sandiel's case, his language acquisition process was greatly influenced by his teachers. He shares anecdotes of the teachers he had and the materials that they used that contributed to his knowledge. On the other hand, he also remembers those teachers and situations that were not as pleasant. He believes that such factors have contributed to his current language proficiency. As Sandiel explains it, he knows that if the situations in his schools would have been different, he could have learned much more English than what he now knows. Many of these experiences are based on the fact that during one of his school levels, Sandiel went to a religious school where priority was given to teachers who were religious rather than those who could teach appropriately. As a consequence, he had teachers who were inexperienced and this affected his language learning.

There were, however, other factors that positively influenced his language acquisition. For instance, having family relatives that live in New Jersey, he travels regularly to this state.

This immersion experience offers him the opportunity to practice English for some time every year. This family that lives in New Jersey would also come to Puerto Rico on vacation and he has always had opportunities to speak English with his cousin. She was the one family member with whom Sandiel usually spoke English without any fear of being judged and in exchange, he would help her with her Spanish. This is mainly how Sandiel has used English among his family members.

Regardless of the fact that Sandiel has had multiple experiences in which he has been able to communicate in English and to learn more of this language, he still perceives himself as a learner of English with low proficiency. The fact that as a college student he has been placed in a remedial English course reminds him of what he still has ahead of him in order to achieve his academic and professional goals. He feels that many of his English teachers did not meet his expectations and he only really learned this subject from grades fourth through six. The main reason behind this was his teacher in those grades. Sandiel shared with me pleasant memories and experiences that he recalled about this teacher. However, he also remembered other not so grateful experiences with other educators throughout his life.

### *Viviana*

It could be said that Viviana is not an average girl. She has a dark and long straight hair that frames and accentuates her cat shaped eyes and her plump cheeks. Although her trendy style makes her look like many other average girls at UPRM, Viviana is more than meets the eye. She is a smart young woman who is aware and conscious of the world around her. Viviana is sure of her convictions and strongly defends her ideals, especially when the topic is English. Although during her childhood and adolescence she never really cared for learning English, her scenario has now changed. As soon as Viviana became a college student, she realized the time that she

had lost in school and regrets not having utilized her time and available resources more appropriately.

Viviana is majoring in animal science and as in Sandiel's case she also entered UPRM at the pre-basic English course. Although she is much inclined toward journalism and has several other culture-related interests, she decided to study animal science. One of the reasons behind this decision is that all her life she has lived in the same town where UPRM is located and it made sense for her to go there. When the time came to choose a major, she selected Animal Science because other family members have professions that are related to this field. Her grandfather worked in the pork industry and her aunt is a college professor in that field.

Viviana's parents always encouraged her to learn English and even enrolled her in a private tutoring session. Her mother, especially, constantly reminder her of the necessity of learning English and convinced her of participating in school activities, such as the English week. Her parents enrolled her in private tutoring so that she could learn English, yet although she learned some skills even in that extracurricular program she felt that she was not accomplishing much. As she has explained, she always felt invaded by this language because she was forced to learn it without really understanding the reasons why she had to do so. Because of such experiences, Viviana demonstrates strong opinions about the teaching of English in Puerto Rico, since she feels that it is not being taught or learned effectively. Viviana strongly believes that if English was taught as a foreign language, students would feel more comfortable and would learn it better.

She went to a public elementary school and then was transferred to a private intermediate school. She was changed again to a public institution during her high school years. After all these years in public and private learning environments, now that she is a college student, she has

realized all the time that she lost while she was in school and that she could have learned more English. In part she blames her former teachers for not providing her with the tools and skills that she needed in English. As Viviana continued to go through each grade, her second language acquisition did not successfully increase because she never found a real purpose to learn English and according to her, not many teachers made the class significant to her.

Coming from a rural area in western Puerto Rico, Viviana's usage of English has always been minimal. For most of her school grades she was not too interested in her English class and at home there were few instances in which she faced a need to utilize English. Furthermore, although several of her relatives, including her parents, have different levels of proficiency in English, at home there were very little to no instances in which she used this language. Aside from some leisure activities, such as reading articles in a teenagers' magazine or a watching a television show, she did not make much use of this language. Viviana grew up being very conscious of her competence in English and still today she perceives herself as a learner with an extremely low proficiency. Although she understands the language and can use it in instances where she is required to, she still sees herself as a non-speaker of English. This has always been a great frustration for her and even more now that she is in college and she has become aware of her need to use English in many more settings than she had to in prior stages of her life.

All four participants have had a variety of life experiences in which English learning and usage has been involved. Their family members and different educational and social settings have been a great influence in this process. The different perceptions and motivations regarding English language learning that they have acquired in different stages of their lives, portray a refreshing frame of reference for the field of language learners' motivations.

## Chapter V: Participants' Motivations and Self-perceptions

For the purposes of this study, I divided the area of motivations into two different orientations, following Masgoret and Gardner's theory of motivations to learn a second language (2003). As I previously explained in chapter II, these orientations are instrumental and integrative. In that chapter I also clarified that having a motivational orientation does not necessarily mean that there is an existent motivation to learn a language. The orientation indicates that when the learner decides that he or she wants to learn a language there will be a stronger inclination to learn it for those purposes. Whereas the instrumental orientation refers to those students whose motivation for learning a second language is for academic or job related reasons, the student that has an integrative motivation seeks to learn that language because there is an authentic interest in getting acquainted and related with the group or culture that speaks the language. Previous research from UPRM (López Hernández, 2007; Vicente, 2000) has reported the existence of both motivations among college level students in Puerto Rico, although the instrumental motivation seems to have a stronger presence among the population of students in this university.

Although instrumentality and integrativeness are the two orientations that I have selected for the analysis of motivations in this study, other motivations were also identified for my participants. Leisure, for instance, was one of the motivations that all participants possessed. Also, it was evident from the data that the participants' motivations were not static; these changed as the participants experienced different settings and language learning situation. It is then through a thorough understanding of how the participants experienced these different situations and settings that this mix of motivational orientations can be better understood. These influences from various settings are portrayed in their narratives as they reveal the values that

they attach to learning English and the origins for these. At the same time, as Garner stated (1968) the influence of their family members, especially their parents, played an essential role in their motivational orientations. These students' individual cases were each influenced by external factors that resulted in their current motivational orientations to learn English.

The experiences, social and academic settings of each participant also influenced their perceptions of their own competence and their identities as learners of English. In other words these influenced how they saw themselves as users and learners of English and how they felt about those perceptions. Hence, an understanding of participants' self-perceptions is essential to the analysis of their motivations for language learning. Including them here enriches the data analysis because these aspects of their language acquisition process can contribute greatly to further understanding their motivations and perceptions. Thus, these are concurringly weaved in this chapter in order to better portray the learners' experiences.

### *Héctor*

Héctor was the participant whose motivations for learning English varied the most, as his learning and social environments changed. Although he was taught that learning English was essential for one primordial reason(to get a good job), he discovered that there were other instances in which knowing English was beneficial and even necessary. His family members were a great influence in the motivations that he had to learn English, yet there were also other influences that contributed to the changes in Héctor's ideas regarding the importance of English in his life.

*Learned orientation.* Before moving to California, Héctor's motivation to learn English was mainly instrumental. This motivational orientation is something that he apparently first learned from some family members, especially his father. He always reminded Héctor of the importance of learning English in order to find a good job.

I have seen it in my family, dad, my uncles, my cousins, all of them are professionals and have told me that English has a great influence in their jobs because most of the interviews that [recruiting] companies do are in English and well, being bilingual has more...how do I put this, is better, it has more advantages.

Many of his family members use English in their jobs. Furthermore, they taught Héctor that English can make a significant difference in whether or not one is able to find employment. When Héctor explained how and why his father learned English, it became clear that it was mainly his father who transferred this instrumental motivation onto him by teaching him about the importance of English.

He learned it here in Mayagüez. My dad graduated from here and learned it here.... He told me that he had to learn English in his classes. He said that he would put a lot of attention because he knew that for the job fairs, the interviews and to get a job, he needed English.

This excerpt demonstrates that Héctor is following in his father's steps. Like his dad, he is studying engineering in the same academic institution that his father graduated from.

His father not only transferred his beliefs regarding the purposes and advantages of learning English but he also ensured that Héctor learned English well. He even made a life-changing decision to provide his children with an authentic full immersion environment.

Dad would always put pressure on me in all my English classes. He would always say ‘try to do well, always do your best, you will see that this will help you in the future. Learn now that you are still young because it will be easier than later when you grow up’. That was one of the reasons why he moved to the United States. He wanted us (Héctor and his sisters) to learn English and he knew that for my future, in order to have a profession it is important.

Héctor’s father had to learn English on his own and as he explained to his son, he was able to learn it during his college years. Drawing from his own experiences, he decided that his children had to learn English much earlier than he did and that they also had to learn it as well as possible.

When Héctor lived in Puerto Rico he was more oriented toward the instrumental motivations for learning English that his family had taught him. Yet he also had, although to a lesser degree, other reasons for wanting to learn English. As he shared with me he has “always liked the English language. It’s like practically wherever you go you need it. If you are going out, traveling, well you need it.” With this thought Héctor expressed additional interests for learning English besides the instrumental and integrative orientations. In this case, aside for what he was taught Héctor also expressed that he simply liked the language and wanted to learn it for occasions in which he traveled or was required to use English in any way. Aside from these additional reasons for learning English, when Héctor moved to California his motivational orientations shifted and integrativeness became his principal motivation to learn English.

Before he moved to California, Héctor always saw himself as a good student and felt that his knowledge of English was superior to many of his classmates. He classified himself as an A student in his English classes.

I can say that when I was in elementary school I was a little bit above the average student in terms of English.... Compared to the other students I was somewhat superior to them because I knew more English. I could understand the teacher better than other students and when we had to analyze sentences and finding its meaning, I had a better idea of how to do it than the other students.

Héctor felt confident with his proficiency in English because he knew that he was above his classmates. He realized that he could perform the tasks that his teacher would ask him to do more efficiently than other students.

Although while in Puerto Rico Héctor was a confident boy, once he moved to California his self-perceptions regarding English use changed drastically. He soon realized that he was in a full immersion environment, his language proficiency as an ESL leaner was not as good as he thought it was.

I felt isolated; I would hear everyone speaking English and I could not understand what they were saying. I was the only one that spoke Spanish and I felt different....Since I was in elementary school, up until I moved to the United States, I always got As, I never got a B, always As. Seeing that change of getting Fs and Ds and Fs and Ds, one after the other, I got frustrated. I would cry, ‘I want to go [to Puerto Rico] because this is going to ruin the good grades that I have always had.

The change of learning environments for Héctor was a drastic one. From being what he considered an excellent student who was above others, Héctor felt that he had become incompetent. He now felt that his proficiency in English was far from perfect and this was affecting him academically and emotionally.

*Changes in settings and motivation.* As soon as Héctor arrived in California he realized that he was not prepared for the type of English use that would be required of him. During the first month of school Héctor struggled to communicate in his classes. This was a difficult and uncomfortable situation for him, yet it also led him to his new motivations for learning English.

When I moved to the United States I used to cry a lot because I felt out of place because I did not know English. I was in a place that was not like a school here in Puerto Rico in which you feel more like you belong because you are not the only one [that is not bilingual]. When I moved to the United States, everyone knew English and I was the only one in the classroom [that did not] and so I felt a bit out of place.

This drastic change was abrupt for Héctor and it influenced how he felt as a student and a learner of English. From considering himself to be an outstanding student, he felt incapable because he could not use English like the other students in his school.

There is a strong relationship between the change of academic and social settings during this stage of Héctor's life and his change in motivation to learn English. These new settings also influenced his identity and self-perceptions as a learner of English. Before that, he thought of himself as a good student who was above many of his classmates. However once he moved to a country and a school where English was required then he began to feel differently about himself.

An experience that I did not like was that on my first day of class [in California], I was asked to get up in front of the class and introduce myself in my English class. I got up very frightened and what I said was my name and where I came from. And I was being asked questions but since I did not know any English at all I just did not answer. I more or less listened to what other students were saying and I got up and said my name and

where I came from and that was it. They asked me other questions but I just kept saying 'I don't know' and that was all I said.

This experience made Héctor feel that he was indeed out of place and that the outstanding student that he was in Puerto Rico was at risk. Unable to communicate among his classmates and his teacher, Héctor was bombarded with questions that he could not understand and decided to use 'I don't know' as his shield until his time to present himself passed. He then knew that if he wanted to feel comfortable again in his learning environment, his proficiency in this language needed to improve.

Because Héctor's first experience among students who were speakers of English was so distressing it led him to feel that he knew no English at all. He felt this way until his English Language and Development course (ELD) course began. When Héctor arrived at this class he realized that there were other students in the same position that he was.

Well, when I got there I felt more comfortable because I knew that I was not the only one and compared to the other students there I was somewhat superior to them in terms of English because I knew very little but compared to them I knew more.

Having learned that there were other students who also needed to learn English his confidence started to improve. He even felt superior to them because even though they all needed to improve in their English, he was ahead of them. At least in that ELD classroom he was once again dominant, as he used to be in Puerto Rico, and that helped him realize that he would be able to go through this process and to improve his English.

Soon after being in that ELD course Héctor began to feel more confident and to learn more English. This, along with other factors, led him to change the amount of English that he used and also how he felt as a speaker of this language.

I then always had that fever of speaking English with my sisters, with my younger sister always. We would always communicate in English. Not as much with my oldest sister, with her it was more like half English and half Spanish. With my dad and mom it was also like that. My younger sister was small then and she knew more English than Spanish.

As he acquired more English Héctor continued to feel more comfortable and since this motivation to learn more English then was to communicate better he used his family members and his home as a safe environment to practice for other settings such as school or his neighborhood. He was then becoming a bilingual speaker as were his sisters.

*Experiencing a new motivation.* Héctor had already learned that if he wanted to be part of his new neighborhood and school environment English was the only language that he could use for communication and thus, Héctor's new motivation was integrative. However, the group of people that he wanted to communicate with were non native speakers of English. These were second language learners like he was and he soon realized that there were many other students in the same situation that he was. This also contributed to his second language acquisition because it made him feel more comfortable with his proficiency and more motivated to continue learning.

I met a German boy who arrived to the United States around the same time that I did and his English was similar to mine and that is how we used to communicate with each other. I could understand everything he would tell me and he could also understand everything I would tell him, because we spoke in the same way so he always knew what I meant. I used to talk with him over the phone a lot, through Messenger and the internet, we used it in English. I still have some communication with him, not too often but we still do. There

was another [student] from Sweden who was also like us, he knew very little English and since we all spoke the same gibberish, we understood each other.

Héctor's new social environment was an essential factor in his acquisition of English. He was no longer surrounded by students who spoke Spanish and thus he needed to speak English if he wanted to make friends again. He did make new friends and through them he also learned that in order to be understood he did not have to speak English perfectly.

From being an isolated kid who did not dare use English around his peers, Héctor was able to once again become the child that he had always been. His new friends and the English that he was learning made a difference in his life, allowing him to continue the normal life of a sixth grader.

I felt apart, I would hear everyone speaking English and I could not understand what they were saying and I was the only one who spoke Spanish and I felt different. I would hang out with my sister, I was in the sixth grade and she was in the eighth. The two of us would always sit together and apart from everyone else in the lunchroom, in our free time and all the time. But when I met all these other students I realized that we were all the same and that is where I started to loosen up. Then came a time in which I socialized more even though I still did not understand it that much but I let go of my fear of speaking English. But at the beginning I did feel apart. I was always in the corner alone and quiet, looking around. I used to cry, I practically cried the first entire month. I would always get back home saying 'I don't want to, I want to go back to Puerto Rico'. But then I woke up with my friends, I spent the first six months of my first year there with them.... The three of us used to go everywhere together, to the movies, for ice cream, to play, everything, the three of us.

Despite the fact that at the beginning Héctor felt that he was too different and that he would never be able to speak English, when he learned that there were other immigrants and learners of English, he started to use this language more among his new friends and his peers. Not only was he spending time with his new friends from Germany and Sweden, but he was also surrounded by neighbors and classmates who came from other countries. As time went by his identity as a learner of this language evolved until it became what it currently is.

Héctor needed to use this language for almost every aspect of his life. English then became the language that he used on a daily basis. He was able to fulfill his learning motivation in California, integrativeness, but there were also additional motivations co-occurring.

[In] California I used English at school, to shop, to communicate with friends, I used it to watch TV, everything I would watch on the TV over there was in English. I also listened to music in English and used to play baseball in English as well. I was in two different teams, six months in soccer and six months in baseball throughout the entire year. No one else spoke Spanish in the teams [and] I was the only Puerto Rican in both teams. At school there were many Mexicans and two Colombians and if I am not mistaken there was also a student from Panama, but very seldom would they speak Spanish to me.

Practically all of Héctor's hobbies and everyday life needs required that he spoke English and if he wanted to be part of his school community, his neighborhood and sports teams, he needed to use English so that he could communicate. His experiences as an ESL learner in California led to the development of several motivations.

Not only was he worried about his identity as the good student that he had always been but there was also a great concern regarding his social life. According to Masgoret and Gardner's theory (2003) and research, integrativeness plays a stronger role in the acquisition of a second

language. Following this theory it could be argued that when Héctor became interested in communicating among his peers his integrative motivation was internally prioritized and as a result he learned English faster and with more interest because there was an immediate need and an authentic motivation for English in his life. In his case, his motivations went beyond instrumental and integrative since he was also learning English for leisure and social activities. These different motivations were contributing to Héctor's language acquisition simultaneously.

*Back to Puerto Rico.* After three years of these life changing experiences, Héctor's family moved back to Puerto Rico. He was now a different student, much more confident and with a higher proficiency in English than when he left Puerto Rico. Indeed he would be going through a new series of experiences that would continue to shape the student that he had become as well as his identity as a learner of English.

In the eighth grade I felt superior to the other students and I felt that I was behind because in the United States I learned English and it was good English that I learned over there. I am still not fully [bilingual], I can write it and I can establish a conversation, sometimes to begin a conversation, sometimes to begin communicating it is like 'do I do it or not' but once I do it, it comes out ok. But when I got here to Puerto Rico it was like ok, how is this going to help me.

After all of his struggle to learn English and to feel that he belonged, Héctor had to return to Puerto Rico. For him the program at this new school was not challenging and he was afraid that he would forget all the English that he had learned in California because he was not practicing it. Aside from that he also thought that the level of teaching in general was below what he needed.

When Héctor came back to Puerto Rico, not only did he felt superior to many of his classmates, he was also more receptive and critical about the aspects of his learning environment

that were related to English. His prior experiences had shaped his new ideas about the teaching and learning of English and also about other speakers of English. Something else also changed about him. He identified himself as a bilingual student and was also able to evaluate the actions of other students who were at the same level of proficiency that he was.

I remember that there were three [students], two boys and a girl, they always spoke English in all the classes, everything, everything and they would even forget how to speak Spanish.... That was in the eighth grade. My friends would always say ‘oh, these *gringos*, don’t hang out with them man, no one likes them’ and this was because they were always trying to let people know that they knew more, more English. Sometimes they would make fun of [other people’s] mistakes because they would correct not with the intention to help but rather as a way of laughing at them. That is why I never socialized with them, they were always apart. I never hung out with them, not even a single day.

Even though Héctor had a language competence profile that was similar to the students that are described in the above excerpt, he did not feel like one of them. Because of his friends in California and his experiences with English, he strongly believed that he did not want to be part of that group. These students were using their skills in English to show superiority and to humiliate their classmates; Héctor did not see this as a correct action. Although he did feel superior, he never felt a need to showcase his skills in this language. He knew that doing so could be problematic and was also clear on the fact that such actions would be wrong.

Instead of doing this, Héctor adopted a much different attitude towards his knowledge. Because of his experiences in California, he had become confident enough in the English that he had learned and had no need to show others about it. For this stage of his life Héctor did not

mention anything related to learning motivations. It could be inferred that once again the change of settings influenced his identity, self- perceptions and motivations. What he was mostly concerned with at this point was his identity as a bilingual student in an educational setting where a rather small amount of students had the same level of proficiency that he had. As a consequence, his identity became more important than his motivations. An example of this is the following event, in which Héctor makes a decision based on the need of his classmates, regardless of what the consequences might be for him as an individual.

I always knew that I knew more than they [his classmates] did, in terms of English and other subjects because in the States I learned a lot. But I never liked bragging about that or saying I know more than you do. Sometimes there would be occasions in the eighth grade in which I did not want the other kids to feel bad and sometimes I would lower my English level to their level. I remember that we had a group assignment in which we had to speak in front of the class. The thing is that in my group there were three kids who basically knew no English and so they would speak and only a little bit of what they were saying could be understood, I had an idea of what they were saying but when it was my turn to speak I did not want to speak with the English that I know because I did not want to overshadow them. I did not want my English to affect their grade because they were my friends and so I lowered my English and made mistakes on purpose. I pronounced some words incorrectly so that they would not be affected by this.... Our teacher noticed but she did not say anything.

Héctor felt that with his knowledge of English, he had also acquired a responsibility that he was willing to accept. He knew that his English teacher was aware of his language competence and luckily for him, his decision did not affect his grade. His teacher seemed to

understand the reasons behind his actions. With this event, he also showed his sympathy toward students that have a language problem and who are in the same position in which he was, prior to being as proficient in English as he currently is. He, better than anyone, knew about the fear that accompanied having to speak English and that was why he decided to be sympathetic with his group members. Indeed, he could have used this opportunity to show his abilities in the language (as his *gringo classmates* would have done), but instead he decided that giving his group mates support was more important and that he had nothing to prove by speaking as well as he knew that he could.

*Daring to speak English anywhere.* The Héctor that moved back to Puerto Rico was very different from the one who had left three years before. He had learned that acquiring a second language is a process and that making mistakes is an essential part of it. He felt much more confident with who he had become as a learner of English and understood that learning a second language is a continuing process.

I have the courage to speak English anywhere. I learned how to be confident in myself, even if I make mistakes because I got used to it in the United States. Over there well, I was always quiet in a corner and I did not dare to speak because I was afraid of making mistakes or of people laughing at me. But I realized that this is part of life and afterwards when I overcame that I thought ‘how silly of me, no one is going to eat me alive, no one is going to do anything to me’. No one ever laughed at me, I made mistakes but no one ever laughed and that is why I created that confidence in myself and what I do is that wherever I go I speak, if it is wrong it is wrong but people understand me.... I now dare to speak English anywhere. I learned how to feel confident of myself, even if I make mistakes, because I got used to it in the United States.

Héctor knew that he could not stay in that corner, crying for the rest of his life and as he said he developed the courage to speak, even if he thought he was wrong. Taking that step helped him realized that there was nothing wrong with making mistakes and in his case, Héctor was fortunate enough to have been around people who gave him support and he never felt that anyone made fun of him. He was able to break free from the fear that many other Puerto Rican students cannot escape, their fear of being unable to speak English perfectly not knowing that such a thing does not exist.

Héctor is currently aware of this process and recognizes that there are still areas in which he needs improvement. He has realized that language acquisition requires a constant development of the learner and that it never ends.

Critical writing has always affected me. I don't know, it's just that when I have to analyze a reading in English I read it, but when I analyze it, I do it in Spanish. When I analyze it in Spanish and then translate that back to English it does not really make sense and this is truly horrible. This is an area in which I need to improve a lot.

Although he perceives himself as quite proficient in English, he knows that he is still in the process of learning. He knows that this is where he needs to focus in order to continue improving his proficiency of English.

Now that he is a college student, Héctor feels that he is in an English course where other students are at the same level that he is. He feels that he is learning with other students with proficiency levels that are similar to his.

I feel comfortable because in the intermediate English course there are many students, well almost of all of them know English and the English they know is good. I can

compare myself to some of them who are above some other students but there are a couple of us who are at the same level.

He no longer feels that he is neither too behind nor too ahead than the rest of the class and as a result has finally reached a level where he does not feel superior or inferior. He senses that as many of his classmates his proficiency is good but there is also room for improvement and understands that there are specific areas that he still needs to work on.

For Héctor, the decisive factor for anything related to second language learning was the setting in which he was placed. His academic and social environment shaped his motivations to learn English and his self-perceptions and identity as a learner of this language. Moving to California led him to an integrative motivation while he still reflected and instrumental motivation in his student life. When the settings changed again to Puerto Rico, his identity was more important than any of his motivations to learn English. This was so until he was in high school and began to think about going to a college in the United States. His orientation, once again, change to instrumental because his purpose for continuing to improve in this language became academic. The aspects of his second language acquisition that he gave most importance to varied according to the settings and his needs in these settings.

### *Roger*

The ways in which Roger used English in Venezuela and the way in which he expressed his purposes for learning English are an indication that his motivational orientation was more inclined toward integrativeness than instrumentalism. Although he did take English classes in school and in an additional English learning program, in Venezuela he experienced no daily usage of this language and thus no pressure to really learn it. He also thought that there were a

variety of purposes or advantages that can be attributed to knowing English, rather than one sole purpose.

*Integrating with English online.* Despite the fact that Roger learned English because his father wanted him to, throughout his life he mainly used it for videogames, one of his greatest hobbies. He not only played videogames that were in English but he also played them online and simultaneously with other gamers that lived in the United States. Thus, the language of communication when they played online games was English.

I would say that videogames, more than anything, were my best English teachers... the most constant ones (laughs). Although many videogames come in Spanish, in many occasions my friends from the United States make me speak English. They are Vietnamese but they have lived all their lives there.

Based on these experiences it could be said that Roger's motivational orientation does not fit completely into Gardner's classifications (1968). He used English for his videogames tournaments and also in many other instances that were not only related to communicating but to other purposes as well.

In the case of Roger his uses of English entitled being able to use electronic media and technology and to communicate with English speakers, even if these were not necessarily native speakers of English but used this language as the medium for communication while they played video games.

(I use English) for television programs. At the movies, computer software and in Facebook which is in English. I also have several friends in the United States who only speak English so I have to speak English to them.... I used to play online games and obviously the best language for communication there is English, also when you travel. It

is not so much that you look for moments in which you can use it but rather that whenever you need it, you know it. You don't know when you are going to need it, it could be any moment. Before coming to Puerto Rico, I never imagined that during college I would be using texts in English, never, ever, ever in my life (laughs).

Roger grew up in a country in which he had no need to speak or use English, unless he chose to use it, and he prepared himself for a higher learning institution where Spanish was the only medium of instruction. He never felt pressured to learn English as much as many Puerto Rican students do.

*Influences from dad.* The only person who constantly reminded him of the instrumental motivations for learning English was his father. Through him Roger learned that English is a tool that can be used for instrumental purposes as well. Several of the positions that his father had held, were in great part granted to him because of his knowledge of English. As a result from his own experience it was important for him that his son learned English and that is why he enrolled Roger in an additional private English course. His father always stressed the importance of learning this language.

My father was once in a really good company which had a manager who had a little bit more experience than my father did but he did not speak English. And then there was also my father who did speak English and one of them was going to be sent to the States for a project that the company had over there. They sent my father because he knew English and he learned that English was something that could open doors for you and that is why he enrolled me in that other class so that I learned English.

Through his father's experience Roger was able to see that it was important to learn English because it would be a good skill to have when he started to look for a job in the future. However,

there were many uses that Roger gave to English that were not related to finding a good job. He was more interested in social and leisure instances in which he was required to use English, whether these were playing a video game or going on vacation. Even after moving to Puerto Rico and using English, in both academic and non academic settings, he still feels that there are many purposes for English other than to find a job.

*Childhood experiences with English.* As a child Roger's encounters with English mainly occurred when his family vacationed in the United States. It was in one of these trips that Roger recalled being unable to communicate with a speaker of English.

I remember that there was a time when I got lost as a kid, before I learned English. And they had to call someone who knew Spanish because it was in one of these mega stores. I was in the states on vacation, I was small and my parents wanted to see something and I did not (want to go with them) so they told me to stay in the toy section and they would come get me later. I was very happy looking at all those toys and hanging out on the hallways and then this lady starts talking to me in English and I was like 'Ahhh?' (laughs). And what happened was that children could not be left unattended in the toys section. I don't remember well because it was a long time ago but I think she was asking me about my parents and I was like 'what?' that was the only thing that I could say in English. So I said 'What? Yo hablo español<sup>6</sup>, Spanish'. I was like eight or nine.

From this experience Roger learned that knowing English was an advantage when you travel so that you can communicate. He told this story in a very humorous way and just remembered it as an anecdote from before he learned English. To him this was not a traumatizing experience. He

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<sup>6</sup> I speak Spanish.

was used to going to the United States and having to communicate with people that only spoke English.

Although he was not too bothered by this experience, when Roger began to learn English in a formal educational setting he did not feel as comfortable as he did outside of the classroom. When Roger was in elementary school he was enrolled in a new school where English was offered and he began to take English classes. As would have happened to any other novice learner, when he was asked to participate in class using this language, it was difficult for him.

When I first started to learn English the teacher was not so bad but the students had already taken an English class on their previous years and I had not. So when I got there it was like ‘ok they know the alphabet and I don’t’. The teacher continued with her class and I did not understand anything there. I was asked to read and I would read it as I thought it should be read, the way I saw it. But I had not idea whether I was reading it correctly or not.

This was Roger’s first experience with English. He felt lost because he had never taken an English class and he was also a year behind. All his other classmates had taken the class before and had learned some things. His teacher never took the time to go over this material with him in order to make sure that Roger was at the same level as the rest of the class.

*Emerging confidence in English.* As Roger grew up he was placed in an additional English course to compliment his English class at school. For him this was where he really learned English because the program allowed him to acquire this language steadily and successfully. After he began to take this course he also began to feel comfortable in his English courses at school and to even feel that he was ahead of his classmates.

The difference between this class and others is that after I went to that other course I dominated English well enough. So then it was not a subject in which I had to study, it was not a class in which I needed to make any effort and I was happy about that, it always made me happy, contrary to other courses.

After he took this class Roger stopped feeling incompetent in this language again. His comfort was at a level in which he felt that it was not necessary to study because he knew the material. Hence, he never felt dissatisfaction with his performance in English class. He felt that the English he had learned was sufficient for the circumstances in which he intended to employ this language.

He reflected on the difference between how he felt before and after he took the course. From feeling lost and insecure Roger became confident in his knowledge and his proficiency in English. As Roger explained, this additional course contributed greatly, if not completely, to this change in his self-perceptions and his identity as a language learner.

It was like in that course I dominated everything so easily and I remember that in the third grade they would ask me to read and I would think ‘nooooo’. It was as if someone had hit me with a whip and I would see all those letters and well ‘I think it is pronounced this way. I would try it and the teacher would tell me ‘good’ and I was like ‘Really?’ but by that time I was more confident. The other thing that surprised was that I never killed myself studying.

This was an experience from the transitional period that Roger went through as he began to learn English. His confidence started to rise because he was getting positive feedback from his teacher and also because he did not feel that he needed to study for his English class.

*New school, new insecurities.* This scenario changed somewhat when Roger was transferred to a new school that was much more demanding than any of the other schools that he had been in before. After many years of feeling confident, he did not feel as the best student in class anymore.

In this new school I had already learned English. It was not like in the previous schools in which I knew nothing, nothing, nothing. However, from being the student who knew the most I went to being perhaps one of the ones that knew the least. I felt insecure; the teachers would ask me a question and although I knew the answer I would stay quiet because I had to answer in English. Even if I did know the answer I had to say that in English. If they tell me in Spanish I can say it ‘he did this and that’ but no, I had to say it in English.

Although Roger felt very confident for many years, once he entered a new learning environment where he felt that all the other students were above him in terms of English proficiency, he felt insecure. From not worrying about studying in his English class because it was too easy, he began to worry about speaking in class because he was afraid of making mistakes. This change of environment resulted in a change in Roger’s identity as an English learner.

*Moving to Puerto Rico.* In Puerto Rico, Roger is taking English courses in which students are more or less at the same level that he is, he once again feels confident in his proficiency and his skills in this language. However, he has a new motivation to learn English. Now that he studies in a bilingual higher learning institution he needs English for his academic life. For Roger, the learning environment has also been an influential factor in his acquisition of English and his purposes for it. He feels competent enough in English and he knows that he can use it for different instances in which he is required to do so.

Roger is also aware that he needs to improve his spoken English. Yet, he does not feel that this is an issue that affects him greatly. When referring to his spoken English, Roger explains how he feels about it and how he thinks it could be improved. His humor is an indication of how he perceives the situation.

I think that it is about my pronunciation but I think that it is a matter of someone sending me to *North Caroline*, up there (laughs) where no one speaks Spanish, and leaving me there for a couple of years. I think that if they do that (laughs) my pronunciation will improve.

Roger feels comfortable with his knowledge of English and although he knows that he can improve some of his skills, this is not crucial for his life. For him some time in a full immersion environment would be sufficient in order for his pronunciation to be better, which is the aspect of his English that he believes needs to be worked on more.

As with Héctor the different settings in which he lived and studied influenced his motivations, perceptions and identity. Being in Venezuela, each school that his parents transferred him to represented a change in both his self-perceptions and his identity as an English learner. From feeling lost in the first years of school he became much more confident after he took the private course, yet when he went to that challenging high school, he once again felt that he was behind. Now that he is in Puerto Rico, he feels confident once again because many of his college peers are at the same level of competence that he is. All of these changes of self-perception can be adjudicated to the changes of academic and social context in which he was learning English.

### *Sandiel*

For Sandiel learning English was mostly important so that he could fulfill his dream of being a meteorologist. Although there were other social instances in which he used English throughout his life, according to the experiences that he shared with me in this study, his motivational orientation seem to be mainly instrumental. In his case, instrumentality was stronger than any other motivational orientation that he reflected.

I am going to have a bachelor's degree in agronomy and a master's degree in meteorology. I need English.... Since elementary school, the only profession that I want to study for has been meteorology. I am here (UPRM) in agronomy but I plan to change and my dream of becoming a meteorologist is still there. I have always known [what I want to become] because I liked to watch the Weather Channel and anything related to that field. Since elementary school I knew that I had to be good in English because I knew what was coming ahead for me. Although at that time I though that there was still much time left, it went fast and I already knew that I had to face going to the United States, working over there and who knows what else. I have to know English.... I have to finish studying here and then continue in Florida, so the more English I learn the more could take advantage of it. I have also tried to find additional English courses because I have an interest in learning it and I will continue using it in my life in the United States. He has decided that English will open doors for him in terms of his career plans and this is his main motivation for learning it. Although he recognizes that he will use English for other aspects of his life in the United States he emphasizes that he mostly needs this language to study meteorology.

Throughout his life Sandiel has traveled to the United States in several occasions. He had family members there and visited them regularly. Whenever he traveled over there he used English to communicate with his family members, specially his cousin. However, although he was using English to communicate with others he saw these experiences as practicing opportunities to improve his English so that when the time came for him to go study in Florida, he was able to do so. Thus, although he was using English for communication and in other instances, for him these were just ways to contribute to his goal of becoming a meteorologist. Sandiel does not see these uses as integrative or as any other type of motivation but rather as a way of practicing English so that when he begins his graduate studies in the United States he is able to do well in his academic career.

*Influence of the father.* As was the case of Héctor and Roger, Sandiel's father was the one who encouraged him to learn English if he wanted to study in the United States. "My father always told me that I needed to really focus on math and English". His father constantly reminded him that he should learn as much English as he could if he wanted to study in Florida. In his household, his father was the one who knew more English and made Sandiel aware that for his future plans knowing English was essential and he was willing to learn it in order to fulfill his long term goals.

*Wanting to learn more.* Sandiel seemed to feel comfortable with the English that he knows, although he was very eager to continue learning and to improve some areas and skills in English. He knew that there were aspects in which he needed to continue working and was willing to do so in order to fulfill his goals and to be able to use English for his future areas of study and his career.

If someone spoke to me in English I would answer but how do I put it... I have problems in terms of word pronunciation and to loosen up more when it comes to speaking in English.... I should improve my vocabulary. I would like to learn more vocabulary so that I can have more knowledge and a better development of English.

He feels that although he has a good proficiency, learning more vocabulary and practicing speaking could contribute to enhance his competence.

*English education and motivation.* As a child Sandiel was first enrolled in a private school. After two years there he was transferred to a public school because the curriculum at the private school was becoming too difficult for him. This change of learning environments had an influence on how Sandiel perceives himself now as an English user.

When I was changed from private to public I felt more comfortable, I felt like I already knew the material [at the public school]. Although in first and second grade I had bad grades, when I began third grade the material was easier well, I knew it already and dominated it very well except for English. I mean, I dominated it because it was much easier but I did not learn. I got good grades on the third grade but I did not learn any English.

According to Sandiel, his new school did not have a good English program and so although he felt more comfortable because the English class was not as challenging as before, he did not learn anything. Thus, although he saw himself as a good leaner of English, the different learning environments affected his language acquisition and that is why he believes that he currently has not learned as much English as he could have. Regardless of this he did see himself as somewhat superior to other students who had not studied in a private school.

Sandiel grew up in an environment in which English was spoken every now and then by his father and other family members. Having family in the United States also allowed him to travel there and to be in full immersion environments. Regardless of this, for him learning English in order to pursue a career is more important than anything. In terms of the relationship between settings, motivation and perceptions, Sandiel was mostly affected by his educational setting. When he was changed to a new school, he felt that he was no longer challenged in his English class and as he perceived, it this was the main factor that affected his language acquisition.

*Viviana*

Of the four participants in this study, Viviana is the one who has shown the least desire to learn English, although she recognized that she needed to learn it, especially now that she became a college student in a bilingual university. Viviana's case is an example of what Gardner and Lambert (1959) meant when he argued that having an orientation does not mean having the motivation to learn a second language. The fact that she used English for some activities and expressed that English is a good language to learn for communication and traveling purpose might seems like an integrative motivation. However these are just some of the situations in which she believed that English could be beneficial and she did not portray a specific interest to learn it. Although her sister is fully bilingual and currently lives in the United States and her parents, as well as other family members who know English, she did not reflect a motivation to learn this language. Viviana did not seem to have a specific drive that served as her motive to continue learning English.

*Just like any other language.* For her English was equally important and beneficial as any other language. She did not feel however, that English was superior to other idioms.

Knowing English, like any other language, has its benefits, of course. It enhances the way in which you think and the way in which you see things and the way in which you interact with others might also change. Even more, when you know English or any other language, French perhaps, it is like horizons open up and you have more job opportunities or I don't know to enjoy life more.

She reported that there were many different purposes for which English was useful. However, these do not really fit into Gardner's motivational model of integrativeness and instrumentality. The benefits that Viviana mentioned are more of intrinsic interests for wanting to learn a second language and are not necessary for integrative or instrumental purposes. Contrary to Héctor, Sandiel and Roger, Viviana had never found a specific motivation for learning English, until she was required to use English in the courses that she currently takes. This however is a necessity and not an authentic desire to learn this language.

*Mom made me.* Although she considered that she always did well in her English classes, she also recognized that she never felt motivated to learn this language. In her case her mother was the person which constantly reminded her of the need to learn English.

My mom always made me compete in the English week. We had to make banners with themes like, why is it important to learn English? And you had to glue pictures and things like that.... My mom used to say 'No, you have to do it Viviana because that shows responsibility and compromise'.

Although her mother was constantly convincing her to participate in school activities that would show her the importance of learning English, Viviana only saw this as a burden because she was

being forced to do it. She was not interested in these activities or in learning English and she never found a real motivation to acquire this language. Whatever Viviana has learned, she learned because it was her responsibility as a student to do so but not because there was an authentic desire to do so.

*Resistance to English.* Because of such experiences, throughout her life Viviana felt that English was being forced upon her. She never really felt a strong motivation to learn it and this reflected on her classes and her self-perceptions.

It comes to a point in which you feel invaded by English. It invades your world and that is it, everything was in English and it is like it comes to a point that it invades your world.... There is no way around it, either you deal with it or otherwise I don't know. It is like shame, I at least felt ashamed, ashamed with myself it is like 'how am I not going to know this?.... It is very uncomfortable because when you don't have the complete dominion that is required in order to have a coherent conversation, it is just uncomfortable.... Having to face that one really does not know English and being in that environment where there are other students that do speak it and that competition among students and that frustration of asking yourself 'what am I going to do when they ask me the same question?

As Viviana described it she felt trapped because there was no other option but to learn and use English. Yet she refused to do so because she felt incapable of speaking and using English. Feeling that she could not complete tasks that were related to this language made her feel shame because she felt that everyone else around her was able to do it except for her. She made herself believe that she could not speak English and that she was inferior to other ESL learners causing her to fall into a current frustration that continuously affects her language learning process.

In terms of English competence Viviana perceives herself to be at a low level of proficiency. She acknowledged that she could use English if she needed to but regardless of this she still does not consider herself to be an English speaker or user. This perception could be related to the fact that she was forced to learn English and there was never an authentic desire to learn it. She knows that she did not make any efforts and thus she feels that she is not being as competent as she could be if she wanted to.

There is not a complete dominion of English. I could say that my skills are very basic, not as much as basic but there is no full dominion. I can however say that if I go to a place [where English is spoken] I don't think that I would get lost because I can ask... I know the basics, to survive.... I think that I can improve in all the skills, the written and oral, all of them.

Viviana did not seem to be clear about her competence in English. She was dubious in regards to how capable she was of using English. On the other hand, she did feel that if she really needed to, she could use what she has learned throughout her life as an ESL learner in order to "defend" herself. Very seldom was she in instances where she was required to use only English.

Viviana seemed to think that in order to consider herself a speaker of English, she needed to have full competence in this language. She recognized that she can use English but still see herself as a non speaker of English.

It is not that I do not know it (English), it's just that I do not have the same fluency that I have in Spanish. It is not the same. This has to change; it has to change to a full dominion.

What seemed to be frustrating for Viviana was that she wanted to be as proficient in English as she was in Spanish. Unlike Héctor, who was able to understand that learning a second language

is a process and that making mistakes was part of it, she had not yet accepted this, probably because she has not been in a situation similar to the one in which Héctor was. Viviana is still in the process of evaluating herself as an English leaner and accepting that she is still in the process of acquiring the language and that this process will never end.

Viviana was aware of the benefits of learning English but she did not reflect a personal motivation to learn it. The only setting that has made a difference for her has been college. It was not until she entered college that she grew somewhat interested in learning English because she experienced an authentic need for it.

#### *Cross Case Analysis*

The participants of this study reflected that they believed that learning English could be beneficial to its learners in many aspects. They displayed different motivational orientations for learning it that were primary to them based on their experiences and that varied throughout their lives. It cannot be stated that each participant demonstrated only one specific motivational orientation for learning English as a second language. These students possessed both the integrative and instrumental orientations that Gardner referred to, although never mutually exclusively, one might have been more salient. The exception in the four cases was Viviana who did not seem to have a motivational orientation that was either inclined toward instrumentalism or integrativeness. There were however other motivations for learning English that did not fit into the specifications of Gardner's classification for motivations but that can indeed be classified as motivations to learn a language.

Héctor experienced both orientations in different stages of his life. When he was in Puerto Rico he learned that he needed to learn English in order to find a good job; this being an instrumental orientation. In the case of integrativeness once he moved to California he began to

develop an integrative motivation that allowed him to improve his English in order to communicate inside and outside of school. When Héctor moved back to Puerto Rico he once again wanted to employ his knowledge of English for academic and eventually job related purposes. Being back in Puerto Rico, he no longer needed to use English as a medium for every day life communication.

As with his motives to learn English, Héctor's identity as a learner of English went through two major stages. The first one was when he moved to California and later on when he came back to Puerto Rico. When Héctor moved to the United States he felt confident as a student and an English leaner. Yet when he arrived there he realized that he was in a different world. The rapid changes that his grades suffered and the fact that he no longer had a social life affected him greatly. When he started to learn English, to improve his grades and to meet new friends, Héctor became a new person. He was more confident in himself and was able to surpass his fears and his frustrations.

When Héctor returned to Puerto Rico, he had to start all over again. Getting used to the Puerto Rican school system and even to Spanish once again was a difficult transition for him. Soon he also realized that as a return migrant he was also seen as bilingual and this implied a new role and more responsibilities for him. Currently Héctor is a different person than the one who left Puerto Rico and the one who came back some years ago.

Sandiel was the one participant who mostly portrayed a very strong instrumental motivation. In his case this instrumental orientation has become a motivation to learn English in order to pursue a master's degree in an English speaking country. Not surprisingly Sandiel's father also highlighted the fact that if he wanted to study meteorology he needed to focus on English and math.

Viviana's situation seems to be different in the sense that although she does report an awareness of the benefits of being fluent in English, she does not seem to adopt either of the two motivational orientations that are presented by Gardner. She had not found a significant motivation for learning English in her life until she became a college student. Now she regrets not having learned more.

Interestingly enough these four participants' ideals about English have been greatly influenced by their parents and other family members. The familial influences have led them to form the current perceptions that they have about the purpose of English in their lives and their motivations to learn it. All four participants were taught by at least one of his parents that English was necessary and that they needed to learn it.

Roger was highly influenced by his father. Like Héctor, Roger is also studying the same field that his father did. His father taught him that English was important if he wanted to get a job. He drew from his own experiences to teach Roger about the importance of English in his field of study. Regardless of these ideals, Roger always reflected a strong integrative orientation because the uses that he has given to English are mainly for leisure activities and for communicating with friends.

Both Héctor and Roger are pursuing a degree in the same field that they fathers did. In the case of Héctor he is even studying in the same institution and program that his father graduated from. Although Viviana's true passion is journalism, she has opted for Animal science because several or her family members have work in this industry. Clearly, their academic decisions have also been strongly influenced by their families.

*Learners' self- perceptions.* Throughout the interviews that took place with each participant, their perceptions about themselves as speakers and users of English were constantly embedded in their narratives. These perceptions were formed throughout their lives and for some of them these have changed and evolved throughout their life experiences. Whereas in some instances they felt unable to learn this language, at others they perceived themselves as learners who are capable of using English in their lives.

Héctor's self-perceptions changed as abruptly as his environment changed. From being a child in Puerto Rico who believed to be learning English at the pace in which he should have he became an insecure student in California who realized that his proficiency in this language was not what he thought it was. From that moment, Héctor's major struggle was learning to build that confidence that he once had. His experiences led him to understand that acquiring a language is a constant process that will never end for him as an ESL learner and he now feels confident again.

The other three participants did not experience a situation that was similar to Héctor's. Roger lived in Venezuela all of his life; a country where English is taught in school but is not an official language. There never was a crucial instance in which there was no other option for him but to use English. Rogers' case is not too different from Viviana's and Sandiel's. They always studied in Puerto Rico, where English is taught in school but, contrary to Venezuela, it is considered an official language. However, this language is not necessary for everyday life.

Viviana, for instance, constantly repeated that she did not know English. Her statement reflected her insecurities as a learner of English. It also served as an appropriate example of the influence of these participants' life experiences in their perceptions of who they are as learners of English. Héctor and Viviana currently have very different perceptions of their proficiencies. Perhaps if Héctor had never moved to California their cases would not be too different.

What differentiates Viviana from the other participants, like Héctor for instance is that when Héctor was forced to use English in order to communicate he realized that perfect English does not exist and that English learners need to accept this if they want to improve their proficiency level. Hence, Viviana's fears and frustrations mainly derive from her belief that in order to use English one must have full dominion of it. If she, like Héctor did, had lived an experience that had led her to understand this, she would probably feel more secure of herself as an English learner. Until she experiences something similar she will probably continue to feel this way about her English.

## Chapter VI: Influential Educational Aspects

The educational backgrounds of the participants in this study were woven throughout their narratives. These backgrounds were essential in understanding how they became the learners of English that they currently are. Several aspects of their education influenced their language learning process significantly and thus these merit full discussion in this report. The most influential factor in terms of their education was their teachers. Throughout this investigation the participants remembered and discussed numerous influential teachers. Whether for positive or rather disappointing reasons, there were specific teachers that they remembered and that they used as examples to define what a good teacher is and how these contributed to the formation of who they are as users and learners of English.

### *Héctor*

Before Héctor moved to California he had several English teachers in Puerto Rico. Among these were teachers that he still remembers because of the quality of their work and their efforts in helping students like him learn English. However, it was not until he came back from California that he became really critical about his English teachers, especially in Puerto Rico.

*Teaching English well.* After Héctor moved back to Puerto Rico, he had a strong perception regarding what a good English teacher is. According to his opinions on this topic, he learned that in order to acquire the English language successfully teachers need to create a full immersion environment in their classes so that students feel a real need to learn this language.

She used to jump from English to Spanish constantly. In many occasions, students spoke more Spanish than English. Sometimes she gave the instructions in English and if she saw that some students were not following her, she would then say them in Spanish. Sometimes she would teach the entire class in Spanish, but the material was in English....

It has its good side so that students know what they have to do, but if you want to learn English, well you are not going to learn English like that, and so it could be said that it was the only bad side of that English class.

This was the first English teacher that Héctor had after he came back from California. He seemed to believe that his teacher's use of Spanish in the classroom was inappropriate because it was not helpful to students. He directly stated that with this technique the teacher was not helping her students but actually holding them back.

In contrast to this teacher, when Héctor began the ninth grade, he had another teacher who only used English in the classroom. He felt that this technique was more suitable for his classmates because it forced them to use English and as a result, students did learn this language.

The English teacher, she was Puerto Rican... she knew a lot of English but she would not help her students, for her entire English class, if you did not understand it, you did not understand it, that was your problem and you had to find someone to help you understand [the material]. And I believe that this way she forced students to stay focused in the class and to look for a way to learn English so that they could do well in it.... You would see everyone always working with the class, 'man, I have to do well in the English class, help me with this, how do I pronounce it' because she used to take points off for [incorrect] pronunciation, if you said a word in the wrong way, she would stop the class to tell you 'look, you say it like this'. It made students speak correctly. That is a method which I found to be interesting.

For him, the teaching style of this teacher was better. When Héctor moved to California he was forced to learn English in a full immersion environment because there was no other option for him. Based on his own learning experience, Héctor believed that an English only setting is more

beneficial to English learners because if they have Spanish as an option for communicating in the classroom, they are never going to learn English.

When Héctor was in the eleventh grade he was transferred to a school with a special curriculum focused on baseball. This was the sport that Héctor liked the most and thus he decided to merge his education with his passion. However he was surprised at his English teacher in that school and soon realized that this teacher lacked skills that for him were essential.

In eleventh grade I was in the baseball school, we practically did not do anything there [in the English class]. We would listen to the radio in English and based on what you were listening you had to write sentences. He (the teacher) would play music and you would copy down what you understood and based on that he would tell you ‘you wrote it wrong, this was like this’ and that was it. That was his teaching style. We wrote two essays on the entire year. The first essay was about how baseball influenced your life and the second one was a free topic. We also got to correct a couple of sentences, grammar exercises. He used to make the entire class speak in English and would take points off if you did not speak in English but that was it. He used to communicate with his students in Spanish but whenever you spoke to him you had to say everything in English. If you said anything in Spanish he would take points off. It came to a point in which you would get there and he would say ‘today we are gonna write sentences’ and he would go to the board to write a sentence. Whichever you wanted [him to write] and that was the class.

Héctor could feel that this class was not doing anything for him or for his peers. The workload and the activities that his teacher prepared were less than what he expected and so he felt that he was not learning or growing as a learner of English. This was the main reason why Héctor’s

father decided to transfer him back to the private school in which he was before he was enrolled in the baseball school.

When Héctor went back to his previous school he also went back to his prior English teacher whom he perceived quite differently than the teacher that he had in the baseball school. In her he found the teaching style that he was seeking and thus for him this teacher was excellent, because she designed a course that was truly helpful to her students. This class was more focused on literature and in developing critical thinking skills.

She would ask critical thinking questions which were obviously your personal opinions.

For example: Why do you think that Shakespeare wrote this at that time? These are questions for analysis, every one of us had their own opinion about the topic. But she was always looking for the best answer. Based on what you had studied, Shakespeare, history, what was happening, you had to analyze why he had written that sonnet.

Héctor liked this class because it was challenging. He was being asked to do more than any other teacher had asked him to do before and he was learning and improving his skills in English. This led him to the positive opinion that he has about this teacher.

*Someone like him.* There was also something else that made Héctor feel comfortable in this teachers' class. She was also a return migrant and Héctor identified with her because she understood his situation.

I used to tell her that I wanted to go to the United States and study there. She used to tell me about how it was and how she got there. Sometimes we would talk about changes in Spanish and English and how it happened to her over there when she was in high school. There was a time in which we established a relationship of sharing our experiences.... I saw her as an excellent teacher. She helped me look for scholarships [for schools] in the

United States. She even called universities and spoke with them directly. That is why I felt a lot of appreciation for that teacher. I cared a lot for her.... Something that motivated me in her class was that she used to work with me individually because she knew that I wanted to study in the States. Since she had gone to college over there, she knew what I needed and she told me ‘well they teach more reading during the first years so I am going to work more with you on reading comprehension’. I would do all the work that was pertinent to the class but in addition I had a free hour and I would go the classroom and would work on that with her.

Héctor’s teacher went to high school and to college in the United States. Since Héctor also wanted to go to a college in that country, he saw his teacher as a source of guidance in terms of deciding where to study and how to go about the process. Aside from her teaching skills, the similarities between their experiences and the support that she gave him made him perceive this teacher as excellent.

*An exceptional teacher.* The experiences that Héctor had with some of his English teachers led him to create a strong perception about the roles of educators in students’ lives. Because of the different settings and environments in which he studied, he has been able to experience different teaching styles and felt that he knew what characteristics define a good teacher. “A good teacher is the one that worries about his students and motivates them. If the teacher is able to motivate students, the student will do well [in the class].” For him a teacher is more than a person who can teach well. He also believed that a teacher has to also care about other aspects of the students’ life and to look for ways to help and motivate their students so that they learn.

An example of such a teacher was one of his English language arts teachers in California.

In a moment in which Héctor felt lost and isolated, he found hope in Mrs. A.

She would teach her class as usual and then she would come to me. She used to teach her class and explain the material to everyone and then she would come to me and explain it individually. This helped me because I started to get better grades. Through her every time I had doubts in something, any material, I could go to her and she would translate it and explain it to me. She would explain it in English and in Spanish, even if it was for another class. She helped me because it came to a point in which I did not know what to do and since I did not have any help, I did not know who to go to and so I used to go to her and she would explain it all. She was like a helping guide. Anything I needed I would always go to her.... What I would do was if I did not understand an assignment I would take it to her and she would explain it in Spanish. I would do it and give it to her so that she corrected the [language related] mistakes and then I handed it in. That way I did better in my classes. For the exams it was the same thing, since I was in the ELD course I would always take my exams there. The thing is that whenever I had an exam I would go to Mrs. A and she would go to the ELD classroom and explained everything to me because by explaining what I had to do I was able to write better and my performance improved. I finished that semester with a B average and that is how it went for all of sixth and seventh grade.

Mrs. A was a pillar in the success of Héctor in California. Had she not been there he would not have been able to do well in his courses. Héctor's ELD teacher did not speak Spanish and so he could not use her as a resource. Mrs. A became that resource or as Héctor describes her that 'helping guide' that gave him the support that he needed.

Héctor's perceptions about what makes an ideal teacher come from his experiences with teachers such as Mrs. A. For him a commendable teacher authentically cares about the student to the point in which there is a real commitment that surpasses any situations or rules, as long as the student is benefiting from the teacher's actions. For him true commitment entitles doing whatever it takes, from violating a law such as Mrs. A did with the English-only act in California, to using one's personal time to call schools in the United States in order to guide and orient a student. These characteristics were beneficial to Héctor to a great extent and that is why he considers them essential aspects of a good teacher. These teachers motivated them to continue learning and to not give up. As a consequence he believes that in order to gain the respect and attention of their students, teachers' first step should be showing a true commitment with them.

*Roger*

Throughout his life, Roger had several English teachers, in various private educational settings. One of Roger's strongest beliefs regarding teachers is that they should also care about other aspects of their students' lives besides the subject that they are teaching. To him, this shows that as teachers they care and it can make students appreciate their work more. This leads to a higher interest in that teachers' class, to an appreciation for that person, and eventually to the students really learning.

I had a teacher who would call you outside the classroom. He would call you by your name and would talk with you for a while. ‘Hey, come here. How are you? How is everything going?’ In class he was very strict but outside the classroom it was like another relationship. And so you feel that this professor is not there to ruin your life, to make you take exams, to fail you. You feel that he is another person just like you and that he is teaching you something, who wants to tell you something.

This teacher showed that he cared for his students because he took the time to know more about them outside the classroom. Roger felt that his interest for his students was authentic and that he was also truly committed to helping them learn.

*Caring matters the most.* Some of Roger's teachers are responsible for his current perceptions on what characteristics make a good teacher. He remembered two teachers in particular that he compares as a way to portray some of those aspects that make a teacher special.

She (Ms. L) was very nice and a good teacher. You knew that even though she was very nice she was not going to give you a good grade for free. She was somewhat flexible with grades and she was not too demanding, I mean she was not too demanding but only up to a point. If you needed a specific grade to pass the course, she would give you an additional assignment or something like that.

This teacher was for Roger the best example of what a good teacher is. She understood her students and was willing to help them. On the other hand, the students were also aware that they had responsibilities that they needed to comply with in her class. They had a give and take relationship in which students learned that they had to behave in a certain ways if they wanted her to respond positively and earn privileges in the class.

Roger compares a previous English teacher with the aforementioned one, in order to contrast how one teacher can use techniques that are more successful in engaging students than others and to use these in order to contribute to their learning. Although he described them both as good teachers, there was one that he believed was more successful than the other. Ms. L was the teacher that Roger remembered the most as the best English teachers he had. He felt comfortable in her classroom and learning with her was easy because she would disguise the

material in anecdotes and jokes, so when the time came for the exam they could not even believe that she had covered so much material.

Ms. R was a good teacher, the fact that she was bitter does not take away from her that she was a good teacher. This teacher used to cover all of her material, she would give quite a bit of material contrary to Ms. L who gave us the material but she used to hide it somehow. With Ms. R you felt like she was killing you, all of a sudden it would be like ‘where did all this studying material come from? All the classes were the same. I do not know how flexible she was but I was always too afraid to ask. Ms. R did not have a relationship with her students, it was more like she was the teacher, she would teach and we would learn, then we would take the exam and pass her class. The other one, Ms. L, was both things [a teacher and a friend]. When Ms. L had to teach she would give her class and could make all of us stay really quiet. However, when she noticed that we were too ahead on the material and that we had extra time, she would then be more like a friend to us. Outside of the classroom Ms. L would also be great with us.

Although Roger recognized that Ms. R was professional and a good teacher, he still made it clear that she was not too friendly. Roger never felt sympathy toward her, she was never more than his bitter English teacher and that made a difference for him between these two teachers. Ms. L knew how to balance her class schedule and how to determine when to be the teacher and when to be their friend.

As with the other participants, Roger felt that the educational settings are not as important as the teachers that work in these. They are the ones that make a difference and that really determine the quality of the school. This was a perception that mostly originated from Mrs. L.

I can tell you that at least in Venezuela, the teacher is the one who can really change everything. If this last English teacher (Mrs. L) had been in any other of the schools that I went to, she would have been the same for me. The school does not matter. What happens is that in this last school the fees were more expensive and so she would get paid more. So she, who is such a great teacher, is not going to prefer working in a school that does not pay her well.

He was aware that regardless of where this teacher works, she will still be the great teacher she is. The institution is not as important as the teachers are. However, because of the different schools in which he studied, he also noticed that schools with the best reputations are more expensive and as a result these can offer better wages to their teachers. As a consequence Roger has learned that there is a greater chance that the best teachers will work for schools that are more expensive and that can pay them a better salary. This was actually one of the reasons why Roger's parents changed him to that last school; they were seeking a better education for him and this was the best school in Caracas, Venezuela's capital city.

When I asked Roger to think about the best English teacher that he had ever had, he could not decide for one but rather two were in his mind. Two teachers were equally important to him although in two different settings.

When I think about my English teachers, more than anyone I remember the teacher of the private course that I took and that last English teacher that I had (Ms. L). They were very nice, they dominated the subject very well and I liked the way they worked. Ms. L was very pleasant, it was like we worked with a material one day and if we had some time left she would tell us a story and it was nice, a really pleasant class. It was very dynamic, we looked at the material and she was very strict when she was teaching, but when she was

giving examples she would give us funny examples and would let us talk a little bit. If a specific topic was being discussed in class she would tell us a story about her and things like that. In many occasions if we did not understand a word, she would used a personal anecdote of things that had happened to her. I also liked that she was a teacher who was always looking after us. If she would see us outside of the classroom and we were not busy she would tell us a story and we had a strong bonding with that teacher.

He appreciated the dedication of these teachers and the fact that they were innovative in the way that they presented the material. Once again, Roger stressed the importance of feeling that ones' teachers really care and that a relationship is established outside of the classroom. After Roger moved to Puerto Rico his family went to Venezuela on vacation. Roger went to Ms. L's school and visited her. This teacher was as nice as she had always been and this is a characteristic that Roger emphasizes as a fundamental element of a good teacher.

Roger reported an appreciation toward teachers who demonstrated innovative teaching skills that were helpful to students as well as an interest in their students both outside and inside of their classrooms. In the case of Ms. R he recognized that she was a good teacher because she dominated the material well. However, he did not identify with her because she never made an effort to reach her students. This was the difference between Ms. R and Ms. L and probably the reason why when he went to Venezuela he visited Ms. L.

### *Sandiel*

Although Sandiel studied in both private and public schools, he spent most of his years as a student in private school environments. For him one of the biggest problems for learning English was the profiles of the teachers that the administrators of that school sought to hire.

In the private school there was a lot of incompetence by the teachers. What happened was that this school would only employ teachers from a specific religion. It is difficult, hiring only teachers from that religion, to find someone to teach and so, one teacher would arrive and she would not demonstrate good skills and they would change her for another and so on. So, since there were less people to choose from there was a lot of incompetence among the English teachers.

He felt that these teachers were not successful in teaching him English because they lacked teaching abilities. Sandiel could sense the incompetence of these teachers and he saw this as one of the main reasons for not having learned as much English as he could have learned.

*Good teaching skills.* This does not mean however that Sandiel never had good teachers. The first school in which Sandiel was enrolled was a private school. He studied first and second grade there and then was transferred by his parents to a public school because his English course was too difficult for his level. He remembered one of his teachers from the elementary public school that he went to. He perceived her as a very good teacher because of her teaching techniques.

I remember that this teacher used to emphasize show and tell a lot. This was from fourth through sixth grade. She was American, she got to Puerto Rico and learned Spanish and she would speak English to us at all times. That is why we felt forced to learn more [English] during that time.

He thought of this teaching style as a successful one because being in an English classroom in which English was spoken at all times helped him learn more of this language. Sandiel liked show and tell because it was a good exercise in which he could practice his speaking skills and it allowed him to learn more vocabulary every week.

There was another aspect of this teachers' style that Sandiel liked. She was different in the sense that she was caring and patient, contrary to his previous English teacher at the private school. This to him was important, especially because he was still a child at that time.

She was nicer; she was a teacher who liked to teach. Not like other ones who used to lose her patience and would yell at you if she asked us something and we did not answer because we did not understand.... I liked her because although she wanted us to learn she also included learning through games. For the other teacher it was just learning and that was it. She would write on the board and would not explain anything.

This teacher looked for creative and fun ways to help students learn in a more interesting environment. He liked her games and her show and tell sessions and he felt that he was learning while he was having fun. This made a significant difference, having come from this previous private school in which his English teacher was not caring and was not willing to provide her students with innovative learning activities.

*Poor selection of teachers.* When Sandiel was in tenth grade, he had been moved to a private school again. In that school he remembered a teacher who was quite unique and also shared the consequences of this uniqueness. With this he also informed me of the school's policies regarding teachers and the characteristics that were most essential for its administrators.

There was one [teacher] who was good and that used to do a lot of debates and everything was spoken in English. She would give us a theme and we had to defend it or be against it. We would do this in English and whenever we did not understand something we would write it down and we would also take notes of these presentations, whatever we understood of it, but they fired her because she was like crazy. There were days in which a student would tell her 'I am tired, I don't feel like taking class today' and

the whole group would act the same way. She would then take us out to play basketball or to do other things. She used to please us with fun things like that one. One day the students started to fill up water balloons and even the teacher was throwing these water balloons and so she got fired.

The school where Sandiel was at this time found her behavior to be unorthodox and thus they fired her. Although according to him she was a good teacher, her personality was becoming more influential to her students than her teaching abilities. Even Sandiel believed this when he said that she was somewhat crazy because of the things that she would do.

During that same year Sandiel had two other English teachers that were consecutively hired to replace the aforementioned teacher. As he explained, none of them were to him successful in teaching him what he needed. He shared experiences with one of these teachers and remembered how he felt regarding his selection of material and his teaching style.

In all the exams you could use the dictionary. Sometimes it was so ironic, getting vocabulary words and having the chance to look them up in the dictionary. If he was giving us the opportunity to look in the dictionary who was not going to get an A? You would search for the word and write down the answer and that was it. And he was always talking about the same thing, the same topics. I remember the nouns and verbs; almost all the exams were about that, the same thing all the time.

Saniel felt that it was wrong of his teacher to allow them to use a dictionary when he was testing them about vocabulary. This was neither challenging nor helpful for him because he was not learning anything; knowing that they would be allowed to use the dictionary in their exams, the students did not study and as a consequence they did not learn the vocabulary. Besides this problem, the teacher was always covering the same material and Sandiel did not learn anything

more than verbs and nouns with that teacher. As he reported, during this period of time he went through a stagnant stage of language acquisition.

Sandiel expressed that he felt that his education was neglected. For several of his school years he was not taught courses that were appropriate for his level. His educational settings and his teachers were responsible for this because of the instability of their system. In some school terms he was lucky enough to have had teachers that did contribute to his language learning. However, there were also many years in which his teachers were not able to do so.

### *Viviana*

For Viviana, teachers are really the ones who have the ability to make a difference in students' lives. She perceived teachers as those responsible for helping students acquire knowledge. For her the two parts, teachers and students, must work together so that learning takes place.

I believe that teachers are a fundamental part of one's knowledge acquisition and there were one or two [teachers] that even made me learn English.... One's disposition as a student is important but the teacher, what the teacher can give [to us] is very important. Although she was aware that students are responsible for their knowledge she was also aware that teachers can make a difference in the classroom. For her some teachers like that influenced her learning of English.

*Making a difference.* The English teacher that she remembered the most was her twelfth grade teacher. His teaching style and his personality were a combination that made him special and she wished to have had more teachers like him in her life.

This was the best year. He was a teacher that all of us students felt identified with. He was serious when he had to be serious but he was much more than a teacher. It was like

he did not stay in that student-teacher relationship only. In the classroom yes it was teacher and students, but he would also break with that line as a friend.... He went beyond being a teacher and was always willing to help students and you felt that you could trust him. You had this sensation that you could not fail him because he trusted you and you could not exceed the limits simply because you knew him or you had a closer relationship with him. This did not mean that you would do well in the class; actually it was more demanding on you.... I felt in debt because he was good to us. He helped us and treated us well and that is why I felt obligated to do well in the class.

She felt that this teacher cared about her and his classmates because he was also their friend. Viviana appreciated the fact that he had the ability to balance their student-teacher relationship with a friendship. She considered him her best English teacher because he showed that he cared about his students as human beings and not only as part of his job. As a result she felt that she could not let him down because he trusted her and had given her his friendship. This made her feel committed to the class.

Not only was this teacher a good friend to his students, he was also a good teacher. Two of the characteristics that Viviana mostly appreciated about him were his interest and his availability to help his students.

He would always make resources available to us. He was a tutor at another school and he also always told us that if we had any doubts we could go see him at that other school. ‘I will be tutoring there and I can help you then’. He had a great willingness to help.... You really do know who you learn with and there comes a time in which you appreciate them, I think that you start to love them, I really do. I had teachers that I really loved; they were like part of my family.

Viviana felt comfortable around her teacher and that was really important for her. Hence, having a teacher such as this one, who showed an authentic sympathy toward his student, contributed to her language learning due to the fact that she sensed an authentic interest in her learning. She felt motivated to learn because her teacher showed her that he really wanted her to learn.

*Avoiding English class.* Despite the fact that Viviana has such a wonderful teacher in the twelfth grade, she also had other teachers who were not as good. Earlier in her life she had experienced taking class with other English teachers who did not make her feel as comfortable as her last teacher did. As a result she was willing to do anything possible to avoid taking classes with her.

She was very mediocre because she was one of these teachers who tries to be bad, the most strict one, and the most professional one but she was nothing like that, because she was really the contrary to that. She was weak and we used to persuade her and would tell her lies like that one of our classmates' grandfather had died and that we wanted to pray for him and she would fall for it. 'Teacher lets do a praying circle because this kid's grandpa died.' We were lying, it was just an excuse so that we did not have to take classes and since it was a Christian academy, well, everything revolved around religion. This experience comes from when Viviana was in intermediate school. This was the period of her academic life in which she was placed in a private school, a decision which was mainly made by her mother who was seeking a learning environment that was more demanding for Viviana. However, Viviana did not really care where she was transferred. She was willing to do anything possible to stop the class and do something else because they did not like the teacher. They found the teacher's weak spots and in this specific event, they used the school's religious focus to convince the teacher of cancelling class and praying for their classmate. In other instances they

would talk about politics or any other event that would stop the teacher from giving them their English class.

For Viviana teachers are responsible for a student's knowledge. She felt that teachers who were friendly and caring were more successful because students felt their compromise in their classrooms. That was also why she reacted negatively to those teachers who did not show such a commitment with their students. This perception led her to make so educational decisions that affected her English learning.

#### *Cross Case Analysis*

The discussion regarding teachers and how Héctor, Roger, Sandiel and Viviana perceived them was the aspect of this study that all four of them mostly agreed on. For them, teachers are the ones who have the power to determine the outcomes of their students. From first impressions to teaching styles, many were the characteristics that they understood made a teacher special. However, some of these characteristics were concurrently discussed by the participants.

All four participants had their share of teachers that they remember, some because of their excellence and others for their mediocrity. For them good teachers are caring and they show this from the first day that they meet their students. As the participants explained, students can read through their teachers and they know what their personality will be like right from the beginning. They all expressed that having a teacher that shows an authentic desire to help students and to establish a relationship with them motivates students and makes them want to be a part of that process. When students sense truthfulness and compromise they become interested and learn because they allow for the development of a strong student teacher relationship that goes beyond the classroom walls. Otherwise, students will not be compromised to the teacher or the subject that he or she teaches.

Such was the importance that teachers played in the lives of these students that Héctor, for instance feels that without Mrs. A he could not have overcome the difficulties that he faced once he moved to California. Roger had teachers that made him feel special and this made him more interested in the English class that he was taking. For Viviana and Sandiel, on the other hand, the lack of teachers like this one in different stages of their lives caused them to learn less English than they could have learned because they felt that many of the teachers they had were not fulfilling their roles satisfactorily. The different teacher that touched their lives made an impact. The main difference among these students was the type of impact that their teachers left in their lives.

## Chapter VII: Conclusion

The findings of this study led to a better understanding of the origins and foundations of the current motivations and perceptions of its participants, regarding learning English as a second language. All four participants reflected positive perceptions toward the advantages of learning English. Their self-perceptions as users of English and their motivations to learn it, however, varied according to their individual life experiences and the myriad influential factors they had. According to this investigation the most influential agents in these perceptions and motivations were family members and teachers. The decisions made by these two entities continuously affected the participants' identities as language learners. Such decisions occurred in instances in which the students had no power to decide for themselves but had to face the consequences of the actions of their family members and teachers.

This may be the case of many learners of English in Puerto Rico. Students are seldom asked to partake in decisions that will be highly relevant to them, in this case specifically their education. Some examples of such decisions are the learning environment of the students, the teachers that they will have and even the places where the family will live or move to. Students spend most of their time either with their family or their teachers and it makes sense that these are the two factors that would mostly influence them in various aspects of their lives.

*Implications for Parents*

...I learned to Spanglinate

Between the lines

I learned to speak

And learned to write

Because my mother couldn't

My mother's tongue wouldn't

Let her speak inglés

She wanted to

But was afraid to

With her struggle

I learned to master language and its promising value

-Arlene Hernández

As this autobiographical poem portrays, parents are indeed influential in the English learning process of their children. They are responsible for many other aspects in the lives of their children that can also indirectly influence this process. Students cannot decide on their own what school they will go to or where they will live because these environments are often chosen by parents, based on the needs of the family. Every decision that parents make will be influential in their children's lives. Such was the case of Héctor when his family decided to move to California; all the changes that he experienced regarding language acquisition, his identity and perceptions as a learner of English were a consequence of decisions made by his parents and not by him. The schools that Sandiel went to were also chosen by his parents and Sandiel is certain that if he had been in a different school or with different teachers he would have learned more

English but this was the school that his parents chose for him. Roger, on the other hand, was not prepared to study in a college where English is used as the medium of instruction but when his parents decided to move to Puerto Rico, he had to use English more than he ever imagined that he would. Viviana was also forced by her mother to participate in school activities where she did not want to be and to go to English tutoring that she did not want to go to. As the examples provided above show, be it consciously or unintentionally, parents shape the education of their children with every decision that they make about that child's life. Some of these decisions revolve around the learning environment, and some around other activities in which the student will be involved.

In terms of motivation, the parents of these participants have also shown to be a great influence on this as well. All four of the participants were told by their parents that English was important and that it was a language that they needed to learn. How these students perceive their needs and purposes for learning English is in part the result of what their parents taught them about it and how they saw that their parents employed English. Hence, parents should be more aware of the great role that they play in their children's willingness to learn English and how they perceive this language.

The findings of this study regarding the influence of parents in the English learners' motivations show that, in the case of these students, whatever their parents taught them became their foundation for their current motivational orientations to learn English. The power that parents hold is even greater than the one that teachers have. Whereas the teacher decides how the students will learn, the parents can decide if that is the appropriate learning environment for their children. In the case of Héctor for instance, when he was in eleventh grade at the baseball school his father soon noticed that he was not receiving an appropriate education and that he was

coming home without any homework. He decided to change Héctor to the previous private school. Sandiel's case however, was different because his parents did not change him to another school even though he was not learning English because of the constant change of teachers who were unprepared to teach. As a result Héctor's language acquisition continued whereas Sandiel felt that he was not learning anything new. These responsibilities lie in the hands of parents.

### *Implications for Teachers*

The aspects of students' education that were not determined by their parents were eventually determined by teachers. Choices such as the material that will be covered in class, the teaching style, activities and even the type of relationship that will be established between the teachers and the students are all part of the teachers' decisions. Hence, both parents and teachers share a responsibility in determining the language learning process of a student.

According to the participants, teachers hold the power to shape a student's educational outcomes. As was the case of Héctor in California, a teacher can turn a student's life around by caring and helping him or her find their way again. On the other hand, as was the case of Sandiel, a mediocre teacher can also set a student back if their selection of materials and teaching style are inappropriate. Such decisions can result in students learning less than they are capable of or even not learning at all. These students placed a significant responsibility on their teachers, making them mostly accountable for the amount of English they have learned throughout their lives.

The perceptions that these students had of their teachers also showed that for them a teacher is more than a person that gives a lecture or an exam. A teacher has to show an authentic desire to teach and to help students learn. Furthermore, a teacher also needs to be a friend and to

show that he or she is as humane as his or her students are. When the students sense this, then that educator is able to engage students and true learning takes place.

Based on the data gathered from this investigation, it can be inferred that students expect more of their teachers than what educators think. For students like Viviana and Sandiel, it is frustrating to know that as college students they are unable to perform as they should because they still lack skills in the English language than they should have learned when they were still in school. This does not mean that they blamed their teachers entirely for this, because they accept that they also have a responsibility in this matter. However, the fact that some of their teachers did not even motivate them in their classrooms led them to feel no eagerness to learn. Thus, in a sense teachers were also responsible for the lack of motivation that these students had in different occasions throughout their lives.

Based on what the participants reported teachers should take several aspects of their teaching into consideration before they begin to teach a course: (a) Find the real needs of the students and make sure that these are the skills that are covered in the classroom. This will ensure that students are motivated because they are improving the skills that they really have to improve. Students highly appreciated teachers who contributed to enhancing their knowledge rather than simply discussing what they already knew. (b) Show an authentic desire to teach and help. The students reported knowing immediately if their teachers care or not about their work and their students. To them this was an essential aspect of the teacher-student relationship. (c) Establish a friendly relationship with the students both inside and outside of the classroom. The participants of this investigation stated in several occasions that getting to know their teachers led to identifying with them and even feeling in debt for their friendships. This creates a bond

and a sense of respect among the students and the teachers. All these suggestions can be developed throughout a school year and can also turn into a motivation for the students.

### *The Existential Discrepancy*

The phenomenon in which I focused this investigation was a notable discrepancy between the reported motivations and perceptions (López Hernández, 2007; Vicente, 2000) of English learners at UPRM and their determined proficiency levels. As explained in Chapter I, regardless of how eager and interested students are to learn English, a substantial percentage of them are placed in Pre-basic and Basic track courses when they enter this university. My principal inquiry was finding possible reasons that might explain why this is happening.

In the case of my participants and according to their life experiences, this discrepancy occurred because their parents and teachers were making significant and crucial decisions for these students that determined their learning outcomes. These decisions were taking place without an active participation of the students. Sandiel for instance, portrayed a high interest in learning English since his childhood. However, the poor selection of competent teachers affected him because he did not learn as much as he believes that he could have if he had been in a different school or with different teachers. Interestingly, although the participants of the study were taught by their parents and teachers that they needed to learn English, the decisions of the adults in students' lives sometimes prevented them from achieving this goal.

### *Life History and Previous Research in Motivations*

Prior to this study there was no research at UPRM that used life history as a research methodology for motivations to learn English. The two investigations that I have referred to (López Hernández, 2007; Vicente, 2000) used questionnaires as their main instrument for data collection. There was a need for more qualitative data that shed light into possible explanations

for the discrepancy that was under study and that allowed for active participation from the students. By employing life history as a research methodology I was able to gather rich data that provided concise and substantial experiences that led to a better understanding of the outcomes of these English learners. This qualitative study contributes to the field of motivations in second language acquisition by providing qualitative data that was non-existent, for this context, because the previous studies were based on quantitative data collection instruments. There still is a need to continue using qualitative methodologies in this field in order to allow students to inform researchers about this phenomenon and the reasons for its existence.

The use of life history also allowed me to expand on Gardner's traditional division of motivation. Although I originally sought to divide the motivations of my participants into instrumental and integrative because that had been the model used by other researchers, I realized that there were other motives and uses of English among my participants. Leisure and technology was a new category that was present among my four participants. Although their life experiences were quite different and had led them to different outcomes, they all used English during their free time and specifically for entertainment. While Roger used and learned this language while playing online videogames with friends in the United States, Viviana also used it to read teen magazines and to watch her favorite shows on MTV. It is more than understandable that all four participants use English and technology. We are living in a time in which everyone is surrounded by technology and in most instances the language of use in such environments is English. This data shows that such motives for learning and using English are significant and should be further explored along with Gardner's traditional instrumentality/integrativeness model.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The biggest limitation in my study was time. Although my time frame was followed as I had originally planned and I gathered all the data that was necessary for the investigation, I wish would have had more time to inform myself more about the life of the participants. I would have wanted to know more about other aspects of the students' lives such as their parents' backgrounds or more specific details about the schools that they went to.

Because I conducted a purposive sampling, I was able to only find one female for this study. Although this investigation was not focusing on gender it would have been nice to have another female voice in it. Throughout this research I noticed that the female participant was the one with the lowest confidence but because of the fact that she was the only female and because of my small sample of participants, it was not possible to gather any data regarding gender differences.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

This investigation has reported that two of the greatest influential factors in the language acquisition process of the English learners that participated in the research were their parents and their teachers. While the parents decided when and where they learned English, the teachers decided how they learned it; that is on those instances in which learning did take place. This leads me to believe that there are several areas that could be further studied with regards to this topic.

It would be interesting to conduct a study focusing on the perceptions of English teachers in Puerto Rico. Learning more about how they see their roles as teachers of English would be enriching to the field. Since students in this investigation have laid such a responsibility on their

teachers it would be interesting to learn about how these teachers, both in public and private schools, feel about this situation and what leads them to adopt one or another teaching style.

A similar investigation would also be prudent in the case of the parents. Learning about how Puerto Rican parents feel about their children learning English would also be beneficial to this field because it would help researchers better understand the backgrounds of students who are currently learning English in Puerto Rico. It would be interesting to learn about the origin of the perceptions that parents have and that they are transmitting to their children.

In the case of students and their self-competence perceptions, I believe that it would be pertinent to conduct an investigation in which an instrument to measure the learner's competence is developed in order to compare their actual competence with how they perceive proficiency. Often some of the participants reflected their insecurities as users of English and perceived themselves at a very low level of competence. Hence, I believe that such a study would also help researchers understand the discrepancies between the learners' self-perceptions and their actual proficiency.

As I mentioned before, this study was not focused on gender and it had only one female participant. This participant is precisely the one who has portrayed less confidence in her English. A gender study on students' perceptions and motivations would be pertinent in order to find any relevant differences between female and male learners.

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## Appendix A: Unstructured Interview Protocol

### *Actualidad*

1. ¿Qué estudias en el recinto?
2. ¿Dónde has vivido?
3. ¿Estudiaste en escuela pública o privada? ¿Estudiaste en zonas urbanas o rurales?
4. ¿Por qué escogiste esa concentración y este recinto universitario?
5. Describe tu conocimiento y destrezas actuales sobre el idioma inglés.
6. ¿Qué destreza de este idioma entiendes que debes mejorar más?
7. ¿En qué clases utilizas el idioma? ¿de qué forma? (textos, participación etc.)
8. ¿Utilizas el idioma fuera de tus clases? ¿Cómo o en qué circunstancias?
9. ¿Crees que el saber inglés tiene beneficios? Si lo crees, ¿Cuáles?

## Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Protocols

### *Nivel: Escuela Elemental*

1. ¿Describe el ambiente en el que vivías durante tu escuela elemental?
2. Háblame un poco sobre tu familia cercana. ¿Usaban el inglés?
3. Háblame un poco sobre tu escuela elemental.
4. ¿Qué recuerdas de tus maestros(as) de inglés a ese nivel?
5. ¿Cómo eran tus clases de inglés a ese nivel?
6. ¿Cómo te parecía la clase?
7. ¿Cómo te describirías como estudiante en aquel momento?
8. ¿Cómo era el salón?
9. ¿Cómo eran los libros y materiales utilizados en la clase?
10. ¿Qué tipo de actividades hacían en la clase?
11. ¿Cómo fue tu rendimiento académico en las clases de inglés en esa época?
12. ¿Utilizabas el inglés en alguna otra materia?

### *Nivel: Escuela Intermedia*

1. ¿Utilizabas el idioma con algún miembro de tu núcleo familiar? ¿De que forma?
2. ¿Te mudaste durante ese tiempo a algún lugar donde tenías que usar el idioma? ¿Para que lo utilizabas?
3. ¿Algún miembro de tu comunidad hablaba inglés? ¿Cómo recuerdas a esa persona?
4. ¿Dónde estudiaste tu escuela intermedia?
5. ¿Hubo cambios en tus clases de inglés? (materiales, enseñanza, ambiente)
6. Si hubo cambios, ¿Cómo te sentiste al enfrentarlos?
7. ¿Cómo describirías tu aprendizaje del inglés en ese momento?

8. ¿Cómo fue tu rendimiento académico en las clases de inglés en esa época?
9. ¿Utilizabas el inglés en alguna otra materia?

*Nivel: Escuela Superior*

1. ¿Utilizabas el idioma fuera del salón de clases? ¿En que ocasiones?
2. Ya en ese nivel ¿Cómo te sentías al tener que utilizar el inglés?
3. ¿Cómo eran las clases a ese nivel?
4. ¿Cómo te sentías en la clase?
5. ¿Cómo describirías a tus maestros de inglés en aquel momento?
6. ¿Qué sentías hacia tus maestros de inglés?
7. ¿Piensas que los materiales que tus maestros utilizaban eran apropiados para ti?
8. ¿Cómo fue tu rendimiento académico en las clases de inglés en esa época?
9. ¿Utilizabas el inglés en alguna otra materia?
10. ¿Tenías compañeros de clase que hablaban inglés fuera de la clase? ¿Quiénes eran?
11. ¿Eras uno de ellos? ¿Por qué o porqué no?

## Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. ¿Cuáles fueron los aspectos positivos de sus clases de inglés en la escuela?
2. ¿Cuáles fueron los aspectos menos agradables de esas clases?
3. ¿Qué hubiesen cambiado de la forma en que sus maestros daban clase? ¿Por qué?
4. ¿Hubiesen cambiado algunos de los materiales (libros, lecturas, etc.)?
5. ¿Qué piensan sobre la forma en que se enseña inglés en las escuelas en las que estudiaron?
6. En adición a la escuela ¿Dónde mas han aprendido inglés?
7. ¿Qué áreas del idioma piensan que se debe fortalecer más en las escuelas? ¿Por qué?
8. ¿Piensan seguir aprendiendo inglés después que terminen los cursos requeridos? ¿De qué manera? ¿Por qué?

## Appendix D: Poem by Arlene Hernández

### My Mother Tongue, My Mother's Tongue

Spanish

My mother tongue

My mother's only tongue

Nuestro inglés

A testament

Of what she

Couldn't do

Wanted to

But was afraid

To be laughed at

To be looked at

She knew the potential of inglés

But was afraid to fail

So she would bail

At the first EXIT

I learned to read for her

I learned to firmar on the dotted line

Books at school

Letters and forms en casa

Perfected my reading  
With welfare papers,  
The New York census,  
Apartment leases  
And section 8 formularios

I learned to speak for her  
I was her interpreter  
Her personal Spanish translator  
Her public mediator

I was her voice  
Like Jesus to God  
Like extranjero to Americano

I would speak her Spanish tears with my inglés words  
And make her words dance, dance y bailar  
Through white walls at the hospital  
And white halls at the Citizenship building and welfare services

I would be there when she would cringe  
And hang on the doors' hinges  
When they would say, "Excuse miss do you speak English?"

Employers would skip her

Dismiss her and diss her

I was there to see how her cries were not heard

How her efforts were not seen

I hold my Madre's battle very dear

Cuz if she would've grasped my inglés

Mother and Daughter might have not connected

For years and years

And more to come

Her tears

Belonged to me

Her struggle

Is my struggle

Embedded within my skin

Of my Spanglish

I learned to Spanglinate

Between the lines

I learned to speak

And learned to write

Because my mother couldn't

My mother's tongue wouldn't

Let her speak inglés

She wanted to

But was afraid to

With her struggle

I learned to master language and its promising value