Opportunities for Learning and Interactions that Promote Literate Actions and Practices:
An Ethnographic Study of a Family Literacy Program

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Research Questions

How does a family literacy program make learning accessible to parents?

Rationale

Many years of research indicate that when parents are involved in their children's education, children achieve better grades; they are more motivated to learn, have fewer discipline problems, and have a higher self-esteem (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Educators often question why some parents are not involved in school. Research indicates that first, many parents are intimidated by the school system (Valdes, 1996), and some may not know how to help their children. Secondly, there are not a lot of opportunities for parents or families to be involved. These studies suggest the need to examine two questions: If the school system wants parents involved in school, what are they doing to make school more accessible to parents? What do schools provide as opportunities for parents to get involved in their children's education?

This study examines how a family literacy program makes learning opportunities accessible to parents. As part of this family literacy program, parents participate in a classroom-learning environment that provides particular opportunities to interact with their children and teachers. In this study, I show the kinds of interactions that are happening between teachers, parents, and children. Furthermore, I make visible that through these interactions, certain learning opportunities are being constructed. Through data analysis, I examine how these interactions promote literate actions and practices. In the analysis of this program, I examine how parents and teachers construct knowledge through interactions across time and I make visible how parents take up what is being

offered through different contexts, therefore creating different opportunities for their own

and their children's learning.

Review of Literature

The public school system faces tremendous obstacles in achieving success for all

students. Schools are faced with issues affecting diverse populations, such as cultural

and language barriers, economic status, and educational levels, making it difficult to

reach the standard level of academic success for students. Since the early 1960's,

educators have operated on the premise that good home-school relations and family

involvement are integral to school improvement (Allexsaht-Snider, 1995). Furthermore,

research has shown that successful parental involvement results in higher student grades,

improved long-term student academic achievement, and an increase in positive student

attitudes (Poirot & Robinson, 1994, Epstein & Becker, 1982, Riley, 1996). Research

shows that even one visit to school by a parent during the school year raises a student's

grades (Stevenson & Baker, 1987). Furthermore, when parents participate they are

indirectly telling their children how important education is. "Parent participation sends a

powerful message to students, and has a direct and profound impact on their

achievement" (Stevenson & Baker, 1987, p. 5). Consequently, parents must be active

partners in a child's education. They have the power to help their children be successful

in school.

Although there has been some research on parent involvement, the idea of school

projects designed to promote family literacy is a recent phenomenon. Currently, there are

four laws governing family literacy programs: Reading Excellence Act, Workforce

Investment Act, Elementary and Secondary Educational Act, and Head Start Act. The

major funding of family literacy programs is authorized through two pieces of legislation approved by Congress in 1998: The Reading Excellence Act which is designed to ensure that every child can read well and independently by the end of third grade. This law included $10 million for family literacy grants. The second act, The Workforce Investment Act (replaced the National Adult Literacy Act of 1991), gives family literacy a major priority, along with adult basic education and ESL programs (Amstutz, 2000). Family literacy programs usually combine services in early childhood education (Head Start), adult basic skills education, and parental education (ESL classes).

Amstutz (2000) illustrates how family literacy programs are designed to make sustainable changes in a family. The design of the programs integrate the following: 1) interactive literacy activities between parents and children, 2) training for parents on how to be first and primary teachers for their children, and how to be full partners in the education of their children, 3) parent literacy training that leads to economic self sufficiency, and 4) age appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences (p. 207). Moreover, family literacy programs attempt to provide assistance to those families that are in need of educational services to reverse an intergenerational cycle of educational failure (Amstutz, 2000, p. 208).

Federal funding for family literacy programs has increased from $14.8 million in 1989, to more than $135 million in 1999. Particularly, for the fiscal year of 2001-2002, the legislature allocated $50 million for Local Educational Agencies to provide ESL classes to parents as proposed by Proposition 227. These funds are distributed to participating LEA's based on their collective enrollment of English learners. On a one-time-basis, LEA's received $100million for the year 1999-2000, in response to the late

passage date of Proposition 227. Thereafter, the state allocation will continue to be $50 million annually (California Department of Education, 1999, CBET Program). While there has been an increase in funding, there have not been standardized guidelines regarding the development and implementation of these programs at the local level. Furthermore, there has not been valid research done on the effectiveness of these programs.

In reviewing research, one of the most challenging tasks was finding evidence or studies that examined the effectiveness of family literacy projects (Amstutz, 2000). Amstutz claims that much of the literature of family literature is based on self-report data. While these testimonials may be valid, they do not provide substantial data to claim that family literacy programs are based on documented effectiveness. Amstutz examines several reports that when evaluated, did not have any documentation of validity to their conclusions. A report done on the 1995 National Evaluation of the Even Start Family Literacy Program, for example, followed four cohorts of participants from 1989 to 1992. The evaluations found no significant effects on reading and writing or on the relationship between parent basic education and children's test scores. Additionally, there was no significance level of increase in the parent's pre-and post-data.

The effects of an effective or successful family literacy program are not short-term. Changes will be visible as a process that evolves through time. Thus, the assumption that increases in test scores or proficiency standards will be the most important factors contributing to the success or effectiveness of the program is insufficient evidence of a program's long term impact. Questions must be asked about the psychological changes that empower the family through their course of study of their children and about the

families' beliefs and perceptions as to why they should be involved in the educational process of their children.

Research on suggests that many family literacy programs have been designed to "fix" families that are assumed to be in need of help. Many programs are based on the deficit approach model, according to which families are viewed as not having competencies (especially in the area of literacy). Few studies explore the rich contexts for literacy in many low-income minority and immigrant families. Because, these literacies may not be school-like, they are often discredited by educators. Auerbach (1989) suggests that many of these deficit-oriented programs undermine the family strengths and give rise to the notion of cultural imperialism: the need to take on middle class values in order to succeed in school. Furthermore, educators often blame parents for not being involved in school, but the educational practices of the schools are rarely examined as a potential factor in children's low academic achievement (Amstutz, 2000, p. 213).

Among low socio-economic families, parent involvement has often been viewed as one-sided. That is, the school system has defined parent involvement as seeing parents in a classroom, reading books at home, or helping children with homework. There is little recognition of other factors in the home that support the academic and social development of the child. Because many low SES families tend not to get involved the way parent involvement has been usually defined, they are said not to care about their children's education (Valdes, 1996).

Whether the difference in action is seen as a deficit or as a culture clash, the fact that there are differences has been noticed and made apparent. Different groups, such as governmental agencies and educators, have tried to create means by which minority

parents can become educated and involved (Valdes, 1996). This is done in the hopes of

bridging the discontinuity that exists between home and school and therefore helping

underachieving students.

The challenge for schools today is to prepare all students to be successful in the school

system. Unfortunately, the school system is guilty of not responding to the needs of

minority families. The failure to provide these opportunities reiterates the economic and

social inequalities that exist in our society today. Academically, minority children have

always been behind the national average. In addition, minorities have among the highest

drop out rate (Rumberger, 2000).

While we may continue to ignore this issue, it is apparent that minorities' success in

schools is dependent on the ability of the family and school to incorporate both family

and school values that can empower the student to succeed (Valdés, 1996). The real

question is: Are schools doing this? Are schools providing opportunities for families to

participate in the education of their children? Some have tried to alleviate the problem by

the creation of family intervention or enrichment programs, often clumped under the

label of family literacy programs (Valdes, 1996). It is important to note that a family

literacy program that is created with the mentality of the deficit model is very different

from one created with the idea of culture clash in mind. The former, an intervention

program, tries to remedy the situation by teaching parents about one area of solutions

while the latter, an enrichment program, tries to use cultural knowledge that parents

already have and connect it with academic or "school" knowledge. It uses cultural

knowledge as a tool for assisting parents to move forward within the new culture. It

teaches families about the cultural capital that is needed to achieve success in the new

culture while it attempts to empower them by making parents, children, and teachers'
partners.

The Study

This study examines some important practices of a family literacy program that make
learning opportunities accessible to parents. As part of this program, parents participate
in a classroom-learning environment that provides particular opportunities for parents to
interact with their children and teachers in an academic setting. This program makes
accessible to parents the language and the learning tasks of school, while empowering
them to learn and practice literate actions with their children.

This study also examines how knowledge is constructed over time, in the practices
and activities of a family literacy program, thereby giving parents the opportunities to
learn and practice literate actions. A social construction view is taken when looking at
what occurs in this family program. By using this framework, it allows us to understand
that in order for learning to take place; a person has to make sense of what is presented.
It provides ways of examining how members, in and through their face-to-face
interactions, shape and are shaped by a mutually constructed social activity (Putney,
Green, Dixon, Durán, 1998). Tuyay, Jennings, and Dixon (1995) write about making
sense of this negotiation and how it presents different opportunities for learning. When
people interact with what is being offered, they use their existing knowledge to interpret
and interact with the given context. An opportunity to learn, according to these authors,
is one that offers people an opportunity to interact with context and to make sense of it.
People in a community make connections with what is being made available, and

thereby, construct new knowledge. This new constructed knowledge forms the basis for the ways in which parents in this community practice literacies.

Social Context

   The setting is the northern tip of Santa Barbara County. The school is surrounded by agricultural fields and produce packaging and distribution plants. The town's population is approximately 6,100 residents. The school district serves 1,200 students in Kindergarten through eighth grade. The student ethnic background is 92% Hispanic, 2.6% Filipino, 2.8% Caucasian, 1.0% African-American, and other. Sixty-two percent of the student population is limited English Proficient.

   The data was collected in an ESL Program, which was designed to teach English to parents. This program was funded after Proposition 227, which eliminated any language other that English from California public school classrooms. Following this legislation, funds were available to school districts to teach parents English, in hopes that they could help their children do better in school. Following legislation, this Community-Based Educational Tutoring Program (CBET) was developed in my school district with three goals in mind: 1) to teach English to parents, 2) to provide parents with the opportunity to interact with teachers, children, and the school system, and 3) to ensure participation by having parents sign a pledge to tutor children once they acquire English skills.   The classes for parents are held twice a week for two hours. During one hour, parents and children receive English instruction separately. For the last hour, the parents are given the opportunity to practice working with their children on literacy activities.

Participants

The ESL Program for parents is held at the local elementary school. Currently, there are three teachers who teach the parent courses. In addition, four teaching assistants work with the children in a separate space during parent English instruction. Participants are mostly parents, but the program also open to other community members who may not be parents.   Approximate attendance of the classes range from about 15-20 parents in each class. There are two classes: beginning level one and beginning level two. There are two sessions, each consisting of 16-20 weeks. In a survey collected, I learned that a large portion of the parents who participate in this program are newly arrived immigrants from Mexico. All parents have achieved some elementary educational level, averaging from second to third grade in Mexico.

The teacher observed in this data collection, is a regular substitute within the school district. He is bilingual, and has been part of the community for many years. His family is well known with this community as well.

Tools

The data was collected through participant observation, videotaping of instruction, field notes, artifacts, participant interviews and surveys. Running records and event maps were constructed to show sub-events and events as they occurred in class. Interaction during events was transcribed to represent events that occurred across time (Green, Franquiz, Dixon). This allowed me to make visible the important interactional components by which the teacher and parents were constructing knowledge in order to practice literate actions.

Data Analysis

Videotape transcription was used from the beginning of the program (Day 4) to examine the different interactions between teachers, parents, and children. This gave me an opportunity to make visible the face-to-face interactions (Green & Wallat, 1981) that occurred. Transcription was done in message units (Green & Wallat, 1981) to also represent units of talk. In these transcriptions, I explored the importance of text and how the teacher provided interaction with text. More importantly, looking at these units allowed me to see how these parents took up new knowledge and used it in working with their children.

The use of ethnography provides a basis for identifying the patterns of interaction within and across the events. It also allowed me to examine how language was used to accomplish the construction of context (Tuyay, Jennings & Dixon, 1995). Contexts are socially active entities, which are constructed by members of that community as they engage in social interactions (Green & Wallat, 1981). In this class, context was produced by the interaction of the teacher and parents in the class. It was then co-constructed when text was made available in space. This ethnographic approach to data collection reflects the logic-of-inquiry that I use to guide my study on how members shaped the opportunities for constructing cultural knowledge (Putney, Green, Dixon, Durán, Yeager, 1998). This approach provides a conceptual framework for collecting and analyzing data from an emic perspective, and for examining how discourse shapes what is being displayed as learning and what is being learned. Using an ethnographic lens allowed me to make visible what occurs in this family literacy program.   It allowed me to better understand the interactions that occurred within this class and how these interactions

influenced and promoted opportunities for the participants to learn and practice literate actions.

To give a sense of the overall program, I will focus on one night of class. The class was a beginning level class at the beginning of Session 1, early in the fall. During this class, the teacher began with modeling practices of the school: practices that include writing name and date on papers to be turned in. The teacher stated that he expected parents to continue such practices throughout the course, just as their children were expected to do during their instruction time in school. The teacher then described the importance of language in life, in education, and in building a successful future. With this introduction to language, the teacher explained the use of descriptive words. Throughout the night, the teacher made reference to the importance of language and communication. He specified the distinctions between English and Spanish. He also repeated words and phrases very often. The teacher also used the parent's native language when clarifying or making an important message. For the first half-hour of class, he built and talked about "language".

After the talk about language, parents were paired to look at pictures in a book. Their goal was to practice coming up with descriptive words that told about the picture. The teacher allowed parents to work together for a time span of about twenty minutes. After this time, the children entered the room, and teacher refocused the group by again modeling the activity they were to do with their children. The parents then took up their role as teachers and guided their children through an activity similar to one they just experienced. Children and parents sat together and created descriptive words and phrases that told about the pictures.

Part I: Interactions between Teacher, Parents, and Children

I selected the transcript of this night because it was early on in the program. Having

been there that evening, I remembered certain key subjects that emerged in my mind. My

rationale for using this lesson was that the teacher was constantly building on the

importance of communication; more so, he was making a distinction between

communication in two cultures. This is important since it is a class where parents and

children are building on interactions to learn a new language. As an observer, I also

remembered the array of literacy activities that the group practiced. I was also very

interested in how the teacher helped build the trust level within the group of English

learners.

Segment 1: The teacher is talking to the parents about the English Language.

06:31:09	as we have discussed language is the foundation of education in this country
	es muy importante que sus hijos se sientan confortables con el idioma del ingles.
06:35:36	I said the difference between nuestra cultura our culture and maybe the culture of this country here
	is a lot of words are used in communication with our children
	because for whatever reason maybe were busy working were busy doing other things and we don't talk that much with our children so what happens

is that the child
at a young age
is not acquiring that vocabulary

we want to make sure
by talking more
by saying more

This class transcription allowed me to better understand the kinds of interactions that occurred in this family program. First, the teacher talked about the importance of language in the American culture. He also discussed the cultural differences of communication between our culture (Latino) and American families. This home/school connectedness allowed parents to see the difference between both cultures, yet emphasizing what types of behaviors are expected in school settings. Seeing the events as constructed across time, we can see that the teacher began to shape the lesson by building a strong foundation for the importance of learning the English language, and in building communication with children.

An event map can help us make visible the interactions that occurred through the course. Using the codes of interactions at teacher to parent (T-P), parent to teacher (P-T), or parent to child (P-Ch), we can see that the teacher and parents had several moments of interactions, some interactions were teacher initiated, others were not. Additionally, when the children came into the classroom, they were also included in the interactional space. These interactions between teacher, parents, and children were crucial to learning. As the event map indicates, the teaching was not just dictated by the teacher, or a one way interaction; it was clearly participative, by both parents and children.

This event map can also help us identify what each interaction allowed. For example, at 07:10, when parents and children were working together, we can see both oral and

written language in their interactions. In this scenario, the teacher was explaining the use of adjectives; parents were working with their children to develop descriptive words for their stories, and were also writing them down on paper.

By viewing what happened in these classroom events, we can see interactions and negotiations of roles and relationships as they change. The teacher presented oral text to the parents; the parents then interacted with this text, and constructed their own idea of what the literacy activity should look like. The transcription shows that while the teacher presented text in an oral form, parents used this as a resource to construct a new literacy practice with their children.

CBET FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM
EVENT MAP
DAY 4

Time	Sub-event	Event	Language	Interactional Space	Component
06:15	Getting started	Opening of class		T-P, P-P, P-T	
06:25	Descriptive words	Talk about text	English/ Spanish	T-P	HSC
06:35	Parents working in pairs to develop new vocabulary	ESL Instruction/ Vocabulary Development	English	T-P, P-P, P-T	OLD
06:55	Children enter and sit next to parents	Transitioning to "Family Time"			
06:59	Teacher models lesson	ESL Instruction/ Vocabulary Development	English/ Spanish	T-P	
07:05	Practice use of descriptive words/reading a book	ESL Instruction/ Vocabulary Development	English/ Spanish	T-P,Ch P-Ch, Ch-P	OLD, WLD, SS, HSC
07:10	Parents assuming teacher role	Literacy activity	English/ Spanish	P-CH, Ch-P, T-P,Ch	OLD, WLD, SS
07:55	Parents and children begin to clean-up	Closing of Class/ End of Instruction			

Interactions
 T-teacher
 P-parent
Ch-child
 G-group: P & Ch

Component
OLD-Oral Language Development
WLD-Written Language Development
SS-Support Strategies
HSC-Home/School Connectedness

Using a unit message analysis makes visible the small chunks of information that allows learning to be facilitated. In Table 1, we see the teacher speaking and often repeating words for parents, using body language, facilitating the comprehension and retention of information. This teaching strategy, TPR (total physical response) is an effective strategy when working with English language learners. Again, the teacher refers to the parent's native language when explaining an important concept. These two ways of presenting text to parents opened the opportunities for learning in another language.

Table 1
Teacher Talk and Action

Time	Teacher Talk	Teacher Action
06:30:02	make sure you put your names on these papers	*teacher holds up envelope*
6:32:20	were stressing the vowels las vocales cortos de a e i o u	*teacher writes vowels on board as he says them*
6:37:25	what I would like is working in partners	*teacher signals two parents to work together*
6:38:40	the small boy in the orange helmet is tip-toeing	*teacher stands on the tips of his shoes*

Part II: Constructing Opportunities for Learning: How these interactions promote literate actions and practices

By making visible the interactions that occurred, we can see how they provided parents with opportunities to construct knowledge and to practice literate actions. In this event, intertextuality was socially constructed as the teacher shared examples of descriptive words to use; parents interacted with the text being offered by the teacher, constructed new meaning, and put it into practice when given the opportunity to find descriptive words as they worked together in pairs. This intertextuality, as Bloome &

Bailey (1992) define it, is a social construction in that the juxtapositions of various oral

and written texts are interactionally recognized in an event, acknowledged by those

participants, and has social significance within an event (p. 198). Individuals in this class

participated in the construction process, by observing, interpreting, negotiating, and

taking up meaning for the words and actions within the group (Putney, 1996). The

construction process allowed parents to achieve competence in the literacy activity that

was later practiced. Bloome & Bailey (1992) suggest that in order for a student in a

classroom to participate in an event, they must demonstrate communicative competence

at a variety of levels. This competence was evident when parents worked with their

children to produce new text.   In Table 2: Transcription of Talk & Action, Family 1

(Parent and two Children) we can see how a parent takes up what has being offered by

the teacher and puts it into practice when working with her own children. The parent

with her children worked together in developing words to describe the pictures in the

book. In this table, we can also see that the parent probes the child, "*and what else?*" to

get the child to think about other descriptive words about the picture. The parent is

"taking up" what the teacher had previously presented, thereby taking the role of teacher

as she probes her child to continue thinking of words.

   By making visible the literate practices, we can understand how the resources of the

group become established and were used over time by different individuals. As parents

took up the role of teachers, parents and children were constructing the resources that

were made available by the intertextuality of everyone working together. This process

became an empowerment tool for parents as they assumed the role of teachers.

Table 2
Parent and Child Interactions

TIME	PARENT TALK	PARENT ACTION	CHILD TALK	CHILD ACTION
00:27:55		Parent is sitting with one child on lap, and next to another child.		the child is holding the book
	como esta el perrito	Parent points to picture in the book		
			triste	
	the little dog	Parent writes		child points to pictures
			she's scared and sad	
	is scared	Parent writes	and sad	
	and sad			
	y que mas			
			y luego	
			esta haciendo su libro	

Part III: Parent Involvement

This family literacy program provided parents opportunities for learning in different capacities. We saw an example of the interactions between teachers, parents, and children that occurred in the program, as well as how these interactions promoted literate actions and practices.

Another component of this program was the opportunity for parents to become involved in school. Not only did these parents attend English classes twice a week, but also some of these parents became active participants in my second grade classroom during the regular school day. Five parents from this family literacy program attended my classroom on a daily basis during the Language Arts component of the day. Parents began by sitting in the room-observing, watching, and interacting with a selected few of the students. As they began to participate and learn about our classroom "culture" and the ways of doing literacy activities at school, they began to feel more comfortable to also

practice these activities with the students. Parents began to interact with more students, modeling their own literate strategies that were learned and practiced in class. Students began to see them as teachers, and often called them so, when asking for help.

Although this part of the research was difficult to capture in detail, it was evident through personal interviews that these parents were being empowered by the experience of being teachers, as they helped students achieve their literacy goals. Parents worked with individual students and small groups. In some instances, two parents took the role of teachers to the entire class as they reviewed mini-English lessons.

Segment 2: Parent working with an individual student during an English Literacy
            Activity

00:05:50   Parent: you read story
                          you read all story *(parent points to text)*
                Child: Ya lei *(I already read)*
                Parent: what happened in story?
                Child: *shrugs shoulders*
                Parent: de que se trato el cuento? (*what was the story about?*)
                Child: de los animales
                Parent: the animals
                          y que mas? *(and what else?)*
                          where do the animals live?

                *Parent continues to interact with child, asking questions about the
                story to help the child understand. At times, the parent re-reads
                the story to the child and asks child to underline key words. This is
                a strategy she also learned in the Family Literacy classes.*

As part of this research, several parents were also interviewed about their feelings of participation and the changes that occurred through the process as their roles began to change. All parents saw this opportunity to participate as a positive experience that has greatly impacted the way they work with their own children in literacy. Even in conversations, the parents took notice of the change in their interactions with their children.

Segment 3: Personal interview with a parent participating in the family literacy
             program.

> ahora si
> *now yes*
> hablamos mas
> *we talk more*
> antes no mas la dejaba que hiciera su tarea solita
> *before I used to let her do her homework by herself*
> ahora no
> *not now*
> ahora si les pregunto
> *now I do ask her*
> de su tarea
> *about her homework*
> de lo que sienten
> *about what they feel*
> hasta voy a hablar con sus maestras si necesito
> *I even go and talk to their teachers when I need to*

On one occasion, this same parent did an ESL lesson on the board with the whole

class. On this day, the teacher had written sentences on the board. Students had to select

words to fill-in the blanks. This was mainly an individual activity that allowed the

teacher to work with small reading groups. As a whole group, the teacher would call on

individual students to help write in the missing words. On this day, the teacher was busy

speaking with another parent, and Parent 1 took on the role as teacher. Parent 1 called an

individual student to complete the sentence. The parent had observed the procedure on a

daily basis, and was now ready to assume this role. She took on the responsibility and

guided the children through the entire lesson. After this occasion, the parent asked the

teacher if she could guide the entire group during this ESL component. From this day

forward, this ten-minute activity gave her the role as teacher, as she practiced some of the

same strategies she was learning in the evening family literacy classes.

Although this is a basic analysis of the research that can exist, it is an important one and I want to continue the search. It provides a foundation to learn about how family literacy programs offer parents different opportunities to participate, and in learning about the many different capacities in which these opportunities fall. It also provides a learning opportunity for those who design and implement programs to study about how to produce the most effective learning opportunities for families that participate in these programs.

Conclusion: I have described the family literacy classes and the opportunities that were available for parents to work with their children. This study was a focus on the type of interactions and what this method approach can make visible.

The majority of research supports the view that has focused on the importance of this role construction in the relationship of teaching and learning in a classroom. Teaching and learning should be an interrelated relationship. An important aspect to consider is the differences in presenting opportunities for learning and for what audience. In this family literacy program, parents were being presented with text that was not of their native language, but the way it was provided by this teacher, empowered the parents in their learning of this new given text. Through this analysis, the teacher's teaching style was made evident. Analysis of message units made visible the different techniques that the teacher used when working with English language learners.

There has been research that illustrates the most effective way in working with students who are acquiring another language. Cummins (1986) illustrates the difference between two models: these models operate on the premise of control over classroom interaction as opposed to sharing control with students. This may be an area of future

study in family literacy programs. Throughout this study, it was made apparent and is worth continuing to investigate. Program implementers should carefully address this concern to produce the most effective learning environment and opportunities for the participants.

By viewing what happened in this classroom event, we saw interactions and negotiation of roles and relationships occurring. The teacher presented oral text to the parents; the parents then interacted with this text, and constructed their own idea of what the literacy activity looked like. The analysis showed that while the teacher presented text in an oral form, parents used this as a resource to construct a new literacy practice with their children.

Without considering how members negotiated and acquired knowledge, researchers would be unable to understand what knowledge or resources shaped the context of the discourse. To understand how interactions provide parents with opportunities to learn new literate actions and practices, it is important to view an event as constructed through time. It is important to view this construction as a process that was negotiated, defined, and co-constructed in and across time.

This program was created with the philosophy of valuing the participants existing knowledge. In this analysis, the teacher reinforced their cultural values and language, yet built on connecting these to academic or "school" culture. By carefully looking at this class and analyzing what occurred, we were able to see how the teacher used the participant's knowledge as a tool to assist in the learning. In reality, it helped built the participant's cultural capital and empowered them in their new community of learning.

Policy Implications

This study suggests that there are opportunities for parents that can be made available in family literacy programs. In order to achieve this, policy needs to address family programs at different levels:

1. Classroom level:
   a) Educators must adopt a broader perspective of literacy. Educators should acknowledge that it goes beyond the ability to comprehend and produce oral and written language. Literacy is a cultural and social practice that encompasses a wide range of interactions.
   b) Educators must acknowledge that not all families have the same literacy needs. Educators should be aware of the family's economic or educational resources that may impede families from viewing literacy as parallel to what the school may view.
   c) Educators must recognize the importance of parent and child interactions in developing literacy abilities. As teachers, we must encourage these types of interactions in schools. Literacy acquisition should therefore be a two-way endeavor that involves reciprocal relationships between families and schools. In schools, we can encourage parent volunteers in classrooms during literacy events. At home, teachers should include literacy homework assignments or activities that promote family interactions.
   d) Teaching and learning relationships should be interrelated. This is an important aspect to consider. The way teachers address program participants and presents lessons can encourage or hinder participation. Promoting family interactions may further opportunities for parents to become empowered, as they become literacy partners when working with their children.

2. At the district level: Districts should design and implement programs that meet the needs of their community. More so, family programs should be culturally and linguistically sensitive and responsive to the participants. Programs should also reinforce the cultural and language values of the families as a way to connect them to a new culture and language. Districts should also carefully train instructional leaders to work to this capacity.

New Questions for Research

In order to continue looking at the effectiveness of family literacy programs, we must first take a critical look at how they are being designed, implemented, and evaluated. Secondly, we must take a look at how these programs are helping parents and schools

built a link between the discontinuity that exists. Are these programs meeting the needs

of their participants? How can we inform implementers of such programs of the most

effective ways to make learning opportunities more accessible to the participants?

Lastly, we must address the need for participants to continue the learning process once

these programs are not in existence. Or so, what happens once these program funds have

been exhausted? How can we assure the continuation of learning opportunities and

participation once these programs are not available for parents or schools?

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