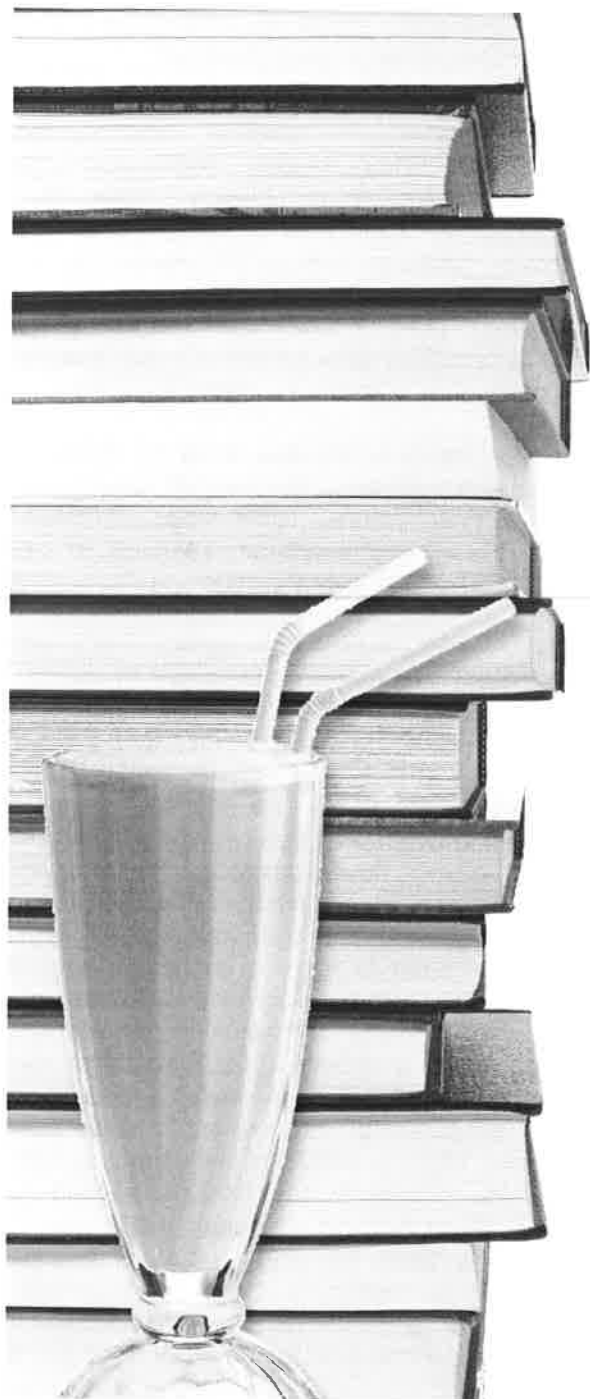


Nontraditional Literacy

Nontraditional Forms of Parental Involvement in Literacy Development: The Book Mobile and Other Stories

BY PATRICIA GUERRA AND CLARENA LARROTTA



Abstract

This qualitative research examines family literacy practices used by working-class Latina/o parents. Through personal narratives two Latina researchers illustrate how their parents and family members engage in nontraditional parental involvement activities that promote literacy development and learning. Analysis of narratives reveals incidental learning occurs through nontraditional parent involvement. In literacy development this learning occurs when parents and children interact in daily life activities. Three themes are explored--nontraditional reading resources, value assigned to literacy, and family interactions. Each theme is explained and accompanied by example narratives. Relevant implications for family literacy instructors are provided.

Introduction

It was one of those rare days when my mom left work two hours early to take us on an errand. It was the first day of summer vacation and there was no school. After picking us at home we drove four blocks to a strip center that housed several stores, including a drug store. At the end of the strip center parked on the street was a very large and long vehicle that looked like a portable building on wheels. Actually called a book mobile, it was a smaller library containing a variety of children and adult books and a librarian at the front desk to check books in and out. These mobile libraries were used to serve residents in the suburbs because the city only had one main library.

Once we parked, my mother led us into the book mobile, introduced us to the librarian, and asked how to sign up for a library card. Because I was only eight years old and my brother five, my mother helped us complete the necessary paperwork, and then co-signed as the responsible party for any lost or damaged books. After explaining the library rules and procedures, the librarian led us to the children's section and pointed out the different genre of books. I remember standing in front of the shelves of books in awe. Although we did not have children's books at home, I loved books. I loved their smell and feel, but especially the places and times to which they transported me. I checked out about five books that day and my brother three. I wanted to check out more books but my mother explained I could only check out as many as my brother and I could carry. She promised that every two weeks when the book mobile returned she was going to let us walk the short trip back; return the books and check out more.

Upon leaving the book mobile, we walked across the street to the drugstore where my mother bought each one of us a milk shake, which was a real treat, and one we were not allowed to have very often. As we left the drugstore my mother told us she would give us just enough money every two weeks to have this treat before walking back home. Driving home my mother took the route we would walk to and from the book mobile, instructing us to avoid the major thoroughfares. It is funny in looking back on that day, I do not remember my mother getting a library card or ever checking out books for herself.

The bookmobile story above narrated by Pat is just one of many examples illustrating how our parents like many other parents of color engage in nontraditional parental involvement activities (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Del Valle, 2002; Heath, 1983; Mercado 2005; Zentella, 2005), that promote literacy development and school achievement. For working-class parents of color, involvement in their children's literacy development is often perceived as non-existent because of their "failure" to use "traditional" practices such as reading bedtime stories, buying educational toys, and implementing shared reading techniques (Daniel-White, 2002; Lopéz, 2001; Zarate, 2007). Even though they do not engage in "traditional" parental involvement activities, many of their children go on to develop literacy and are successful in school and in higher education.

This article examines family literacy practices used by working-class Latina/o parents, that is, how multiple generations learn together and how they use and value literacy (Weinstein, 1998). Through sharing our literacy autobiographies, we (the authors) examine the literacy practices used in our families while growing up. We will (1) identify nontraditional forms of parental involvement resulting in the development of literacy habits children cultivate for life; (2) explore strategies for integrating these nontraditional forms in parenting and home-based education; and (3) use our personal narratives to provide relevant examples and implications for family literacy instructors. According to Worth (2008), narratives speak to "the representation of an event or sequence of events. It is closely tied to description, but it goes beyond description" (p. 43). This article presents stories of our literacy development during childhood and explores the question: What involvement behaviors did the parents of these two Latina Ph.D. university professors use to facilitate their literacy development?

Redefining Literacy

In the past, literacy has been defined in simplistic terms as the ability to read and write. Powell-Newman and Beverstock (1990) explain: "In the past a person who could barely read and write was judged to be literate...As a nation, we are now coming to realize that literacy involves the many dimensions of our many cultures, and we are redefining literacy accordingly..." (p.7). The definition of literacy needs to accommodate to modern times and to the many cultures represented in the population of our Nation. It is important to view reading through a socio-cultural lens (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000; Gee, 1990) that goes beyond technical skills of decoding sound-symbol relationships and highlights the importance of cultural, historical, and political contexts for comprehension. Chu (1999) challenges the traditional conceptualization of literacy and suggests (1) Expanding the definition of literacy that takes into account the language and cultural knowledge of linguistic minorities, (2) examining the socially contextualized nature of literacy and literacy practices of linguistic minorities, and (3) understanding how the literacy of linguistic minorities is measured (p.5).

Furthermore, many factors determine the extent to which a person is literate in the heritage language or other languages (culture, social role, education, economic status, and length of residence in the person's native or adoptive country).

With the notion of *emancipatory literacy*, Freire and Macedo (1994) suggest two dimensions of literacy, the individual and the social. In the individual dimension, students have to become literate about their immediate environment histories, experiences, and culture. In the social dimension, they must appropriate the codes and cultures of the dominant spheres. By learning how to navigate in the dominant culture, students transcend the individual dimension. They need to interact and understand both dimensions in order to become successful literacy users. Teaching and learning in this framework, therefore, must draw on funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) based in the background knowledge, life experiences, and linguistic practices of the students and their communities. Literacy practices and purposes vary from culture to culture and from household to household (Pérez & Torres- Guzmán, 1996; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Literacy is part of our daily life and routines; no matter what the socioeconomic status of the person or the family, literacy is present to a higher or lower level of frequency and fashion in every household.

Nontraditional Literacy Involvement

Research indicates that a number of nontraditional involvement behaviors are used to facilitate literacy development by parents of color (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Farr, 2003; Heath, 1983; Lopéz, 2001; Mercado, 2005; Valencia & Black, 2002; Zentella, 2005). For many children of Latino background, oral tradition, consejos, funds of knowledge, and the value of hard work are manifestations of non-traditional parent involvement behaviors.

Oral Tradition

In the oral tradition stories are told rather than written and are conveyed through folktales as well as songs, chants, music, poetry, dance and rhythms (Heath, 1983). In many Latin American countries like Mexico corridos (folks songs), dichos (proverbs), riddles and jokes are also considered part of the oral tradition (Farr, 2003). Passed on from generation to generation some stories teach history and tradition while others entertain and provide moral guidance. These stories are performed in public settings or shared in homes between family members. Regardless of setting, a high value is placed on the storyteller's creativity and verbal dexterity.

Consejos

Through *consejos* (advice or life lessons) Latina/o parents shape children's behavior and instruct them in school matters to encourage the development of self-sufficient individuals (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994; Valencia & Black, 2002). *Consejos* like "My job is to feed and clothe you; your job is to go to school and learn" or "You need to finish school so you won't have to work in the fields or clean houses like me" are delivered as brief messages or embedded in stories shared through the oral tradition. Usually, conveyed spontaneously, these lessons center on important experiences that create bonds of care between parents and children.

Funds of Knowledge

Strategies, skills, abilities, practices, and bodies of knowledge essential to a household's functioning and wellbeing comprise a family's funds of knowledge. Examples of these funds include family history, migratory practices, household composition, income producing and recreational activities, child-rearing practices and beliefs, and oral and written literacy practices in Spanish and English (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992). Drawing upon their funds of knowledge families use literacies to make sense of daily life experiences involving medical and health care, child-rearing, spiritual guidance, leisure and other relevant activities (Mercado, 2005).

Value of Hard Work

Research on migrant parents (Lopez, 2001) suggests that they instill the value of hard work in their children as a means to communicate the importance of having an education. By helping children experience the harsh conditions of manual labor, parents motivate children to obtain an education, which in turn will get them a better job and end the family's cycle of poverty. Parents believe that if children learn to work hard, they will to do so at work and in school.

It is important to continue gaining knowledge into the ways in which non-mainstream parents assist their children with reading and writing development using life events and community interactions that are part of the daily life of families (Ortiz & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2005) rather than judging them for what they "fail" to do like reading nightly to their children. As a case in point, we like many other Latinas/os were not read to as children because our parents did not see it as their role. Teachers were responsible for teaching academics and parents socialized children's behavior (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). Additionally, our parents worked full-time to make a "better life" for us than what they experienced as children. Even if they had wanted to help with academics, between work and household chores little time was left in the evening to work with children. Our parents did not read to us nightly or use other traditional forms of parent involvement; however they developed literacy in other ways as the remaining sections of this article highlights.

Literacy Autobiography

According to Steinman (2007) the literacy autobiography is "a reflective, first-person account of one's development as a writing being" (p. 1). Building on her definition, our literacy autobiographies include the many aspects (i.e., reading, writing and culture) of literacy development, not just writing. Literacy autobiography is the method of reflection we used to generate our narratives. According to Sparks-Langer and Colton (1991), reflection requires three elements--cognitive, critical, and narrative. Cognitive refers to how people use their knowledge to make decisions. The forces that drive thinking--"experiences, goals, values, and social implications" constitute the critical element (p. 37). Narrative may include both elements but the focus is on understanding how people make sense of their lives and their experiences (Merriam, 2009; Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). For Clark and Rossiter (2008) "Narrative learning falls under the larger category of constructivist learning theory, which understands learning as construction of meaning from experience" (p. 63).

Data Generation and Analysis

Through a series of informal conversations, we (the authors) told stories about how we learned to value reading and writing and the roles different family members played in developing literacy habits within us. We took individual notes and started writing our stories to have a data bank. Once we were done recalling and telling these stories we typed them and looked for patterns. Using open coding techniques (Creswell, 1994) and narrative analysis (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009) we drew upon our narratives to understand the meaning of our literacy experiences growing up. Our focus was on how our parents and family members engaged in nontraditional forms of parental involvement that promoted our literacy development and school achievement. We juxtaposed the findings from our narratives (Strong-Wilson, 2006) against the dominant discourse on parental involvement in children's literacy development to identify non-traditional forms.

Two Latina Researchers

Currently we are working as assistant professors in the college of education at a public university in central Texas. The following paragraphs present the background of our upbringing and families.

Patricia Guerra

Born and raised in San Antonio, Texas I am at least a third generation Mexican American. Beyond that I am unsure because my parents knew little of their family history and rarely discussed it although my brother and I often inquired about it. Growing up during the depression, I think their families spent their time struggling to survive from day-to-day. My mother was the youngest of eight children and my dad had three older brothers. Both lived in extreme poverty during childhood, especially my dad. After being orphaned early in life, he lived with his godmother in a shed behind his Uncle's house with no food, running water or electricity. Forced to drop out after sixth grade in order to survive, he did odd jobs and manual labor until he joined the military at 16. Four years later he was honorably discharged with his GED. My mother graduated from high school and then worked as a bookkeeper. While my mother spoke English and Spanish, my dad was bilingual and bi-literate. He learned to read and write Spanish from his godfather who required him to read the Spanish newspaper nightly.

From the age of five I grew up in middle-class neighborhoods and attended schools that were predominantly White. I was bilingual until the age of

five when I was caught speaking Spanish to the only other Mexican American student in my first-grade class. I was immediately sent to the principal's office where my parents and I were told if I ever spoke Spanish again at school, I would be expelled for the year. From that day on my parents never spoke Spanish to my brother and me again. Consequently, I lost my Spanish and my brother never learned to speak the language until much later in life. Out of my immediate family I was the first to go to college and graduate with a bachelor's degree and the first out of my large extended family to earn a master's degree. I attended the University of Texas at Austin where I graduated with a Ph.D. in education.

Clarena Larrotta

I was born in Armenia, in the coffee region, in Colombia, South America but I was raised between the interior of the country, the mountains, and the pacific coast. Growing up my family was poor. My dad worked different jobs, as a door-to-door salesman, in the ships checking the quality of the merchandise that arrived in the port, and as a watchman. My mother worked at department stores in a variety of service positions. I am the second child in a family of five children, three girls and two boys.

My mother's schooling reached only the fifth grade and none of the women in her family finished secondary school or attended college. My father quit school when he was finishing first year of middle school because he wanted to start making money. However, his father wanted him to pursue a degree, which most of the men in his family did. Women in my father's family were a different story; they were only allowed to continue their education through the fifth grade. My grandfather used to say: "Las mujeres sólo tienen cabellos largos e ideas cortas" [Women have perfect hair and imperfect ideas]. Following their parents' model, my parents did not encourage my sisters and me to study. Also, my mother got pregnant two times in a row when I was about to finish high school. The little money my parents made covered basic needs for five children (food, clothing, shelter). However, I managed to attend college working part time jobs; dealing with many economic difficulties I obtained a bachelor's degree in education. During my third year in college I started teaching English to children at a bi-national center. Seven years later I traveled to Puerto Rico and obtained a Master's in English Education. Next, I attended the University at Texas at Austin where I graduated with a Ph.D. in education.

Broadening Understanding of Parental Involvement in Literacy Development

From our literacy autobiographies three themes emerged—nontraditional reading sources, value assigned to literacy, and family interactions. In the sections that follow each theme is explained and accompanied by excerpts from these autobiographies.

Nontraditional Reading Sources

The examples presented in this section highlight reading materials not commonly considered resources in an environment that fosters literacy development. On the surface these two homes do not appear to provide a print rich environment however when examined closely these homes had reference books, manuals, gossip magazines and other nontraditional reading materials. Books present in the home were not necessarily purchased to develop children's literacy skills.

Books at Home

Since the living room in our house was like a museum and was reserved only for entertaining company, it was off-limits except when I was to dust the furniture on Saturdays. The "good" furniture was kept in this room along with porcelain vases and other objects sitting on tables and shelves that my mom loved and did not want broken. On one wall of our living room was a fireplace with built-in four-foot bookshelves on each side. These shelves were lined with expensive books my dad had purchased when I was a baby. They were beautiful. Each one was bound in a tan hardback cover with a red leather label on the spine. The pages were like parchment and smelled wonderfully. The title was embossed in gold on the front cover and each page was gilded. Since I never saw my parents read these books, I guess they were used as décor like the other "expensive" objects in the living room. Drawn by their beauty, I spent hours reading in the big easy chair next to the bookshelves once my parents left the house on Saturdays (Pat).

Although Pat's parents did not intentionally buy books for her to read, they displayed them in an accessible location and in plain sight along with other "art" objects in the living room, which gave them value and significance and sparked her initial interest in books. By placing a comfortable chair next to the bookshelves her mom also created an inviting environment where reading was encouraged.

The only books I remember seeing in my house growing up were books with adult content such as sex manuals, murder mysteries and western stories, and a cartoon series for adults called "The White Samurai". However, as a child I did not have access to those books. My dad used to hide them from us, sometimes locking them up in a drawer, but I "borrowed" them whenever no one was looking. I hide in the bathroom or my bedroom to read. I remember reading the samurai story when I was 9 and the other books when I was 12 (Clarena).

It becomes evident that parents know certain reading content is not appropriate due to a child's age. However, by their existence and hiding place, children know parents read these books. Parents also communicate the message people read for purposes other than academic. As these two stories illustrate Latina/o parents may not utilize traditional parent involvement behaviors like reading to children or buying children's books but they do other actions that spark children's reading. By having books and other reading materials accessible in the house and signifying their value by placing in important locations, they unintentionally encourage children to read.



Encyclopedias

When I was in middle school, my parents purchased an expensive set of encyclopedias for me to use. I don't recall ever seeing my mom or dad open one of these books, not even to instruct us in how to use them. They did tell me I should use them to do schoolwork. Unable to take me to the library after school, these books became the substitute library. I used them to write research papers and do other homework. After a few months, I remember seeing my younger brother sitting in the living room spending hours reading each encyclopedia from cover-to-cover. He loved

reading the stories and sharing his knowledge with me. I'm convinced this routine was in part responsible for his acceptance into medical school with a full scholarship (Pat).

Buying costly encyclopedias was a huge sacrifice on the part of Pat's parents. This involvement behavior supported literacy development as well communicated the importance of learning and the value of education. Furthermore, observing Pat's use of these books served as a reading model for her bother. Reading these non-traditional resources increased his knowledge and developed vocabulary and reading skills.

One afternoon I was alone in my grandmother's fancy living room. I was curious about the encyclopedias in display next to the expensive liquor bottles and antiques. I grabbed volume "M" and looked inside. I remember reading the word "medicine" and learning about the origins of medicine. The volume discussed how in past centuries prisoners were used as guinea pigs to study the human body, especially the brain. I was 10 and I still remember the picture of a prisoner tied up on a cement counter screaming with his head open. Three doctors were looking inside the man's head using weird tools. It was so interesting that I kept reading until I heard steps and put the volume back on the shelf. I knew I was not supposed to use the encyclopedia without adult supervision (Clarena).

In this home encyclopedias were also for reference but were not to be handled unless an adult was present. Like Pat's brother, Clarena was fascinated by the stories found in the encyclopedias. History presented as stories held her interest and encouraged more reading.

Gossip Magazines

While visiting my grandmother on the weekends I borrowed gossip magazines from my youngest aunt who lived with her. I took the magazines home and read the love stories in the romance section. This was exciting reading for me because it was a different type of reading from the one we did for school. I found these stories very similar to fairy tales (Clarena).

In this example, gossip magazines provided by an extended family member are another source of non-traditional reading material used to develop literacy skills. This type of reading was helpful in exposing Clarena to character development and the structure

of stories with a plot, problem resolution, beginning, middle, and end.

Almanac

When I was in fourth grade we learned about dinosaurs. Fascinated by these creatures, I went home each day and shared my newly acquired knowledge with my mom. One day, I remember going with my mom to trade in her S&H green stamps at the local redemption store for a large, colorful paperback book that looked like an almanac. (Green stamps were given to customers at the checkout counters of supermarkets when they purchased food.) Since we didn't have a lot of money, my mom usually redeemed these stamps for small appliances so this was an unusual exchange. The almanac contained pages of short paragraphs about dinosaurs--their habitat, food needs, and other pertinent facts. Next to each paragraph was a space where a picture of a dinosaur was to be glued like a postage stamp. My parents did not read the paragraphs to me or ask specific questions about the information but each month I received a new set of animal pictures. I glued each picture in the appropriate space and spent hours studying the pictures and descriptions. (Pat).

Although not a traditional reading resource, the almanac and the monthly set of animal pictures Pat's mom redeemed for the green stamps built on her interest of dinosaurs. The pictures along with the descriptions encouraged her reading and expanded vocabulary and sentence structure among other literacy skills. Additionally, the redemption of stamps for the book rather than home appliances signified strong support of Pat's reading and learning.



Value Assigned to Literacy

Our parents instilled the value of literacy through daily-life reading and writing interactions that were not necessarily school-like (Ortiz & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005) but still conveyed the importance of literacy development. These involved using literacy such as individually reading the newspaper, reading a manual to make repairs or reading notes with instructions.

Reading Models

My parents loved to listen to the stories my brother and I wrote. While mine were five-page romance stories, my brother wrote 30-page "books" of James Bond adventures. Although our parents did not read our stories themselves, my brother and I read each other's. His were just as exciting as watching the James Bonds movies. My parents did, however, read the daily newspaper from front to back and on Sunday mornings it was a two-hour ritual because the paper was so thick (Pat).

Even though Pat's parents did not read and interact with stories in traditional ways such as conducting shared reading or asking questions about the content, they listened intently while she and her brother read them aloud and gave lots of praise. Receiving admiration from the most important people in their lives placed great value on their work and encouraged more reading and writing. Additionally, both siblings served as reading models for each other.

My dad didn't read to us when we were children but he used to buy the Sunday newspaper and read it in his special chair the entire morning. I peeked over his shoulder or asked questions until he was annoyed. He answered one or two questions and then gave up and took the comics section of the newspaper and told me: "Take...and go away... leave me alone. I want to read!" I obeyed him and went to my room and deciphered the stories told in the cartoons. I am not sure I knew how to read yet (Clarena).

Since my dad was handy, he had a garage full of tools. Each one came with a manual that he filed in a box along with the manuals for the appliances in our house. If the lawnmower or stove needed repair, he sat in the den studying the appropriate manual until he felt prepared to fix the device (Pat).

Parents and children reading together was not the norm in these families. Moreover, newspapers and manuals are not considered traditional reading

material like books but in reading them daily Pat and Clarena's parents served as powerful reading models, demonstrating reading was critical for accessing information like city and world events. And, when Pat's dad read manuals and then repaired equipment Pat observed a concrete link between reading's functional use and relevancy.

Teaching Siblings

After school each day I played school with my brother. Since he was younger, I was the teacher and he was the student. I taught him lessons learned in school—the alphabet, spelling, vocabulary, and I read to him. As a result by the age of four he could read. (Pat).

When I became an elementary school teacher and earned a salary, my first present for my brothers who were 7 and 8 at the time was a big book with a collection of classic children's stories. This book had two CDs and I was excited that my brothers enjoyed listening to the stories, looking at the colorful pictures, and turning the pages (Clarena).

As illustrated in these excerpts, literacy development does not belong solely to the role of parents but is shared by other family members. Socialized by parents who value interdependence and have different role expectations for older and younger children (Trumbull, et al., 2001), older Latina/o siblings like Pat and Clarena, assume roles similar to parents such as providing childcare or sharing their funds of knowledge with younger siblings. Socialized by school, Pat and Clarena learned more traditional involvement methods, which they in turn used with their younger siblings.

The Importance of School

My first year in middle school my parents bought me a desk. Located in my bedroom, this desk provided an official place to write my stories, read, and study. Each day after school, my mom asked if I had homework, which was her way of telling me I should go work at the desk in my room and get it done (Pat).

By providing a physical space and asking about homework, Pat's parents signified the importance of literacy. Moreover, they sent a strong message that learning and school are important.

Since my two brothers were born when I was 17, I grew up with two sisters. Because we were women there were very strict rules at home about

when and where we were allowed to go. School was the only place I was allowed to go at any time of the day or week. I remember signing up for after school tutoring even though I didn't need it just for the fun of being able to leave the house (Clarena).

Clarena's parents did not attend school meetings or pick up her report cards. However, they communicated the importance of school by allowing her to attend school and school-related functions at any time.

Family Interactions

Family members come together and recount stories focusing on real-life events and family affairs. These stories entertain, teach, inform and/or pass on history and culture to the next generation.

Storytelling

Each night at dinner, our parents told us stories about what happened during their workday. Since my dad was a salesman he had lots of stories about the dealings with customers each day. After he finished, my mom shared her story of the day's events. Working as a clerk at the county courthouse she told fascinating stories about co-workers and the cases heard in court. It was like listening to daytime soap operas. Once she finished, they turned to my brother and me and asked about our school day. Our parents were not the only adults who told stories in our family. Every weekend and holiday we visited relatives who also shared stories while children listened (Pat).

Many times early in the morning my mother fixed breakfast for my dad and after, we waived him goodbye at the door. My two sisters and I then sat on the floor around my mom who used to sit on a chair by the kitchen table and tell us stories. She wore a long nightgown, sat like a frog, and pulled the nightgown down to cover her legs and feet while sitting on the chair. I don't know why I thought that was fun to watch and still today I remember that image. Two of the stories she told frequently were how she met our dad and their wedding day. Since my grandparents did not approve they got married in secret but my granddad arrived at the church with a rifle to stop the wedding. During these times, my mom also told us what we were going to do during the day and week, and about her concerns over her and my dad's jobs. I wasn't in school yet but I still

treasure those moments in the mornings when my "ma" would tell these stories (Clarena).

In the traditional method of shared reading parents read books to children and children are expected to interact with parents by asking questions, discussing details or pointing out items in pictures. As these excerpts illustrate, parents tell stories of real-life events and expect children to listen quietly while the story is told. Real-life events transformed into oral stories entertain, teach/inform, and provide moral guidance to family members. Through the oral tradition family history and other significant events are passed down from generation to generation. Rich with details and emotion stories are told within the context of relationships between people.

Parents modeling and encouraging the telling of stories facilitates the development of literacy in several ways. First it provides a space and time for dialogue and interaction to occur among family members where adults practice their skills and children listen and learn. Second, like reading texts, interlocutors have to make sense of the story's meaning, understand new vocabulary and follow story structure. In addition to drawing upon cognitive abilities, storytelling engages affective skills like imagination, spirit and heart (Clark & Rossiter, 2008).

Recipes and Grocery Shopping

Since my mom was not the best cook—believe me her homemade tortillas were so bad we purchased them from a "tortilla factory"—she relied on recipes a lot. Cut from newspapers and magazines leafed through at the beauty shop, she and I would carefully read the recipes together to make weekend meals. Since my mom worked full-time, by ten, I was preparing weekday suppers by myself using these same recipes. I must have reread them hundreds of times (Pat).

When I was 7 my mom used to send my two sisters and me to the market on the beach while she stayed home cleaning and got ready for work. She gave us a list of groceries and seafood for us to buy. We had to decipher the words on the list and make decisions about what to buy depending on the price and what was fresh (Clarena).

In Pat's case, in addition to providing opportunities for oral interaction between mother and child, use of the recipes communicated the functional value of literacy—reading accomplishes a task in the daily routine of life. Repeatedly mulling over these recipes

encouraged reading and learning new vocabulary related to cooking and math literacy (i.e., measurement and temperature). Similarly, when Clarena deciphered the grocery list and made calculations and decisions about the purchase of food based on the amount of money she was given, she also strengthened reading and math literacy through real-life application.

Implications for Adult & Family Literacy Instructors

Instructors working in family literacy programs should first, broaden their definition of parent involvement in literacy development beyond traditional behaviors of shared reading, buying children's books and other behaviors to recognize and value the involvement behaviors working-class families of color use. Rather than seeing families for what they do not do or have, view their funds of knowledge (i.e., reading materials, family interactions, sibling relationships) as assets upon which to draw for literacy instruction.

Second, during home visits instructors should identify nontraditional types of reading material such as comic books, magazines, the Bible, reference books, brochures, recipes, medical/drug information and other functional material present in the homes with which they work and use in literacy instruction. Additionally, instructors should inquire about literacy interactions between parents, children, and siblings to identify potential sources for incidental learning that instructors can incorporate during literacy sessions.

Third, instructors should encourage adults to use storytelling as a means for promoting literacy development. "Narrative is also how we craft our sense of self, our identity" (Clark & Rossiter, 2008, p. 62). Similar to what happened in our families; story telling is a powerful means working-class families utilize in order to educate their children and convey a positive message about self, culture, and education. Clark and Rossiter (2008) explain learning through stories requires listening, telling, and recognizing stories, which involves receiving and making sense of a message. "Stories are powerful precisely because they engage learners at a deeply human level. Stories draw us into an experience at more than a cognitive level; they engage our spirit, our imagination, our heart, and this engagement is complex and holistic" (p. 65). In telling stories we establish connections and recall other related experiences and as a result new learning happens.

Finally, consider having older siblings and extended family members, not just parents, practice literacy

with children. Have children write stories about their families and encourage families to continue to cultivate oral traditions such as giving advice (*consejos*) and using proverbs (*dichos*) in their conversations as another means of developing literacy. Instructors can devise other assignments around these practices as a way to validate families' literacy skills and enhance the traditional curriculum established by the family literacy programs they serve.

Final Thoughts

The three themes presented in this article are consistent with existent literature explaining there are multiple ways for family literacy to develop other than reading books and reading with your child (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Farr, 2005; Heath, 1983; Zentella, 2005). Although our stories reflect parental involvement practices from 30 years ago, current research on working-class Latina/o families reveals that many of these practices are still evident in today's homes (Farr, 2005; Mercado, 2005; Reese & Goldenberg, 2008; Zentella, 2005). Literacy is developed through families' funds of knowledge and it is embedded in daily life experiences. This development occurs through the use of printed material as well as through language-learning opportunities found in Latina/o homes (Reese & Goldenberg, 2008) such as storytelling, telling proverbs and jokes, giving advice or life lessons, practicing religion, and singing and listening to music. These practices contrast with the perceived lack of involvement of these families by some family literacy educators (Farr, 2005).

Additionally, the concept of print rich environment manifests in different ways depending on the home (Ortiz, & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2005; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). In some homes a rich print environment is comprised of books and a computer while in others it encompasses magazines, flyers, the Bible, newspapers, manuals, catalogs, health and medical documents, greeting cards, and other non-traditional reading materials. It is not social status, race, or economics that make a home rich in literacy, but the value placed on literacy and education. In a study of Mexican immigrants, Delgado-Gaitán (1992) found a range of texts and literacy tools used in homes despite the fact that parents had little prior schooling. This and other studies (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Mercado, 2005; Moll, Neff, & González 1992;) suggest that the extent to which families use literacy as an integral part of family life is the key to shaping literacy acquisition. Therefore, it is important to disrupt the dominant discourse that the only or the

best way to develop literacy is through the use of books and reading bedtime stories to children. It is evident that the use of nontraditional reading material can help families, their children, schools and institutions, build a bridge to academic literacy development.

In examining our literacy autobiographies we, the authors, illustrated that through non-traditional parent involvement incidental learning occurs. In other words, unintentional and unplanned learning happens in a natural way (Kerka, 2000; Rogers, 1997). In literacy development this learning takes place when parents and children interact in daily life activities that do not necessarily have an academic purpose. Consequently family literacy educators will benefit from gaining knowledge and acknowledging the value of all types of family literacy practices. This will call for an assets-based approach in which educators identify what sparks children and parents' interests as a way to motivate and further their development of literacy skills.

Author's note.

The authorship of this manuscript is credited equally to both authors. Each contributed equivalent efforts toward its conceptualization, analysis, and writing.

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