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Introduction

The papers in this issue comprised a panel presentation, "Literacy Issues in a Minority Setting: An Ethnographic Perspective," at the 89th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in New Orleans. Initially intending to represent a broader minority perspective, the panel inadvertently ended up focusing on four Mexicano/Latino populations throughout the United States with an emphasis on Mexican immigrant groups. The panel represented a core of ethnographers of education who examine literacy issues in populations of Mexican descent. Undergirding the theoretical and methodological perspectives was the growing concern over explanations of school failure for this minority population.

While these papers provide many instances in which language experiences of Mexicano children living in the four communities are different from those found in the school—emphasis on symbolic language, oral knowledge sources, and collaborative and cooperative language encounters—there were also similarities to school-type language. Interactions within and outside the family provide many opportunities for children to engage in abstracting and manipulating language, a skill considered the core of academic language (Heath and Hoffman, 1986). These studies found no qualitative distinction between the teaching and learning activities of the minority homes and those of middle class homes. The implications of these findings are that cultural and linguistic differences do not constitute enough of an explanation for the high rate of failure among children from Mexican origin homes, as previously thought.

Aside from building on previous work in anthropology of education, these works contribute to the developing theory of what constitutes literacy. Together, these contributions present a solid argument for a reconceptualization of literacy that reflects the demographic realities of American society. Notions of text, literate activity, and literacy acquisition are extended to accurately represent the language and literacy practices of Mexicano home and community discourse contexts. Rather than a static and distinct depiction of Mexican and American cultures, we find an active incorporation of cultural and linguistic resources available in the multicultural settings of the four communities represented. This is in contrast to what theorists of culture and education have painted over the last quarter of a century.

By expanding conceptions of text, literate activity, and literacy acquisition, the authors are able to apply their analytic skills on fluid and intangible forms of knowledge. Thus, these authors find displays of literate behaviors and literacy skills on the walls surrounding a mall, in the analytic and literary oral strategies Mexicanos use to talk about knowledge in their multicultural world, and in the discussions between parents and their children around their daily activities or reading activities inspired by a family literacy project. Being literate and having literacy skills means much more than being able to encode graphic symbols and encode oral communications into such symbols. It means also being able to manipulate and abstract knowledge gleaned from oral and symbolic representations of knowledge--such as folklore, environmental print, and graffiti.

It is fitting that at least of the one of the papers addresses the incorporation of community cultural forms and social issues into the teaching of reading. Educational strategists are often left perplexed about how to incorporate background experiences into the learning setting. As we continue to explore ways in which to actualize a redefinition of knowledge and a reconceptualization of literacy, this example of family literacy is an appropriate reference point. Such a social-contextual model of literacy opens up the possibility for viewing the rich and varied experiences of Mexicano culture as a resource.

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Yrjö Engeström

The Role of Ethnography in the Reconceptualization of Literacy

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When I began my research project on the literacy practices of an extended Mexican-immigrant family consisting of eleven households in the Chicago area two years ago, I immediately realized that one of the first tasks I was going to have to undertake was to find a definition of literacy that would provide me with a perspective from which to view the practices that I was planning to examine. In my review of what scholars had to say about literacy as a phenomenon of scientific interest, I came across a number of different ideas about what they thought it

they thought it meant. Those who were convinced that it was virtually impossible to define it in any specific terms would simply tell me that literacy was problematic and leave it at that. Those, on the other hand, who were brave or foolish enough to try provided me with definitions that could be classified under one of the four developmental phases which the term underwent: crude literacy (Cressy, 1980; Lockridge, 1974), achievement or grade-level literacy (Clifford, 1984; Kaestle, 1988), functional literacy (Gray, 1956; Levine, 1982), or contextual literacies (Heath, 1982; Street, 1984).

The types of literacy defined under the first three of these phases, or categories, were what I would refer to as examples of literacy in *the singular sense*, i.e., they were based on the assumption that there was one type of literacy that cut across all levels of differentiation: race, class, gender, age, national origin, employment status, etc. Only the fourth category developed by ethnographic researchers dealt with literacy in *the plural sense*, i.e., the types of literacies used by particular groups of people in particular social and cultural contexts. It is important to note that the conventional rules of discourse which governed most discussions about these different views of literacy over the years were challenged in the course of the concept's development and periodically led to breakdowns in consensus. These momentary breakdowns, in turn, permitted literacy specialists challenging the *status quo* to revamp or expand the ways in which the term was defined or conceptualized. Of all the challenges, none has been more far-reaching than the one initiated by literacy specialists involved in ethnographic research.

In the late 1970's, a growing interest in the role of literacy in different cultures persuaded a number of ethnographic researchers to undertake critical analyses of both the theory and the practice of literacy. In the process, researchers who had argued that there were differences in cognitive development between members of different cultures and who promulgated a strict dichotomy between orality and literacy (Goody & Watt, 1977; Ong, 1983) came under attack. Through their research, several scholars (Heath, 1983; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984; Tannen, 1982) demonstrated the importance of examining and understanding the uses of language, both oral and written, in particular cultures to see how they were affected by the dynamics of the social, cultural, political, and economic systems which existed within or impacted from without.

While Street (1984) offered us what he called an "ideo-logical" model of literacy, one that attempts "to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorise it in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded" (p. 95), Tannen (1982) and Heath (1982) replaced Goody and Watt's notion of a dichotomy with a new metaphor for considering the relationship between spoken and written language: the continuum. In their view, a more accurate way of portraying the discourse patterns of different cultures is as points along a continuum (Tannen) or continua (Heath) instead of as either absolutely oral or literate. Together, these and a number of other related ideas led to our current notion that there is not one "super literacy" which serves all purposes in all places for all people at all times, but rather multiple literacies serving multiple purposes in different places for different people at different times.

Moreover, the concept of literacy itself has been expanded to include a combination of basic skills in reading and writing *and* what has been variably called behaviors or strategies involving complex patterns of thought, metacognition, or consciousness. A number of scholars, for example, now argue that there is more to literacy than "having the ability to decode graphic symbols and encode oral communication into such symbols" (Vasquez, 1987, p. 9). In other words, literacy is no longer limited, as it was during its first three phases, to the process of encoding and decoding written language. "Being literate," a new element which consists of "the cognitive skills and strategies [used] to manipulate language and knowledge . . ." (p. 15), has been added. As Pattison (1982), in keeping with the ideas of such scholars as Heath & Hoffman (1986) and Langer (1987), has noted:

> [Literacy] denotes consciousness of the questions posed by language coupled with mastery of those skills by which a culture at any given moment in its history manifests this consciousness . . . . Consciousness of the uses and problems of language is the foundation of literacy, but the literate person must also be able to express this consciousness in the ways evolved and sanctioned by the culture in which he lives. At present American culture anticipates that its members shall be able to read and write, and for us these skills are an intimate part of any definition of literacy. But some cultures do not demand these specific accomplishments as part of their definition of literacy. (pp. 5-6)

In view of these new developments, many of us—especially those theorists and researchers whose work has been concentrated in the homes and the communities of non-mainstream groups in this country—are readily confronted with a very difficult and complex problem. In our initial stages of research dealing with individuals who belong to groups that for a variety of social, cultural, histori-

cal, political, and economic reasons do not make extended use of reading and writing, something which North American culture obviously considers essential, we asked ourselves, how are we to view their literacy practices? I suspect, as has been true in my own work, that the various non-mainstream groups studied by literacy specialists in the field do not engage in what Heath (1982) calls "literacy events" to the extent that mainstream, middle-class, North Americans do. Are we to say, therefore, that *their* literacy is deficient for fulfilling *their* purposes in *their* cultural settings?

The answer, which Vasquez (1989) introduced in her work and which I am currently considering in my own, is an answer which literacy specialists at the forefront are currently debating and are still concerned about accepting outright: the idea that we must expand the concept of literacy to its outer limits and include "those oral activities whose link to written text is vague or non-existent" (1989, p. 32). In her work, Vasquez has noted the hesitancy among researchers to take this final step. Gilmore (1983), Vasquez notes, "has labeled relevant speech events as literacy related if they are composed of skills traditionally related to reading: comprehension, syllabication, and word-attack" (1989, p. 32). And Snow (1983) has also come close, but she "has expressed difficulty labelling them literate because of the term's association with the use of print" (1989, p. 32).

Several other researchers have self-consciously expanded their concept of literacy to include the notion that "one can be literate without the overt use of [written] texts" (Stock, 1983, p. 7); most, however, differentiate between private and public domains, which suggests that oral activities within the home or the "closed" community of the extended family cannot be considered literate by this measure. Michaels (1989), for example, has noted that literacy includes "a myriad of ways of using language (in writing, reading, speaking, and thinking)." In her view, "each of these uses of language can be thought of as a form of literacy which interacts with home-based ways of using language and which has its point of origin in the school or in a societal institution (business, government, job site) beyond the school" (p. 9). In his analysis, Gee (1989) differentiates between what he calls primary discourse ("our socio-culturally determined way of using our native language in face-to-face communication with intimates") and secondary discourse ("discourses which crucially involve social institutions beyond the family"). After analyzing discourse within the constraints of a private/public dichotomy, Gee concludes that literacy can be defined as the "control of secondary uses of language (i.e., uses of language in secondary discourses)" (pp. 5-6).

Heath (1983), Vasquez (1989) and a number of other researchers who have done work within the homes and communities of non-mainstream groups, on the other hand, have noted that certain oral language activities "within the context of the home facilitate the acquisition of literacy skills in school" (Vasquez, 1989, p. 33). There is, then, some basis for taking a leap and arguing that a comprehensive model of literacy must take into consideration the oral language practices which individuals make use of even "in homes where parents are not highly experienced with print-related activities" (1989, pp. 36-37).

The theoretical model presented in Figure 1 below, I would like to suggest, is one way of integrating this notion and organizing what ethnography has revealed to us about literacy over the last several years. For purposes of clari-
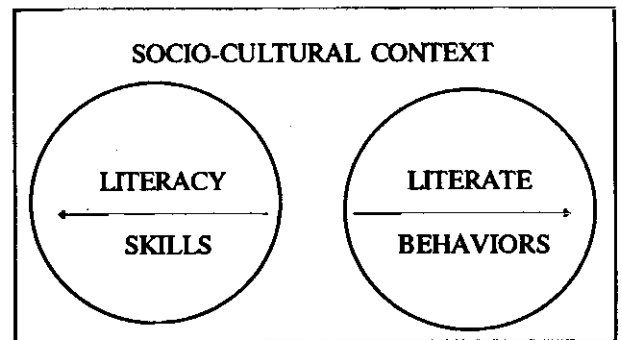
Figure 1: Theoretical Model of the Principal Constituents of Literacy

fication, the principal constituents of literacy may be defined as follows:

1. The SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT consists of the various social, cultural, historical, political, and economic forces that influence the manner in and the degree to which members of a particular group develop literacy skills and literate behaviors.

2. LITERACY SKILLS are the basic skills used by individuals to encode and decode written language: "those mechanistic linguistic abilities which focus on separating out and manipulating discrete elements of a [written] text, such as spelling, vocabulary, grammar, topic sentence, outline, etc. apart from the meaning and interpretation of a text as a whole" (Heath & Hoffman, 1986, p. 4).

3. LITERATE BEHAVIORS are "those abilities that enable students [and others] to analyze, discuss, interpret, and create extended chunks of language . . . . These behaviors include the ability to provide sequenced explanations, logical arguments, grounded interpretations, and abstract analyses. Literate behaviors use [written, oral, and visual] text as a basis for communication, interpretation, and self reflection" (Heath & Hoffman, 1986, p. 4).

According to this model, literacy is said to consist of separate but complex sets of literacy skills *and* literate behaviors (represented by the two circles) engaged in by individuals within a specific socio-cultural context (represented by the larger rectangle). The horizontal lines, or continua, in each of the two circles illustrate the range of possible literacy skills and/or literate behaviors demonstrated by members of the particular community being examined.

Because this model includes oral and visual text in a self-conscious attempt to expand the existing limits of literacy beyond the written word, critics might argue that it goes too far and takes in too much of what we have for some time referred to in more general terms as "discourse." In view of the hesitation voiced by Gilmore (1983) and Snow (1983), this is to be expected. As I see it, though, if we truly want to argue that there are multiple literacies in the world, we cannot continue to privilege one type of "text" over another by maintaining a false separation between the various texts I have mentioned or a false dichotomy between so-called private and public domains as Michaels (1989) and Gee (1989) have done.

Another major criticism of this model might also be voiced by individuals who support expanding the concept of literacy to include other types of texts but who are concerned about my suggestion that literacy skills must continue to be an essential part of the equation. What about communities of people (even hypothetical ones), they ask, that have highly developed literate behaviors as defined by this model but do not make use of written language in any way? Would they be said to possess literacy on the basis of this model? This is a difficult question for which I have yet to formulate an acceptable answer. For now, in view of the historical development of literacy as a concept and the degree to which reading and writing have spread and continue to spread to the far reaches of the world, I would have to argue that these groups can be said to possess literate behaviors but not literacy.

Once the static theoretical model which I presented in Figure 1 is applied to an existing group of people—the extended Mexican immigrant family with which I have been working, for example—it immediately becomes both interactive and dynamic and gives rise to a secondary set of constituents called "events" (see Figure 2 below). These events may be defined as follows:

1. A LITERACY EVENT is "any occasion in which a *piece of writing* is integral to the participants' interactions and their interpretive processes" (Heath, 1982, p. 93).

2. A LITERATE EVENT, which is the flip side of Heath's definition of a literacy event, is any occasion in which a *piece of oral or visual text* "is integral to the participants' interactions and their interpretive processes."

Literacy events, which occur as a result of an interactive relationship between the literacy skills and literate behaviors used by a group of individuals within a specific socio-cultural context, have generally been the focus of interest in most literacy-related studies undertaken in both school and home settings. No doubt the myopic concern with written language in most of these studies has been the primary reason. Because they have been hidden from sight as a consequence of the overwhelming interest by most researchers on activities related to reading and writing, literate events have been virtually ignored. Along with Vasquez (1989), I would argue that literate events play an important role in the way in which literacy unfolds in most non-mainstream communities where oral language is as highly privileged, and possibly even more privileged, than written language.
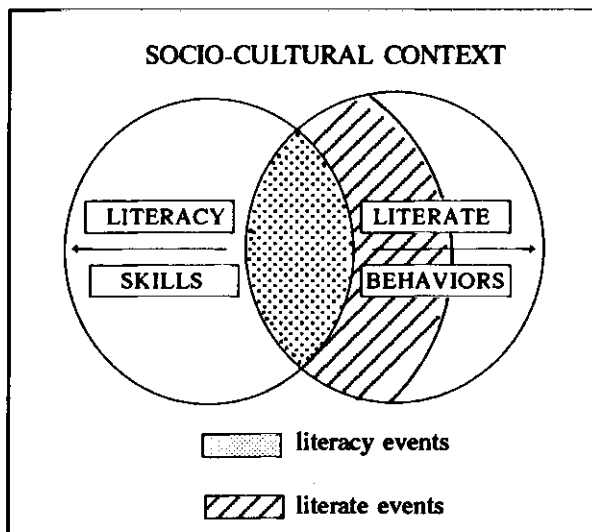

Figure 2: The Literacy Practices of a Mexican Immigrant Family

As Figure 2 clearly indicates, the number of literacy events in which members of the extended Mexican immigrant family engage is rather limited. Why is this? To begin with, the seventeen adults (ages 27 and over) in the family were born and raised in two relatively isolated *ranchos* (essentially, unincorporated villages) in the Mexican states of Michoacan and Guanajuato. Of these, six received no formal education whatsoever; the rest received any where from a second to a sixth grade education. Because one of the major forms of communication between these individuals and the family members that they left behind involves letter writing, even those who received no formal education have managed to teach themselves how to read and write well enough to engage in this literacy practice. Aside from letter writing, many of these adults also make use of reading and writing at work, at church, in assisting their children with homework, in both their formal and informal study of the English language, and in relation to the business and government-oriented correspondence which they regularly receive via mail. Although the sixteen younger adults (ages 17 to 26) and the sixteen children (ages 4 to 16) in the extended family have more advanced literacy skills than the adults do, they too engage in a rather limited number of literacy events (outside of a formal educational setting) in the course of their daily lives.

On the other hand, most members of the extended family appear to engage extensively in literate events. As you can see from Figure 2, such events occur exclusively within the region labelled literate behaviors, although some are probably influenced in undetermined and invisible ways by print-related forces within the larger socio-cultural context. In her work, Vasquez (1989) examined a set of literate behaviors which she called "analytic strategies." In my own work, I have expanded the concept of literate behaviors to include "literary strategies" and "rhetorical strategies." Both of us have focused on "oral language activities which have their origin in oral and visual text" and which take place "in homes where parents are not highly experienced with print-related activities" (Vasquez, 1989, pp. 36-37). The various literate behaviors which we have identified may be defined as follows:

1. RHETORICAL STRATEGIES are literate behaviors which individuals use to inform, entertain, and/or persuade others and to interpret and judge the "ethos" of people engaged in performative and/or participatory conversation with them.

2. ANALYTIC STRATEGIES are literate behaviors which are used to manipulate and abstract written, oral, and visual texts.

3. LITERARY STRATEGIES are literate behaviors which grow out of the experience of individuals with their own "literature" (folklore, verbal art, and the Mexican oral tradition, for example) and which are often integrated into their daily discourse.

As is common practice among Mexican-immigrants, the members of the extended family with which I have been working make extensive use of the analytic strategies which Vasquez (1989) found among the Mexican immigrant families with which she worked in Northern California. Moreover, members of the extended family with which I worked also make extensive use of literary strategies in their daily lives. Although the primary strategy that permeated most of their daily conversation involves narration, or the telling of stories, they also engage in other "literary" forms [see Bauman (1976) and Pratt (1977) for a better understanding of the broader definition of literature which I am using here] typical among Mexican immigrants: jokes, riddles, gossip, *dichos* (literally, "sayings"), and teasing. Like the analytic strategies that they use, the literary strategies are embedded within the larger rhetorical context in which they operate. In other words, these activities often occur within a variety of rhetorical situations (Bitzer, 1968; Miller 1984) with which they are familiar and which encourage their active participation in the "performative conversations" which they enjoy amongst themselves.

In closing, I want to ask that you take a look at Figure 3 (next page) for a moment. I have included this theoretical model to contrast it with Figure 2 and to illustrate the reason why so many members of the academy continue to cherish the "precious" notion that literacy has been, is, and always will be explicitly connected to the written word. More than just about any other speech community in our society, those of us who are members of the academy place a high value on the written word. Everything we say, everything we do, everything we think is permeated with or mediated by the written word. Small wonder that within the socio-cultural context in which we operate, nothing is more highly valued than the written word. And small wonder that when we create models of literacy, we privilege the written text over other competing texts. As scholars and as teachers, we value it so highly that the controlling metaphor in our academic community describes our fate if we do not contribute our share to the "Gods of Knowledge." We either publish or we perish.
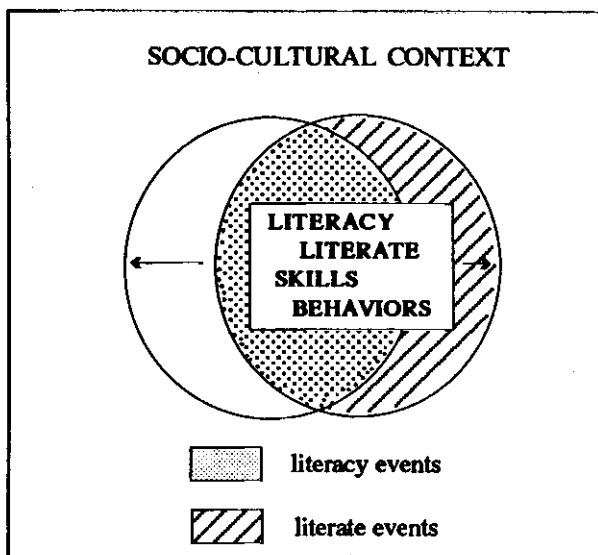
SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

LITERACY
LITERATE
SKILLS
BEHAVIORS

literacy events

literate events

Figure 3: The Literacy Practices of an Academic Community

I would like to suggest that we need to step back and see how people who do not cherish the written word in the ways that we do can still be literate. It is time, I believe, that we recognize the reality that members of groups with limited literacy skills nevertheless have the ability to manipulate and abstract language in relatively sophisticated and literate ways. This does not mean that they are necessarily self-sufficient within the larger community and that we, should, therefore, stop doing everything in our power to give them an opportunity to share in our love and our ability to work with the written word. It is after all an essential ingredient of modern urban life. We should, however, make sure that we consider the full extent of their abilities before we make sweeping judgments about just how literate or illiterate they supposedly are.

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Oral Contexts for Literacy Development in a Mexican Immigrant Community

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Over the course of the last decade, researchers have described how children's experiences with orality serve as bridges into literacy. For example, Wells (1981) has claimed that creating spoken texts entails using the kinds of composing processes found in writing (e.g., forming an overall plan, selecting the appropriate content, and organizing it to fit the plan). Snow (1983), has argued that occasions when adults and children collaboratively construct oral texts are important precursors for literacy

development. In line with this perspective, Michaels has described Sharing Time, a recurring classroom event involving teacher and student, as an occasion when "implicit literacy-related instruction" is available to non-minority children (The Literacies Institute Technical Report No. 1, 1989, p. 18). Teacher behaviors thought to prepare children for literate texts include teacher clarifications and elaborations of children's contributions as well as requests eliciting further clarifications and elaborations from children. I found clarification and elaboration requests to be a recurring feature of the conversations that involve working-class Mexican-origin adults and two preschool-aged children in the home and at school. This paper examines these discourse devices in light of recent theories and research on the language and literacy development of minority children.

Parents and teachers used these two question types with two preschoolers, Jennifer and Nestor, over the 9 month period that I was involved in an ethnographic study of the children's language learning milieu. Both children were the oldest in their family and had access to one or both parents for extended periods of time each day. In both homes, a younger child also occupied their parents' attention. Both sets of parents wanted their children to maintain Spanish, the language that was used almost exclusively in and around their homes. Despite these similarities, the children had contrasting personalities; Jennifer was gregarious and outgoing, even with strangers, while Nestor tended to be more reserved and less adaptable to new situations.

Although elaboration requests and clarification requests have been described in numerous studies that focus on the language socialization experiences of non-minority children (Brown, 1968; Holzman, 1972; Moerk, 1972; Corsaro, 1977; Garvey, 1977, 1979; Cherry, 1979a, 1979b), I did not come to the study planning to describe these question type interactions. Rather, as I became increasingly more familiar with over 60 hours of audio-recorded language samples, especially through listening repeatedly to recordings and by studying the transcripts of recordings, I discovered that these questions occurred in the home and school. The following examples are occasions when they were part of conversations the children had with their parents at home.

Nestor's mother routinely used elaboration and clarification requests in their context of the conversations about Nestor's school day. As was the case in the following exchange, Nestor's mother was the one to initiate these conversations.

M: ¿Quién más estaba en tu mesa, hijo?

N: ¿Maestra? ¿De maestra mami?

M: No, de niños.

N: Alejandro, Demis... ¿Y quién más estaba en tu mesa, hijo?

N: ¿Masestra? ¿De maestra mami?

M: No, de niños.

N: Alejandro, Demis... Este Fernando me dió un pedazo de tortilla.

M: ¿Si?

N: Si. El lo que quiere ser mi amigo mami.

M: ¿El lo quiere ser tu amigo?

N: Uh huh.

M: ¿Y él te dió la tortilla para eso mijo?

N: Si. Y luego dió un pedazo a Demis. Mira el pedazo. Ese vato
se comió un pedazo grandote de taco.

M: ¿Y tu comías la tortilla que te dió?

N: De taco. Demis se comió y luego dijo no quiero. Dijo... te sirves tortilla entera. Verdad, que si.

M: Van a ser amigos, ¿verdad?

N: Si. Y también las niñas van a ser amigas todas.

M: *Who else was at your table, son?*

N: *Teacher, teacher mami?*

M: *No, children.*

N: *Alejandro, Demis... Fernando gave me a piece of tortilla.*

M: *Yes?*

N: *Yes he wants to be my friend mami.*

M: *He wants to be your friend?*

N: *Uh huh.*

M: *And he gave you a tortilla for that son?*

N: *Yes. And then he gave a piece to Demis. Look at that piece. That guy ate a big piece of taco.*

M: *And did you eat the tortilla that he gave you?*

N: *Taco. Demis ate it and then he said he didn't want it. He said ... serve yourself a whole tortilla. Really.*

M: *They're going to be friends, right?*

N: *Yes. And the girls are all going to be friends.*

In the preceding example Nestor, with his mother's help, describes a past experience. His mother's questions prompt Nestor to provide more explicit information about his verbal contributions as well as details about the series of events that made up this experience and the consequences of the events. The result is a sequentially organized narrative account with a beginning, middle, and end.

Although accounts of what had happened at school were not part of conversations containing elaboration and clarification requests in Jennifer's home, Jennifer and her parents also referred to past events when talking together. In the following excerpt, she begins by recounting an imaginary visit to the shoemaker which is also part of the story line of a well known song.

J: Papa. Me llevas al zapatero que me 'ciera zapa tos. Y con el piquito redondo. Y me regaño.

F: Mm hm.

J: Con el piquito redondo. Me regaño.

F: Ay el zapatero no... te va a dar una jalada. ¿Te engaño?

J: Si.

F: ¿Te engaño o te regaño?

J: Me 'gaño.

F: ¿Te hizo los zapatos?

J: No. Me hizo los zapatos pero el piquito no. ¿Es me regaño?

F: Te engaño. Te hizo los zapatos pero el piquito no, ¿verdad?

J: El piquito no. Y le dije del piquito de los 'patos.

J: *Papa. You take/took me to the shoemaker so he would make me some shoes. And with a round toe. And he scolded me.*

F: *Mm hm.*

J: *With a round toe. He scolded me.*

F: *Ay the shoemaker... he's going to gyp you. He fooled you?*

F: *Yes.*

F: *He fooled you or he scolded you?*

J: *He (can't tell Jennifer's meaning from response).*

F: *He made you the shoes?*

J: *No. He made me the shoes but not the toe. It's that he scolded me?*

F: *He fooled you. He made the shoes but not the toe, right?*

J: *The toe no. And I told him about the toe of the shoes.*

Instead of helping Jennifer extend her description of her imagined encounter with El Zapatero (the shoemaker), Jennifer's father uses a series of clarification requests to uncover Jennifer's meaning for the word regañar. In the process, he provides her with definitions of engañar, which is the meaning she intends to convey, and of regañar which is the word she uses.

At both homes, adults also elicited clarifications and elaborations from children when talking about events and objects that appeared on TV. For example, Jennifer initiated the following conversation with her father about a TV

program that they were both watching. Jennifer begins by drawing her father's attention to a globe of the earth that routinely appears on the Spanish-language TV station during station breaks.

J : Una bola. Por que. . . Esta yendo una bola bien grande? [Jennifer is referring to globe that routinely appears on a Spanish-language TV channel during station breaks]

G: ¿Mmm?

J: 'sta yendo bola bien grande en esa.

G: ¿Quien?

J: En esa bola.

G: ¿Nosotros estamos ahi en esa bola?

J: Sí.

G: ¿Donde ... 'onde donde esta la bola?

J: Ay, toda la gente tiene una bola en su casa. Todos los lados. Y nosotros tambien.

G: ¿Y tu estabas viviendo en esta bola?

J: Si, toda la gente vive en esta bola.

G: ¿Quién dice?

J: Yo yo 'horita.

G: ¿Por qué hizo asi?

J: ¿Qué dice en esa?

G: ¿Cómo se llama esa bola?

J: Telajamay [nonsense word]

G: ¿Cómo se llama la bola esa donde estamos no sotros?

J: No sé. Ey, triangle.

G: Es tierra.

J: No.

G: Esa bola se llama tierra.

J: *A ball. Why ... is a big ball revolving?*

F: *Mmm?*

J: *A big ball is revolving on that.*

F: *Who?*

J: *On that ball.*

F: *Are we there on that ball?*

J: *Yes.*

F: *Where... where where is the ball?*

J: *All the people have a ball in their house. Every where. And we do too.*

F: *And were you living on this ball?*

J: *Yes, all the people live on this ball.*

F: *Who says?*

J: *I do now.*

G: *What does it say in that?*

G: *What is the name of that ball?*

J: *Telajamay.*

G: *What's the name of that ball where we are?*

J: *I don't know. Ey, triangle.*

G: *It's the Earth.*

J: *No.*

G: *That ball is called Earth.*

In this example her father's elaboration requests help Jennifer show how parents can help children describe a single object as well as construct a narrative account. In addition, the use of test-like questions to check Jennifer's knowledge about the globe and what it symbolizes is reminiscent of known-information questions that prevail in many classroom settings. Consequently, Jennifer's home language experience may prepare her for occasions when teachers use similar questions in the context of an instructional lesson.

So how do experiences with conversations containing elaboration and clarification requests contribute to children's literacy development? The Scollons (1981) argue that elaboration requests contained in accounts of past experience, provide children with the frameworks for narrating and elaborating information which is an important oral precursor to the acquisition of literacy skills. They claim that experiences with these frameworks is a means of teaching the information structuring of essayist literacy. Also, question-types are reminiscent of the supports that successful readers and writers use. As Calkins (1986) has noted, children and adults query themselves about text as they read and write. This is particularly true for those individuals who have had experiences with writing conferences and other school-based literacy events that include the use of these question-types. Interestingly enough, I have found that elaboration and clarification requests occur during literacy events at an Eastside elementary school that is moving toward a whole language approach to learning and teaching. For example, note how Lorena's elaboration requests help Juan reconsider his writing during the following excerpt from a writing conference that took place in their fifth-grade classroom. Juan begins this session by reading a story he has written about a baseball game. Lorena immediately responds by asking Juan to elaborate on his writing in very specific ways.

L: How fast did the ball go?
   Did it go slow motion or did it go real fast? Just zoom. Or you could write down, "Zip, zip, zip." How fast did it go? Did it go slow?

J: No.

L: Did it go fast? How fast?

J: Seventy miles per hour.

L: Put that down. Did it burn the the catcher's glove? Did it burn it, make it on fire?

J: Yeah.
L: Put that down.
J: It hit the ump... It hit the catcher.
L: It hit the catcher's face? Put that.
J: It hit the player.
L: It hit the player? (laughs)
J: It hit the ump. (laughs)
L: Which one? It hit the player? All three of them?
J: Yeah, okay.

When adults use elaboration and clarification requests to help young children like Jennifer and Nestor to extend their oral texts, they prepare them to participate in events like the one above. Also, experience may help children use questioning as a composing and comprehending strategy when reading and writing.

Another important contribution of this work is to provide us with an empirical basis for reconsidering alternative views about language socialization in language minority settings. So much of this research emphasizes differences the way minority and non-minority adults contribute to children's language socialization. Middle class homes are portrayed as places where parents initiate conversations with their children and accommodate their own talk in a variety of ways. They elicit clarifications and elaborations, expand and extend children's utterances, and regularly engage children in predictable conversational routines (e.g., Brown & Bellugi, 1964; Ratner & Bruner, 1977; Ninio & Bruner, 1977; Snow, 1977; Cazden, 1979; Snow, 1983). In contrast, some ethnographic research has presented a very different picture of the language learning milieu available to non-mainstream populations both here and abroad (Philips, 1972; Schieffelin, 1979; Miller, 1982; Ochs, 1982, 1988; Heath, 1983). Adults are not the primary language socialization agents for their children. Instead, these studies emphasize the role of peers, siblings, and other family or community members. The absence or infrequent use of certain adult accommodations (e.g., questions, expansions) has been attributed to a view of child raising that contrasts with middle class parents' tendency to adapt to the child's situation.

I have also found differences in the interaction patterns that involve Jennifer and Nestor and those that have been described for mainstream English speakers. For example, book reading was not the collaborative event involving children and parents that has been described in mainstream homes. When children interacted with books at home, it was done alone. Also, both of these children had access to a wide network of socializing agents. They lived for extended periods of time with uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents who often took over childraising responsibilities. As both children have aged, translation has become an important event, and an occasion when they take on the socializing responsibility for an adult. They help negotiate language and texts in the context of crosscultural events that are totally unfamiliar to most white English-speaking children of the same age. For example, they accompany and translate for adults who are interviewing for jobs, who are conferring with teachers, and who are attempting to negotiate written texts (e.g., parents' ESL homework, insurance forms, bills).

Despite these important differences parents' use of clarification and elaboration requests is reminiscent of what has been described in many non-minority homes. A number or combination of factors may account for this commonality. For example, similar world views on child raising and the relationship between children and adults may account for the similarities in the way adults use language with children. In addition, social traits (e.g., economic status, family size) that are shared across cultures may at times account for the similarity in the way people talk more than their particular cultural orientations.

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Reading the World in a Multicultural Setting: A Mexicano Perspective

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What happens when a researcher is confronted with a contradiction between the theoretical framework that informed the design of the study and the preliminary analysis of the data? As an anthropologist, one should re-examine the theoretical assumptions and allow the data to generate new theory. Basically, this is the rationale I took for "taking a leap and arguing that a comprehensive model of literacy must take into consideration the oral language practices" (Guerra, this issue) of individuals who belong to a group where print is not a prominent feature of everyday life. In interpreting the preliminary results of a two-year ethnographic study concerned with the manipulation of knowledge in Mexican immigrant homes, I found that specific oral language activities in the homes of four families shared many of the analytic characteristics with those oral activities conventionally labeled "literate" in the classroom setting. The cause of my cognitive dissonance was the fact that many of these oral activities were displayed without the visual evidence of a printed text.

Had I insisted on imposing the conventional framework of "literate"—i.e., ability to talk about written texts—on the oral activities of the families of the study, I would have found little or no examples of literate activity. More specifically, I would have found that in the four Mexicano families studied there were no opportunities to talk about knowledge. My recourse was to reconsider the notion of text that undergirds current definitions of literate activity

and expand it to include alternative forms of knowledge. This expanded notion of text was thought to embody the message conveyed by either oral or visual representations of knowledge which could include such texts as environmental print, photographs, institutional and personal documents.

In the same socio-cultural setting where Pease-Alvarez (this issue) conducted her study, and using similar ethnographic field methods, I examined the everyday conversations of four working class Mexicano immigrant families. Within the range of possibilities for talking about knowledge that entered the daily lives of these four families, I found three distinct discursive patterns which I have labeled Retellings, Extensions, and Reconstructions. Here, I focus only on the Extensions pattern. This pattern is a class of collaborative encounters in which family members collectively construct their reality when talking about the signs and symbols of their multicutlural world. More specifically, Extensions are interactions in which family members offer background information, contextual clues, and personal commentary to build upon the collective visual or aural experience being considered. For example, the "message" in media events, linguistically intriguing vocabulary, photographs, environmental print, or institutional and personal documents is extended through analytically-laden statements made by individuals present.

Analysis of the Extensions pattern allowed me to achieve two goals. First, it allowed me to examine the convergence of the linguistic and cultural resources available in the everyday language of non-native speakers of English. Second, it allowed me to examine more closely the blurring of boundaries between oral and written language and to explore a connection to literacy in a context where knowledge is predominantly acquired through aural channels. I want to elaborate here only on this connection.

In general, Extensions sprung up spontaneously within the broad context of family activity. Extensions were initiated when family members were stopped short of their involvement in other activities by requests to engage their attention on a piece of information entering their immediate social context. The summons directed them to share in both the physical and social experience. That is, they were expected to verbally elaborate on their visual or aural experience. In a sense, they were expected to collaborate with fellow family members in their reading of the world.

When I examined the language samples that followed such attention getters such as, "Hey! Check this out!", I found that Extensions took form around three types of texts—two that were literacy-mediated and one whose

connection to print was vague and indistinct but was an implied form of text that grew out shared cultural and linguistic background. Specifically, the two literacy-mediated Extensions involved distinct printed texts: one which was visually present and another which was orally recalled. The latter being once-removed from the immediate social situation, codified elsewhere, and as such transmitted orally to the participants in the conversation. The third type involved an expanded notion of text without print, one that that involved a message coded in the cultural and/or linguistic understandings shared among the participants.

Literacy-mediated Extensions that centered on printed texts as part of the immediate social context involved talk about written language found in personal and institutional documents and in signs and symbols. In these conversations family members shared contents of letters, requested assistance in filling out applications, and collectively considered illustrated want-ads, travel brochures, report cards, and checks. The second type of literacy-mediated Extensions encompassed texts whose printed form was found outside of the social context of the conversation. These Extensions typically arose out of experiences with media events—e.g., telenovelas (Spanish-language soap operas), newscasts, and radio programs—and the recalling of contents of institutional documents such as laws, report cards, and immigration forms which were previously read or talked about. The analytical activity in this type of Extension centered on a second-order reference to text. That is, explanations, evaluations, and elaborations centered on an evolving oral text that individuals were presently experiencing.

The third type of text used to form Extensions involved tacit knowledge about people's nicknames, regional variations of meaning, and phonetically interesting vocabulary. In many cases, these Extensions were initiated without a visible or audible stimulus, but were prompted by a memory of previous experiences. For example, in the conversation below on a televised baseball game, the text acted upon by the Neruda family members consisted of a cultural understanding of the game of baseball, its rules, and the players' career.

When I examined language samples that grew out of an experience with the three types of texts that formed the pattern Extensions, I found that they shared similar characteristics and were basically indistinguishable in terms of the analytic strategies individuals used to talk about their experience. Throughout the language samples, individuals offered brief, yet analytically charged statements cri-

tiquing or interpreting some aspect of the text. Heath & Hoffman's (1986) examples of literate behaviors of explaining, evaluating, and arguing with some aspect of the text as well as the strategy of making comparisons to other texts or situations were employed indiscriminately across the three types of Extensions. Literacy-mediated texts, and in specific, those which involved printed material in the immediate social context, did not invite a qualitatively different response from the interactants other than to be more explicitly specified in the conversation. In particular, Extensions which centered on printed material included more references to the text than the other two types of Extensions.

The difference among the subcategories of Extensions, however, was due to the inability of some of interactants to speak or read English rather than to the presence of print. Bilingual children often read the text in English and simultaneously translated it to the adults, therefore making the text explicit. The second-language and literacy affected how often the text was mentioned rather than how it was manipulated or abstracted. Additionally, catch-up statements made for the benefit of a newcomer to the conversation also made the text explicit.

The following translated version of a fragment of an extended conversation is representative of Extensions without print and based on shared understandings. This conversation illustrates the specification of text and the analytic strategies used to talk, not only about the actual game, but of prior information the family members had acquired through viewing other games or through other conversations.

> Jr: It was two to zero and Canseco made a home run.
> Father: The son of a bitch hits hard.
> Daughter: And, how old is he? Twenty-three or twenty-four?
> Jr: Twenty-three.
> Father: That's how old Valenzuela was when he started. Twenty-two or twenty three and now (inaudible)
> Daughter: Ha! But, now he is no good!

This small fragment of the conversation is sufficient to demonstrate the socialization in analytically responding to a piece of text. The text—prior knowledge of players' careers—serves to invoke evaluative statements, in this case, contrasting the power of Canseco's batting to the deterioration of Valenzuela's pitching. It also initiates comparative statements—Canseco's great start to Dodger's pitcher Valenzuela's earlier glory. And finally, we see that

the analytic strategy of making prediction is also elicited: the probable demise of Canseco's career.

Extensions provide a window into the way knowledge of the world precedes and is interconnected with reading the written word (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In the everyday language of the home, and in specific, in conversations about what individuals see and hear in their social space, I uncover a point in which reading, writing, and language are dynamically interconnected with reality. This particular nexus reveals the ways that Mexican working class immigrants respond to texts bearing knowledge about their multicultural world. In these spontaneous conversations children are also socialized to "read" and interpret their world in collaboration with members of their social network who share relevant knowledge and prior experience.

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Family Literacy in a Spanish-Speaking Context: Joint Construction of Meaning

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In this paper I plan to demonstrate the ways in which an ethnographic perspective and an underlying assumption that literacy activities are socially constructed framed the organizational structure of a Family Literacy project in Carpinteria, California (Allexsaht-Snider, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan & Allexsaht-Snider, 1990). The project intervened and facilitated an empowerment process for Spanish-speaking parents. I will also summarize the ways in which researchers used insights gained from initial interviews with and observations of the families to plan an intervention that fostered joint construction of meaning for literacy activities. In addition, I will outline the social construction

of literacy by parents and children as it unfolded in examples of two family cases. In conclusion, I suggest that an understanding of the social process of literacy learning by the families in the Carpinteria Project can be applied to an examination of the assumptions and goals of family literacy programs in other minority communities.

The research presented here views family reading activities in the context of broader family literacy activities. Rather than viewing reading as a literary or cognitive process, Bloome (1989) suggests that it should be seen as a social or cultural process. If we are to understand reading as a social process, we must consider what meanings are constructed in reading activities, how the broader socio-cultural context influences the construction of meaning, and what participants understand from participating in the activities (Green, 1990). Auerbach (1989) points out that although recent research on family literacy in minority communities (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987 & 1990; Diaz, Moll & Mehan, 1986; Trueba, 1984) has provided us with a broader definition which avoids the deficit model inherent in earlier studies, intervention programs do not yet reflect this new *social-contextual approach* to literacy. Family literacy research has framed a new perspective based on the assumptions that literacy learning must be seen in relation to its context and uses (Heath, 1983) and that it also needs to acknowledge the families' social realities and help them to act on them (Freire, 1970). The Carpinteria family literacy program was designed in an attempt to close the gap between what has been learned from the ethnographic literature on family contributions to literacy and what is happening in the implementation of family literacy programs (Auerbach, 1989). In the following pages I will apply frameworks for understanding reading and literacy as social processes to the analysis of the parents' experiences in the project's workshops and parent-child reading activities in the home.

The Family Literacy Project

The Family Literacy Project began when ten Spanish-speaking parents accepted an invitation to attend a program of eight monthly meetings as an offshoot of Delgado-Gaitan's research on family-school linkages in the community of Carpinteria. At each meeting parents were issued a children's literature book in Spanish that served as the basis of a workshop led by another parent and the researchers. The workshop focused on strategies adults could use during their reading with their children. Prior to beginning the program, parents were interviewed about the literacy practices and environment in the home, and were asked about their perspectives on their child as a

reader. They were videotaped reading with their children at this time. Videotaping was done three times during the program, and again about eight months later. At the time of the latter follow-up video, they were also interviewed about the project and reading with their child.

The initial interviews with the families yielded data regarding the family schooling backgrounds, home literacy environments, and family literacy practices which served to plan the organization and content of the Family Literacy Project intervention. The interviews confirmed the findings of Chall & Snow (1982), Delgado-Gaitan (1990), Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988), and Trueba (1984), that a range of literacy practices and materials were found in the homes of working-class, minority, and language minority families. This finding is in contrast to the assumption often made by social scientists that these homes are "literacy impoverished."

Families who participated in the project shared several characteristics in common: They were immigrants from México, working class, and predominantly Spanish-speaking. Their schooling and literacy backgrounds varied considerably, however, and subsequently their social, linguistic, and contextual presuppositions about what is required to participate in reading activities (Gumperz, 1986) also varied. The Alvarez and Rios family exemplify this range. Mr. Alvarez had completed sixth grade in México and had attended high school in the United States where he had learned to speak and read English, while his wife had only completed sixth grade in México. They both read newspapers, magazines and books at home in Spanish. Mr. Alvarez also read newspapers in English. In contrast, the Rios family spoke Nahuatl as their first language and Spanish as a second language. Neither parent could read or write, so their older children mediated all interactions with written texts.

The information from initial interviews about parents' diverse experiences with literacy and varied experiences in reading with their children was used in planning a program with a flexible organizational structure that built on family strengths, fostered interaction between parents, and engaged them in reading as a social process. The requirements for participation in the literacy activities in the project were defined as broadly as possible. Parents' and children's oral literacy skills were acknowledged and given value through the interview process and in workshop presentations. The parents were encouraged to view oral interpretation of text as a viable skill independent of a particular individual's ability to decode print (Hale, 1980). Since many parents reported that one parent had

more literacy skills than the other, joint or group interpretation of text was modeled and practiced in the workshop and home settings so that participation in literacy activities was not limited by parents' or children's relative lack of decoding skills. Joint participation meant that they could build on each other's knowledge. Both parents (and in one case an older son) in each family were encouraged to participate in the program.

The understandings of home literacy contexts that emerged from the initial interviews were integrated with the social-contextual approach of family literacy advocated by Auerbach and implemented by Ada (1988), Freire (1970) and others. Within a socio-contextual framework, the training was designed to build on parents' knowledge and experience by encouraging them to engage in dialogue with their children to assist in applying their own life experiences to constructing meaning from text. The monthly workshop sessions on reading with children were introduced with a brief presentation of a new book by a parent leader in which he or she read part of the book and modeled questions to stimulate discussion about the text in relation to the families' experiences (For discussion of a similar program see Ada, 1988). The introduction was followed by small group sessions in which parents took turns reading aloud from the text and posed questions for each other to draw out the relationship between the text and their own experiences. Those who were more experienced in interacting with text took the lead, while parents who were less confident in their literacy skills learned from the joint reading activities with other parents. The workshops were organized in a monthly series so that the understandings developed in the workshop settings could be enacted in reading activities at home. Parent-child reading activities at home were followed by meetings where parents could raise questions and concerns, thereby reconstructing the reading activity with their child on an ongoing basis and also collaborating in a critical examination of their roles in shaping their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, in press).

Reading as a Social Process

If reading is viewed as a social or cultural process, then an analysis of the data regarding reading activities in the Family Literacy Project can be said to reveal an intersection of several different cultural views of the reading process. The meanings attached to the reading activities conducted during the project can be seen to have been socially constructed during parent-child, parent-parent, and researcher-parent interactions. Parents had initially attached meaning to the reading activity with their children based on their past schooling experiences in either México or the United States, or on their self-identity as readers or non-readers. Because of their unique personal biographies (Taylor, 1981), parents held diverse views of what counted as literacy, what kinds of resources they had to apply in literacy activities, and whether or not they had access to literacy (Szwed, 1988).

A new, shared interpretive framework for the reading activities (Weade & Green, 1989) was negotiated by the parents, parent leaders, and researchers during the workshops. New standards and interactional expectations that encompassed parents' cultural views of the reading process, traditional American classroom organizational patterns, and the new socio-contextual frameworks proposed by the researchers, were negotiated. Parents had initially reported reading aloud only with their younger children who could not yet read on their own. Over the months of the project, as parents read aloud together and discussed the books they later read with their children, they saw that they could participate with their older children in jointly constructing meaning from text. The parents also negotiated meaning during the reading activities in the home. One of the later videotapes showed, for example, a father and daughter talking about a school literature book, *Isla de los Delfines Azules* (Island of the Blue Dolphins) that they had been enjoying together. The father pointed out the locations in the text that were in the local vicinity and which they had visited, integrating personal experience into the reading process.

Parents who initially saw the purpose of joint reading activities as improving their children's decoding skills and fluency in reading aloud, found through participating in reading with their children that another more encompassing purpose was to make reading activities at home meaningful and enjoyable for the children. Table 1 (next page) illustrates the meanings held by the participants in the study in the different reading activities and the process of joint construction of meaning through the reading activities in the home and training settings. In the following paragraphs, I discuss two family cases to show the social process of reading and literacy activities for families in the project.

Family Case Studies

Mrs. Macías was a single parent with two children, a fourteen year old son and eight year old Alicia. She completed primary school in México before emigrating at age fourteen to the United States, where she did not continue her schooling. There was a small library of books in the Macías home, including story books, a dictionary,

THE SOCIAL PROCESS OF READING ACTIVITIES IN THE FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT

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┌─────────────────────────┐                    ┌─────────────────────────┐
│  Parents' past schooling │ ────────────────▶  │ Teachers' and students' │
│ experiences and self-    │ ◀────────────────  │ shared meanings for      │
│ identity as readers      │                    │ reading activities in    │
│                          │                    │ the classroom            │
└─────────────────────────┘                    └─────────────────────────┘
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Initial meaning of parent-child reading activities

Participants negotiate meaning for reading activities in parent workshops

Parent and child negotiate meaning in reading activities at home

9 months later

Classroom context for literacy
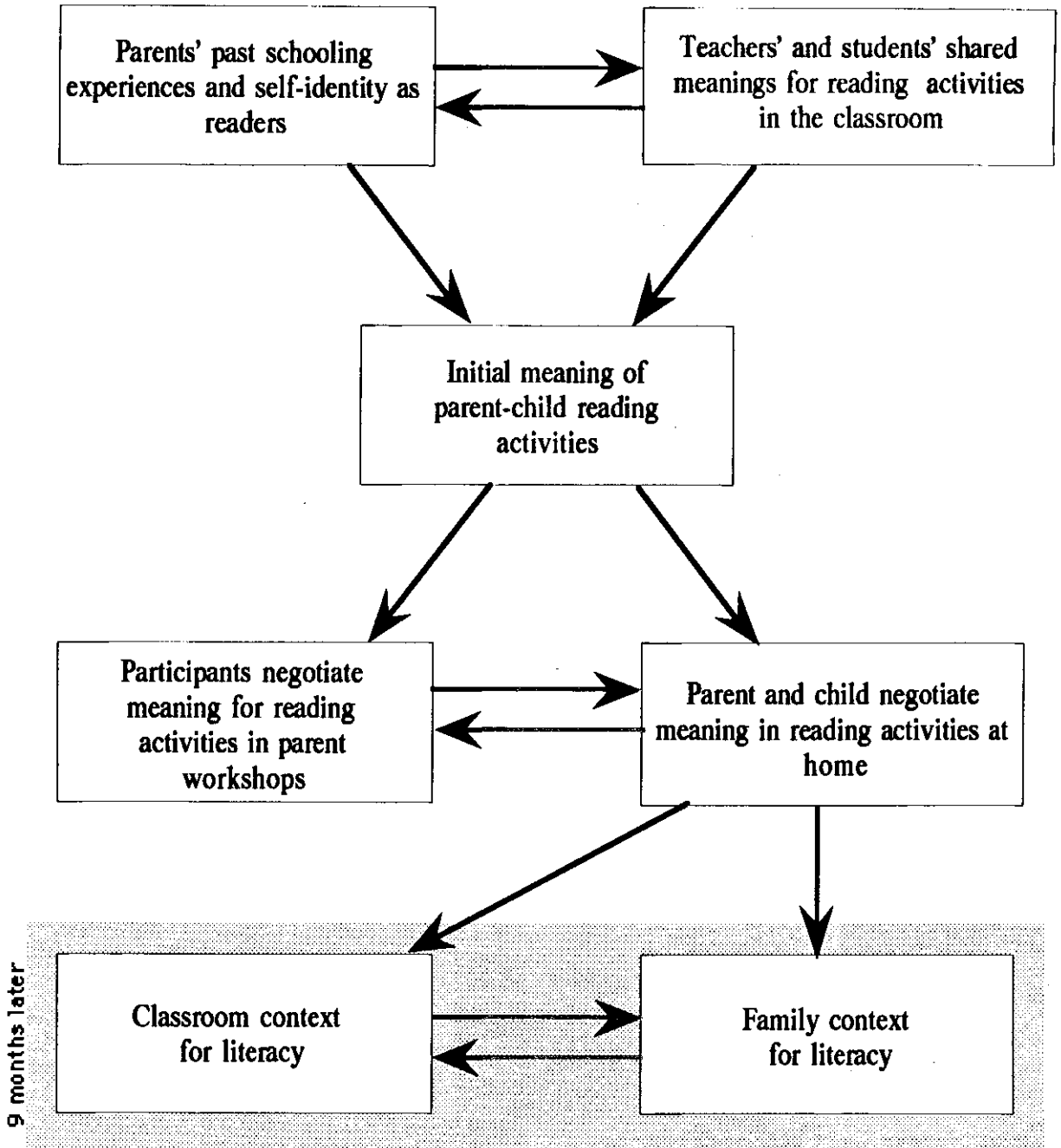
Family context for literacy

TABLE 1

and an encyclopedia set. Mrs. Macías read regularly with Alicia and encouraged her to read the newspaper because she thought it was important for her daughter to know what is going on in the world. At night when she read with her daughter, Mrs. Macías asked Alicia questions to try to make sure that she was understanding. Mrs. Macías thought Alicia was not doing well in reading because she could not explain what she was reading. Alicia's mother was actively involved with homework and other literacy activities associated with her daughter's schooling. She read in both Spanish and English. Unlike some other parents, she did not express a frustration about not being able to help Alicia with her reading and homework due to her own lack of schooling and reading. Instead, she was concerned with Alicia's lack of independence and unwillingness to read and do homework on her own.

The Soto family also had a daughter, Estrella, who was the oldest of three children. Mr. Soto attended secondary school in México, and his wife attended only a few years of primary school. Mrs. Soto had learned to speak English through her work, and had developed some reading and writing skills in English. There were books, magazines and newspapers in the home, and the family were regular members of the local library. Mrs. Soto thought that Estrella was a good reader, that she had a very open mind. The mother thought they, especially her husband, needed to pay more attention to her. She added, " ... Que el sabe leer más mejor que yo. Ayudarle a ella quizá está leyendo así en voz alta él necesita decirle 'Así se hace'. Por que él tuvo más estudio que yo ¿verdad? Yo le puedo leer pero no sé ni donde están las puntuaciones ..." (He knows how to read better than I do. To help her when she's reading out loud he needs to tell her 'This is how you do it'. Because he studied more than I did, you know? I can read, but I don't know where to put the punctuation).

The parents in these two cases began the project with similar backgrounds in literacy and similar understandings of the reading activities with their children, although there were distinct differences, too. In both families, at least one parent had Spanish literacy skills at approximately a sixth grade level and those parents were confident about applying their own reading skills in assisting their children. Both families initially saw the purpose of reading as finding information or gaining knowledge or wisdom. The two sets of parents differed in their goals for reading with their children, however. Mrs. Macías was concerned about her daughter developing independence in reading and doing her homework. Mr. and Mrs. Soto focused on the need to develop Estrella's pronunciation and use of pauses and intonation in reading aloud a

passage in a meaningful way. A second difference in the two families was that Mrs. Soto, in contrast to Mrs. Macías, saw herself as lacking literacy skills in Spanish and therefore less able to assist her daughter with schoolwork.

The patterns of interaction in the videotaped reading sessions were similar in the two families. Both parents initiated little or no discussion with the girls in the first observations. In both cases, the girls responded reluctantly, vaguely, and briefly to their parents' efforts to question them about their reading. For example, Mrs. Macías asked, "¿Cuál es el título?" (What is the title?) and Alicia answered, "A gozar en casa" (Having a good time at home). When her mother tried to relate the title to Alicia's experience by asking, "¿Qué es para ti gozar en casa? (What does it mean for you to have a good time at home?), Alicia responded vaguely, "Hacer una cosa." (Doing something). In the second session, Mrs. Soto asked, "¿Ese es el papá?" (Is this the father?) and Estrella responds, "No." Her mother continues, "¿Quíen es este señor? (Who is this man?) and Estrella answers, "Un señor."

Analysis of the videotaped reading sessions over time indicated that parents and children slowly negotiated new meanings for the reading activities. In the second sessions, in both cases, parents used the idea of questioning regarding the stories that had been presented and practiced in the parent workshop to try to draw out the children's understanding of the story in relation to their own experiences. The children initially resisted their parents' efforts by either not responding to the questions or responding briefly or inaudibly. The new interactional expectations for the reading activities that the parents and researchers had constructed during the workshops had to be reconstructed in the home settings in a repetitive process over time. The videotapes of the later reading sessions indicate that the parents had integrated the idea of questioning the children about text in order to relate it to their own experiences into their framework of meaning for the reading activities, and that the children were beginning to integrate the new interactional frameworks. In the fourth videotaped family reading session, Mr. Soto asked, "¿Qué fué lo que más te gustó aquí en el libro?" (What did you like best in the book?), and Estrella answered, "Era cuando los niños estaban ahí y un marinero dijo que no se preocuparon." (When the children were there and a sailor told them not to worry). Estrella's father drew out her response, saying, "Sí, ¿por qué? (Yes, why?), and Estrella responded, "Porque no estaban su papá, ni su mamá, ni su hermana." (Because not even their dad or their mom or

their sister was there.). The follow-up interviews with parents provided insight into the additional understandings developed by participants in the project that went beyond the development of questioning and discussion interactions around text.

The Social Significance of Literacy in Family Life

In the interview eight months after the Family Literacy training program ended, Mrs. Macías found the program useful because, "He podido tener más comunicación con [mi hija]. [La comunicación ha mejorado] en estar más unidos y de comprenderlos tambien a ellos. " (I've been able to have more communication with [my daughter]. [The communication has gotten better in that] we are more united and understand each other better.) Mr. Soto echoed the same theme of family unity emerging from participation in the project, as did many of the other parents. In his words, "Este proyecto ayudó mucho a la unión familiar." (This project helped a lot with family unity.) Mrs. Macías also indicated that she had learned from getting together with other parents that she wasn't the only one who had concerns about her daughter's lack of independence and motivation in reading. The discussions with other parents had helped her not to feel inhibited about participating in her daughter's schooling. She summarized, saying, "Tenemos que quitarnos esa pared que nos dividide de decir el hijo va a la escuela, en la escuela aprende todo y yo ya no tengo nada que ver. Y eso no es cierto." (We need to break down the wall that divides us, where we say that my child goes to school, she learns everything in school and I don't have anything to do with it. That's not true.)

Mr. Soto noted that his participation in reading activities with Estrella had affected the other children in the family as well, "Ahora mis hijos los más pequeños tambien quieren leer." (Now my other younger children also want to read.). Mrs. Soto added that she thought the project had helped the children, but it had also helped her. She felt it was very helpful for parents who had not had much schooling because they read more and understood better what they were reading.

The two cases presented here illustrate the different starting points in terms of literacy backgrounds, home literacy environments, and goals for the parent-child reading activities for the Macías and Soto families. While the social processes of the reading activities in the home and the workshops were experienced in similar ways in the two families, they reported different changes in self-perception, relations of family members, and involvement in school-related activities (Cochran, 1988). Auerbach (1989) asserts that "The goal of a social-cultural approach to family literacy is to increase the social significance of literacy in family life by incorporating community cultural forms and social issues in the content of literacy activities" (p. 177). The research discussed here today suggests that an approach which incorporates community cultural forms and social issues as well as reading as a social process can facilitate an empowerment process that fits families' individual social contexts and goals for literacy learning.

The experiences of the parents and children in the Carpinteria Family Literacy Project confirm an assertion made by Auerbach (1989) in summarizing the implications of a social-contextual model for family literacy. The family literacy model, as such, is not a predetermined curriculum or set of practices or activities. Instead, the model implies a set of questions to be asked about the context for family literacy programs in a particular community, such as: (1) What are the meanings that parents and children attach to literacy activities, and what are their goals for those activities?; (2) What is the context for literacy learning in the family, community, and school settings?; (3) How does the organizational and social structure of a family literacy program support or constrain the families' participation in reading and literacy learning activities?; (4) In what ways does the program support or constrain parents in shaping their and their children's social contexts? An understanding of these questions can frame the development of programs for families that fit their social contexts and incorporate their goals for literacy learning.

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Reading and Writing Graffiti: A Reading

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This paper presents a preliminary analysis of graffiti, a rich communication system used extensively by rival gangs inside and out of a multi-ethnic community encircled by middle-class Anglo neighborhoods in the city of Splitsville, outside Chicago. The reading of the text on the walls of this predominantly Latino community reveals two sociolinguistic features of gang communication systems. One, it illustrates the appropriation of American and latino culture symbols as a distinctive gang register. And, two, it reflects the racial and socioeconomic tensions that split this mid-western city into five distinct communities.

I will attempt to decode a particular stretch of graffiti that covered several walls on two buildings adjacent to a new shopping mall catering to a middle-class clientele. This stretch of graffiti reflected an on-going dispute between warring gangs. Though the graffiti symbols themselves were, more than likely, obscure, even meaningless, for most mall visitors, the graffiti indicated that something unpleasant was reverberating beneath the upscale pleas-

antry of the local stores. Whereas the store owners and the city officials would have liked the mall to be appealing and fashionable, the graffiti announced another socio-economic reality. This particular example of graffiti was a "system of signs" that made public a set of social dynamics that persistently undermined the city's attempt to create another separate image, another separate social reality that disguised its multi-ethnic reality.

Most estimates claim that the Latino population in Splitsville is approximately 1/4 or 1/5 (perhaps 20,000 to 25,000) of the entire population of 90,000 inhabitants. The Latinos use a variety of self-labels: *puerto riquenos* (Puerto Ricans), *tejanos* (Texans of Mexican ancestry), *mexicanos* (Mexican immigrants), Mexican-Americans, and so on. There is also a small number of Cubans, but the majority of Latinos are Mexican-origin. In my research, I use the term *mexicano* to reflect two conditions: a large number of recently arriving Latinos have been Mexican immigrants, and members of the familial networks I have worked with who describe themselves as *mexicanos*. This self-identification differentiation reflects a distinct historical, economic and political reality for each of the Latino groups.

The first *mexicanos* arrived in the city during the late teens and early 1920s. The primary employer at that time was a major railway that maintained repair shops close to Splitsville's downtown and its outskirts. Not until the late 1960s and early 1970s, however did *mexicano* immigration achieved significant numbers. At the same time Splitsville received significant numbers of Puerto Ricans and *tejanos*. Though employment by this time was far more diverse and included a variety of industrial manufacturers and other kinds of businesses requiring cheap labor, the city also began to lose it's well established employers due to stiff competition from shopping malls springing up along the periphery of the city. Today in the downtown area, almost all the small businesses are neighborhood grocery stores owned by *mexicanos* specializing in Mexican products.

The downtown itself is divided by a river. On the west side of the river one enters the Near West Side, where Near East Side conditions continue sporadically for only a few more blocks. This area is followed rather quickly by the spacious lots and large homes of Splitsville's West Side which has historically has been the home of the city's high society. The area is far from homogeneous, however, for there are significant neighborhoods that resemble those in the Near East Side. Interestingly, the West Side is also experiencing growth at its western edge, and this new area in the next decade or two may resemble considerably the mall area that comprises the Far East Side.

The importance of this three-way split is that the city's Latino community is caught in highly complex economic and political changes. For instance, the city officials of Splitsville are trying very hard to rejuvenate the downtown. Downtown redevelopment included the establishment of a downtown campus of a local junior college, the refurbishing of a 1920s theater/"movie palace," and the creation of a transportation center and a new post office in an area that formerly contained abandoned railroad buildings. All of these efforts have been attempts to create a better "image" for the city. In fact, for a few years in the late 1980s the city created an "image task force," whose early meetings I attended as a member.

A city "image task force" and other development groups have on various occasions pinpointed the Near East Side in particular for a variety of improvements. These groups complained that street-cart vendors— *paleteros* (Mexican-style popsicle vendors) and sellers of *elote* (corn), run down houses, garish storefronts and signs on downtown buildings, and, most importantly, gang and drug related killings, contributed to the city's poor image. City officials cite this bad "image" as a reason for the low economic growth that has characterized every other city along the high-tech corridor. As such Splitsville's Latino population and other low-income groups present city leaders with a highly perplexing situation. On the one hand, the areas on both sides of the river are an eye-sore to city planners who see the redevelopment of the area as the only hope for the city's economic recovery.

For an ethnographer of communication or a textual theorist, graffiti presents interesting problems. For instance, the notion of "conversation" or "text" can be extended to include graffiti as a communication system. Graffiti as a kind of conversation is not a far fetched idea. Graffiti oftentimes depicts disputes between one gang and another. Graffiti written by a gang can, in effect, say, "this is our territory" or "we're going to get you." But, while the concept of "conversation" is also problematic, in that it implies face-to-face contact, a gang's response by reconfiguring the earlier message constitutes a turn-taking mechanism reminiscent of face-to-face conversations. Graffiti as text presents characteristics not normally considered in conventional textual theories. However, currently there is considerable interest in breaking down distinctions between oral and written channels and labelling examples of both as "texts" (Shuman, 1986). My own preference at this preliminary stage, is to interpret

graffiti without using the lens of too much terminology and to depend considerably on the interpretations by gang members and peripheral gang members from Splitsville.

Graffiti in Splitsville is part of a highly complex set of communicative symbols used by gangs to communicate with each other. It is one strand in a thick web of communication. One layer of symbols consists of hand signals. Each gang has its own particular way of holding fingers in order to "throw" each other signs. Another layer consists of colors displayed on clothing and possessions. Each gang has its own set of colors. A third layer consists of special styles for decorating both body and clothing. For instance, wearing "hoodies" (light jackets with a hood), "baggies" (baggy trousers), a thin beard at the chin, or special hairdos may signal—when associated, for instance, with specific gang colors—gang affiliation or may, more simply, signal membership in the local "street culture." Arranging the bills of caps at certain angles may signal affiliation with "People" or "Folks," umbrella terms under which a variety of gangs might unite to fight other gangs.

A fourth layer of communication among gangs consists of special lexicons and styles of speaking, which often overlaps with the lexicons and speaking styles of the local "street culture." Brand names appropriated from public culture, acquire new meanings when placed in the context of gang life. For example, a jacket from the Los Angeles Kings hockey team in the context of gang culture signals a Latin Kings' gang affiliation. A Pittsburgh Pirates black and gold baseball cap with "P" on the front also signals Latin Kings. The Latin Kings gang uses black and gold and aligns with other gangs under the confederation of the "People." In the Latino neighborhoods of Splitsville virtually every gang member, as well as almost every participant in the local street culture is able to encode and decode all these layers of communication.

As a fifth layer of communiction, graffiti has a number of core signs that make the system efficient and coherent. For instance, the symbol for the Latin Kings is a black and gold five-pointed crown. Therefore, to draw a five-pointed crown on the wall of a building, the symbol "5," or paint one's graffiti in gold is to refer in some fashion to the Latin Kings. Similarly, signs and symbols from mainstream culture are constantly appropriated into the sign system. I have already mentioned how the names and colors of sports teams can be appropriated, but other terms and symbols slip easily into the special communicative web used by gangs. For instance, a lion, because it symbolizes the "king of the jungle," becomes appropriated to

signal Latin Kings. Therefore, any picture of a lion, e.g., a lion on a ring or a t-shirt, signals allegiance to the Latin Kings.

Controlling much of the sign system itself are the directions up and down. For instance, to "throw" a gang sign up means, in effect, "love you, but to "throw" the same sign down means "kill you." Similarly, to draw a five-pointed crown right side up as a part of one's graffiti means "love Latin Kings," but to draw it upside down means "kill latin Kings." Up and down, then, are directions that transcend some of the communicative strands and control much of the message making.

Directions might be compared to "negative" morphemes such as "non" that have the power to change the semantic dimensions of words. Core signs, then, move across the various strands in order to ensure communicative coherence and efficiency. The result is that messages are made and read as a kind of short hand or a set of efficient abbreviations (more examples: LK=Latin Kings; D=Deuces; K=Killer, hence, KK=Kings Killer and DK=Deuce Killer), which is particularly necessary for the graffiti writer since graffiti is illegal and the writer must be constantly looking out for patrol cars or rival gangs members.

Earlier, I described graffiti as a conversation, particularly a dispute, among rival gangs. The symbols associated with one gang are sometimes "cracked" (reconfigured) with the symbols of another gang. Sometimes they are painted over and the new gang's symbols replace the earlier markings. These procedures result in a remarkable density in which messages initiate responses that become another set of messages and so on. When graffiti becomes layered in this way, it becomes dense with authors, or, if one prefers, speakers. In short, erasure and inscription, as on-going polar processes, are graffiti's basic conditions.

The messages of an evening's work can disappear at the hands of a noncomprehending store owner or a comprehending rival gang member only to reappear again the next night. Because graffiti is always subject to erasure, it is highly ephemeral, but its ephemeralness results from its powerful ability to incite. Graffiti's disruptive "presence" is due to the various surfaces that it can occupy. Grafitti is typically drawn on interior or exterior walls, dumpsters, concrete supports of expressways, and garage doors. Its messages frequently turn the corners of buildings in a blatant disregard for space. In violating the conventions of printed space, graffiti acquires a loud public "presence" and announces its distinct illegality. Graffiti maintains an

unusual tension between erasure and inscription, between presence and ephemerality.

In the summer of 1990 in Splitsville, graffiti seemed to instigate a war among gangs by publicly announcing "we're going to get you." As such, it also announced the control of territory. Territorial control becomes particularly important for the selling of drugs. In the case of the stronger gangs, drug traffiking is so profitable that they consider themselves organizations due to their ability to purchase entire buildings. In contrast to Mainstream society's declaration of ownership through the exchange of cash, graffiti symbols declare metaphorical ownership. The graffiti system itself is used like cash to declare ownership of the local "hood" (neighborhood), at the same time that it announces verbal revenge.

An interpretation of graffiti as metaphorical ownership reflects the racial and economic tensions that exist in Splitsville. It allows us to understand the special relationship between "antisocieties" with "antilanguages" and more conventional society through the appropriation of the latter's cultural symbols. Halliday's (1978) notion of "an antisociety is a society that is set up within another society as a conscious alternative to it." It depicts the social dynamics embedded in graffiti. Graffiti symbolizes a mode of resistance which may take the form of passive symbiosis or of active hostility and even destruction (p. 164). Resistance, perhaps, is most possible when the antisociety adopts structures similar to those of the "normal" society.

The stronger gangs of Splitsville appropriated the hierarchical structures of more mainstream organizations. In the case of a local gang one finds a president, vice presidents, an enforcer, a "Council of 5" (a judicial body usually in charge of maintaining the rules of the gang), and foot soldiers called "pee wees." Some gangs also have treasurers who collect fees from the membership. Stronger gangs have copies of "The Book," which contain rules, rituals, and prayers that are observed by gang members. Like a "normal" society which organizes itself around certain printed documents (e.g., a constitution, written laws, contracts, and manuals of procedure), antisocities also center much of their activity around similar kinds of print. In short, some gangs seem to further their resistance to "normal" society by appropriating many of its modes of organization.

As stated earlier, the communicative system used by gangs distinctly reveals the forces of appropriation. According to my analysis, a "normal" society presents its own range of complex semiotic material, and gangs, select and transform that material to fit their own prescribed meanings. These meanings acquire nuances not connoted by the "normal" society, and in this way become an antilanguage that is obscure to most outsiders. Obscurity is achieved through reconfiguring and supplementing the semiotic material of the "normal" society into the gangs own language. For instance, graffiti is written typically left to right like conventional texts, the number system and the alphabet remain intact, and symbols such as crowns and pitchforks are still understood as crowns and pitchforks) yet it takes on different connotations in the context of gang culture. These appropriating tendencies add another layer of density to the semiotic material of a "normal" society, and perhaps, is another way by which gangs resist the received meanings of the larger society.

In this brief piece, I have barely scratched the surface in analyzing the reading of graffiti. Further analysis of the study's data may elucidate gang members' sense of community identity, a deeper sense of inter-ethnic dynamics depicted in the writings on the wall, and the speech diversity and novelistic language expressed by graffiti symbols. Still, further research is needed to frame the notion of appropriation within a larger question, "What constitutes community identity?" As Bakhtin (1981) suggests, communities that are in contact interanimate each other. They infect, disrupt, and even discharge their differences during their interaction such that each commmunity's beliefs, values, and language system (including its way of speaking) are exchanged, resulting in ephemeral identities.

Note

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Discussants' Comments on Preceding Papers

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Collectively, the authors assert numerous conceptions of literacy that go beyond the conventional notion of literacy as an interaction between the individual and written text. These authors weave a connection to literacy and to each other's work by expanding the common notions of text and construction of meaning. Together, they illustrate a number of components which comprise literacy and literate events: home socialization of oral language expression, family verbal interactions about daily activity, community representation of multi-dimensional media, and interaction with literature books in the family and the school. The focus of the construction of meaning which undergirds involvement with literacy moves from the individual into the social world and is bound by a sense of perceived cultural identity and active participation in one's social environment.

These papers have two common themes that intersect with a broader notion of literacy: cultural identity and empowerment. Literacy as specific skills and activities is a common notion in a society that still believes it is a melting pot. Given the broad cultural consensus of literacy as a personal attribute, (Olson, 1977) schools have historically evaluated student achievement solely on the basis of reading scores. Educators assume that once a person learns the basic skills to encode and decode written symbols, they earn the designation of a literate person. Absent in this concept of literacy, of course, is the understanding of context. Context as an important component of our understanding of what constitutes literacy, has received extensive attention in the last decade with respect to culturally diverse communities (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Heath, 1983; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Trueba, 1984). The papers presented here contribute further evidence for a re-conceptualization of our popular notions of literacy that encorporates context as a fundamental feature of its definition.

The differences between literacy and a literate event are raised by Juan Guerra. Of significance is the expansion of the concept of text beyond a piece of writing to include oral and visual texts. In his comprehensive model, he argues for extending the definition of literacy to include a more extensive role of oral language. In some communities where there is a limited experience with the written word, oral language practices are valued much more highly and carry many analytic capabilities typically attributed to conventionally conceived "literate" activities.

Literacy as a social practice is always accompanied by specific forms of organization (Street, 1984). Ferdman (1990) argues that "being literate" refers to having mastery over processes which code culturally significant information. This means that a person who may be considered an illiterate person in one culture may be classified as being quite literate in another. In a multi-ethnic society, variant conceptions of what constitutes literacy need to accurately reflect its demographic reality.

Cultural adaptation occurs on many levels as individuals interact with signs and symbols of the diverse cultures in American society. Cintron takes us to the walls of buildings in Splitsville and shows how gangs relentlessly appropriate Latino or Anglo culture to engage in symbolic conversations with disputing gangs and to make a social statement about power relations among the various groups in the community.

Cintron points out that while the Anglo group owns the buildings and walls that provide the canvas for the gangs, graffiti makes a statement of metaphorical ownership to the business establishment. This act, I maintain, indicates knowledge of the imbalance of power relations between the haves and have nots. The walls display the problematic limitations of community identity to assert itself in the midst of complex cultural settings. Cintron's work provides evidence of the subtle yet strong influence communities in contact have on each other. The interpretation of the public symbols is indeed important to analyze to increase our understanding of how communities participate in literacy activity that promotes their cultural identity and their status in relation to each other.

Culture exists as a product of social interaction and organization, and Vasquez's paper presents a closer look at the nexus of literature and literacy in a multi-cultural community. By examining verbal extensions of individuals' daily experience through interaction with family members, she finds that individuals in an immigrant setting have ample opportunities to engage in analytic activity. The four-family study describes how children read and interpret their everyday world in spontaneous conversations in the home—a structure which parallels literacy activities involving written text in the classroom.

As part of the formal schooling, children from culturally diverse groups encounter difference in behaviors emphasized by the educational system, the school, and the teacher. In many cases, these differences are seen as effecting the learning process. Pease-Alvarez's study of preschoolers engaged in face-to-face interaction involving clarification and elaboration requests, challenges the perceived discontinuity between the language of the home and that of the school. This perception has been a source of unnecessary conflict for linguistically different children whose access to educational resources have been limited on this basis. Pease-Alvarez, however, asserts that these question types are a common practice in the homes of the two Mexican origin children. Further, she demonstrates how the adult's scaffolding help to prepare children for school-based literacy events in the instructional setting.

Allexsaht-Snider describes how increased awareness among parents was evidenced by a positive change in their self-perception and efficacy in being able to participate directly in their children's literacy learning. Through literacy project workshops they formed new relationships with other members of their cultural group and shared common fears and successes as they learned from each other. The approach taken in this study conveys the importance of family literacy to obtain access to available resources. Parents considered the relationship between what they are learning in relationship to their personal experience, validating their role in the construction of meaning.

Empowerment is an on-going intentional process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources (Allen, Barr, Cochran, Dean, & Greene, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). Access to varied literacy practices assumes active participation in constructing one's reality. It recognizes diverse cultural identities breaking the barriers of sociocultural isolation imposed on culturally diverse communities. Literacy, therefore, becomes a tool for realizing one's cultural identity and empowerment.

Ethnographic perspectives on literacy help to conceptualize at a close range the interaction of children and adults in various settings within Latino communities and across other cultural groups. In these papers we hear the people's voices in their respective settings, and these voices help us to construct alternative ways of knowing reflective of the multi-cultural reality of American society. We find that culture identity is not a discreet set of criteria but a fluid process of accommodation, appropriation, and assimilation. In other words, there is an acceptance and commitment to a local community rather than to a specific culture.

While these papers clarify several areas of literacy, they also point to the need for further research into the home-school connections. Critical questions are raised about how the school responds to the notion of making oral literacy as valuable as written text. We need to know more about the home and school's explicit and implicit messages about learning practices. Much needs to be learned about how communities become empowered through involvement in their own literacy practices.

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Work-in-Progress:

The Impact of Social and Information Networks on the Schooling Experiences and Life-Chances of Mexican-Origin High School Youth

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The study reported here forms part of an ongoing program of research aimed at better understanding how social networks shape the schooling experience and life-chances of Mexican-origin high school students. Social networks have long been viewed as the vehicles by which people in society gain access to resources and opportunities leading to social mobility. At the same time, social networks can also be viewed as social boundaries, imposed largely by economic conditions within a particular community, which restrict people's participation in social arenas within the mainstream of society—and therefore, restricting their access to institutional resources.

A network-analytic approach to understanding young people's life-chances begins with the most fundamental aspects of social inequality in society, explained in terms of the inequitable distribution of opportunities for forming instrumental relations with different people capable of providing various types of institutional resources and support (e.g., job and career-related information and guidance, academic coaching and mentoring, organizational recruitment and sponsorship, etc.). Opportunities for forming instrumental ties often have to do with participating in particular social, organizational, and work domains within the school, the local community, and the greater society. For young people from low-income families, such opportunities are typically constrained by the economic and ecological conditions of the school and of the local community.

Operating out of the Stanford Center for the Study of Families, Children, and Youth, and in collaboration with six San Francisco bay area high schools, my research team and I gathered extensive interview and questionnaire data on the social support networks of 205 Mexican-origin high school students. Most of the data obtained in the semi-structured network survey was coded, and converted into quantitative form. This coded data has allowed for a series of multivariate statistical analyses to be conducted.

The findings reported here center on the students' acquisition of various forms of informational support, such as the provision of specialized information and guidance related to academic tasks, career decisions, educational and job opportunities, crisis intervention, and the utilization of community services.

Among the findings of the study, high-achieving students, and those characterized by higher educational expectations, reported significantly more personal ties to non-family, white-collar adults: teachers, counselors, extended family members, and professionals in the community. The relation between ties to white-collar (professional) adults and educational expectations, however, was strongest among working-class, first and second generation students in the sample. For the working-class students in the sample, reliance on white-collar contacts for informational support was associated with track level, participation in both community-based and school-based organizations, and support networks characterized by a particular structural pattern: low-density, ethnically diversified networks, with social ties dispersed across a larger number of social domains. Reliance on white-collar contacts (e.g., teachers and counselors) for informational support was also associated with level of bilingualism. Relative to their English-dominant cohorts, highly bilingual students in the sample demonstrated a greater likelihood of forming relations with white-collar adults in the school and community. With regard to students' friendship networks, high-achieving students, and those characterized by higher educational expectations, reported having peer networks which were school-based and ethnically diversified; in other words, while friends remained predominantly Mexican-origin, high-achieving students were more likely to incorporate White and other non-Mexican-origin adolescents into their social networks.

Surprisingly, while a great deal of research has been conducted on social support and social networks, almost all of this work has been conducted on adults. Very little of what is known by researchers has been applied to youth-related issues, particularly the problems of academic underachievement, early school departure, gang formation, and youth unemployment. Furthermore, most of the research literature on Latino youth which deals with environmental influences on school achievement and attainment have so far only implied the importance of networks and social support. The study of adolescent networks, as described here, promises to provide theorists, policy-makers, administrators, teachers, counselors, social workers, and parents with a better understanding of how access to institutional resources (i.e., information,

impeded by the structure of an adolescent's social network. It is hoped that this understanding will help families, schools, and service agencies develop or improve existing interventions intended to promote the social development and academic persistence and performance of youth from low-income communities.

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