

Chapter 7

Multiple Modes of Communication of Young Brazilian Children:

Singing, Drawing, and English Language Learning

Sharon Cecile Switzer

Abstract A series of home visits with a group of Brazilian immigrant families of three and four year olds refutes the premise that financially disadvantaged immigrant children do not receive support for their learning at home. Parents and other family members participate in developing their children's literacy skills, and were observed engaging in a variety of communicative practice, such as singing, drawing, or dramatic play. In this qualitative study approximately 60 home visits were conducted to observe the focal children in their daily home environments. Observed communicative events were coded for type of modality, such as dramatic play, singing, drawing, video, photographs, and art. Data derived from observations of multimodal literacy events revealed that the greatest frequency of such literacy events occurred in dramatic play. In addition, themes identifying the purpose of the multimodal literacy events, often related to relationship building between parent and child, as well as themes related to maintaining relationships and connections to the homeland. Implications for practitioners involve recognizing the numerous multimodal literacy experiences children experience at home before formal schooling, as well as the need for sensitivity on the part of teachers regarding the importance of extended family relationships and connections to the homeland.

Keywords literacy, Head Start, young children, family literacy, emergent literacy, early childhood, immigrant children, immigration, early literacy, ethnography

East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania, USA

M. J. Narey (ed.), *Making Meaning*.
© Springer 2009

Language and the communicative skills associated with its symbolic representation grow and develop out of a context that includes culture, history, and socio-economic influences. Paulo Freire emphasized the critical connection between language and the socio-cultural and historical context in which communication takes place. “The language that we use to talk about this or that and the way we give testimony are, nevertheless, influenced by the social, cultural, and historical conditions of the context in which we speak and testify” (Freire, 1998, p. 58). Language influences and constitutes the spoken context of communication, even as the context of communication, including its social, cultural, historic, and economic aspects, influences language. Indeed, all learning arises from, and is dependent on, the context. It is for this reason that my study of the literacy practices of a group of young Brazilian children examines the home context, as well as the cultural, historical, and socioeconomic background of the families in which they live.

Existing evidence indicates that the beginning of children's literacy and language development occurs through oral language interactions with the adults around them (Bissex, 1980; Chall and Snow, 1982; Heath, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Parents, in playing and talking with their children, provide valuable language and pre-literacy experiences for them (Butler and Clay, 1987; Dickinson, 1994; Larrick, 1982; Morrow, 1993). Existing research, however, has focused primarily on monolingual families, and on print-based modes of communication.

The purpose of this study was to examine the symbolic communicative and language-based activities observed in homes of Head Start children where Brazilian Portuguese was the home language. In analyzing this data, other modes of communication in addition to print were of particular interest.

Communicative Practice and Literacy

What does literacy mean? It is more than decoding and answering comprehension questions. Recent literature sets it in a larger sphere. Literacy events are defined as occasions in which literacy is an integral part of the activity (Barton, 1998; Street, 1987, 1997). This research draws from a study of the uses of print in the home environments of young Brazilian children. Analysis of the data from that study revealed that children engaged in a variety of modes of communication, in addition to verbal expression. I, therefore, re-examined these data using a broader definition of literacy to include multiple modes of meaning-making in the communicative practices observed in the homes.

Grillo (1989) uses the term *communicative practices* to refer to the “social activities through which language or communication is produced” (p. 15). Grillo, then, views literacy as one type of communicative practice within a larger social context, de-emphasizing both reading and writing (together or separately) as the sole indicators of literacy. It is clear that recent trends in research have focused on

understanding the broader context in which literacy develops. The broader view of literate activities as forms of communicative practice would also include drawing, singing songs, dancing, or even creating musical sounds to convey and/or evoke feeling or emotional response.

All learning takes place within the context of a situation or activity. During the child's emergent literacy phase, the family's culture has a significant influence on the child's literacy development. Literacy is linked to the institutions and settings in which it is developed. Therefore, it is important for educators to understand the cultural context of children as they develop their language and literacy skills.

Context of Language Acquisition and Literacy

If we accept the tenet that language and literacy develop, not as isolated skills, but as part of a broader context and culture, then the question that is likely to follow is: What are the ways that language and literacy develop within that context? In recent years the concept has taken hold that literacy is an emerging process that unfolds gradually and continually from birth. This is an important concept, and it is one that has framed my study of the literacy practices observed in the homes of five Brazilian immigrant families.

The development of literacy is a process that begins from the time that language begins to develop in infancy. As children develop their ability to communicate through the interactions with the adults and caregivers around them, they begin to internalize the structures and conventions of the language spoken around them. At the same time as they develop their ability to communicate effectively in that language, they are creating the foundations for the ability to communicate through the symbolic representations of that language.

In-home Practices Affecting Literacy Development of Children

The emergent literacy paradigm has brought to the forefront the pivotal importance and impact of the home and family on children's literacy. Thus, a study of the language and literacy development of young children needs to take into account the home environment because this is the context in which the language and literacy development of these children is taking place.

Multiple Modes of Literacy

In extending the understanding of literacy to encompass the multiple variations in which children make meaning and communicate their thoughts and emotions, I

have broadened my understanding of the activities and interactions observed in the homes of these young children. Similar to studies conducted by other researchers, for example Johnson (2003), I sought to uncover what might be the multiple modes of literacy in this group of immigrant children.

Until recently most literacy research has focused primarily on linguistic and print-based sources of communication (Johnson, 2003; Kress, Jewitt, Ogborn, & Tsatsarelis, 2001). By looking at literacy and learning through the wider lens of multiple modalities (Hamilton, 2000; Kress, 1997; Kress et.al, 2001; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Stenglin & Idema, 2001), I hope to provoke a more thoughtful analysis and understanding of the rich literacy background that immigrant children, especially children of non-English speaking parents or non-native English speaking parents, bring to the classroom.

I have framed the analysis of data reported in this chapter within a theoretical approach that integrates sociocultural and activity theory (Rogoff, 1997; Wertsch, 1991) with a multimodal theory of language, literacy, and communication (Kress, 1997; Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001; Kress et. al, 2001).

Sociocultural and activity theory is founded on the notion that thought and the construction of meaning is by necessity situated in the cultural, historical, and institutional setting in which it occurs (Johnson, 2003; Wertsch, 1991). Thus in my research I focused on what children did, with whom they did it, and what message they communicated in the event.

Such an approach acknowledges that a solely verbocentric approach to understanding communication is limited to the ability of the participants to speak, read, and write using words (Stein, 2000), a particular barrier to participants who are neither fluent nor culturally grounded in that language. In fact, Kress posits that “what is most significant . . . is that the substance of the lesson – the curricular content – is represented in the *image* [italics added], not in the language” (Kress, 2000, p. 338).

In using the term multimodal texts, we are referring to those texts through which meaning is conveyed through multiple means that may or may not include the spoken or written words (Walsh, 2006). Thus multiple modalities of meaning include images such as photos, pictures, and drawings. They include audio texts such as sound effects and music. They also include kinesthetic “texts” such as dance, dramatizations, theatre, and dramatic play.

Since the discipline of semiotics examines how meaning is made through all kinds of signs, visual as well as verbal, we have seen an expansion in our understanding of literacy as multimodal to include “images, gestures, music, movement, animation, and other representational modes on equal footing with language” (Siegal, 2006, p. 65).

The body of research investigating the use of multimodality in classrooms, presents a picture of youth who are demonstrating success in learning, thinking, and understanding, despite the fact that previously they had been identified as “struggling” or “learning disabled” by practitioners viewing their learning and literacy through a solely linguistic lens (Siegal, 2006, p. 73). If we accept the position that drawing and writing are two forms of symbol-making that are equally

valuable in young children's meaning-making (Dyson, 1993), then we would not view drawing merely as a pre-writing activity.

"If students live within communities and cultural contexts that value spoken language, performance, dance, craft, and music more than writing, then how can the worldview of the school integrate these multiple modes of representation to give students the best opportunities to demonstrate their abilities" (Stein, 2004, p. 112)? This brings to forefront the importance of recognizing the multiple modalities of meaning-making that are prevalent in the cultures of many children. According to Archer "To be 'literate' then does not simply mean having acquired the technical skills to decode and encode signs, but having mastered a set of social practices related to a set of signs which are inevitably plural and diverse. . . . Literacies are therefore understood as multiple, socially situated and contested" (Archer, 2006, p. 450).

Observations of In-Home Literacy Events

It is critical that researchers keep the study of literacy within the context of the everyday lives of the people around them (Szwed, 1981). Through in-home observations, I have attempted to learn the stories of my informants as suggested by Bateson (1984) because they are intrinsically worthy (Seidman, 1991). In order to further a deep understanding, my intent was to work with a small group of participants (5 families) with whom I could maintain extended contact over a period of time (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, I relocated to an island off the coast of New England where a community of Brazilians resides, and I remained there for the duration of the data collection.

As an ethnographer, I immersed myself in the Brazilian culture and home-life of the families in my study. I drew upon my past experience of having lived three years as an American in Brazil. This was aided my understanding of cultural issues my participants might confront. I conducted an average of ten home visits per family during the 6 months of data collection. Home visits lasted from one to two hours and took place at times when the parents could conveniently be available. During the study, I was able to see families at several different times of the day and different days of the week, including weekends.

Virtually all aspects of the daily lives of the families were of interest to me in the early stages of the research. It was my intention that by the setting of such broad boundaries the data-gathering process would not be distorted or restricted by any preconceived notions. One aim of the initial visits was to allow the families to become familiar with the research process and comfortable about my presence. When the family members no longer treated me as a visitor and I had ascertained that performance behaviors for my benefit had subsided (between visits 2 and 5), the subsequent field notes were treated as real data.

Following the procedures of other researchers who have studied uses of language (Heath, 1983) or literacy (Purcell-Gates, 1996; Taylor, 1983; Taylor &

Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale, 1986) in the home, I noted and recorded all materials in open view in the home that were related to literacy, including such items as books, printed notices, bills, signs, environmental print on household products, television guides, and writing materials. I also noted conversations that occurred about literacy related activities, such as an inquiry by the parent about what the child did in school that day. In addition, literacy events engaged in by family members on excursions outside of the home, such as paying bills by check, reading labels during grocery shopping, or filling out a form to be on a waiting list for a post office box were also recorded. I also included in my field notes additional modes of communication, such as, singing, dramatic play, drawing, painting, and object-building, such as block building. In short I included all aspects related to children's attempts to convey meaning through symbolic representations or creative activities.

Description of Context and Participants

All of the participants in this study were Head Start participants, living on an island off the coast of New England. The length of time parents had been in this country when the project began varied, ranging from ten years to six months. Thus some parents had lived in this country for some time prior to the birth of the focal child. Others had arrived more recently, bringing their children with them from Brazil.

The focal children of the study were those enrolled in a home-based Head Start program. Therefore, it did not include a pre-school for the children to attend. The central role of the Head Start program was to provide support services for families, parent education, home visiting, as well as assistance in placing children in existing pre-school programs in the community.

Four of the five children were females. Four of the five were four years old at the time of the observations. Four of them had siblings, either older or younger; and one sibling was born during the period of data collection. Because all of the families qualified for Head Start by income eligibility, they all would be considered of low socioeconomic status by the standards of the local community. All of the participants in this study were year-round residents of the island, despite the fact the central economic base was summer tourism.

Length of time in this country varied. Two children had been here less than one year. Two children were born in the United States. One child, Tatiana, had been here about one and a half years. Parents' ability to speak English coincided with their length of time in the United States. For example one parent who had lived in this country for 11 eleven years, was very fluent in English. Other parents spoke virtually no English. Those who did not, such as Augusto's and Maria's parents, studied English with tutors and/or with books and tapes at home. The two children who were born in the U.S. spoke both English and Portuguese and often combined the two when speaking to me.

The dearth of available and affordable English classes made it very difficult for parents to take formal classes in English. The principal language spoken in the homes of all participants was Portuguese.

Parents' educational background in Brazil also varied. One of the mothers had been a teacher in Brazil. Another had been a journalist. One of the fathers had been an accountant. Another said he had done clerical work for an airline. However, the economic situation in Brazil had made it impossible for them to find employment. In this country the fathers were primarily laborers in the construction and landscaping industries. The mothers worked in restaurants and hotels as cooks and housekeepers. Rosa's mother and father owned a Brazilian store that sold foods, cosmetics, and household items from Brazil.

Evidence from the Study: Making Meaning through Music and Singing

Activities involving music and singing abounded in these homes, albeit in different ways and different amounts. The use of music and singing for making meaning was directed by the parents, depending on the value they placed on this mode.

For Augusto's family, music came in the form of toys that could be used to teach skills. He had a musical "alphabet" toy. Although this toy was primarily meant to teach children the letters of the alphabet and the phonetic sounds connected to them, it also played music. The toy consisted of buttons to press. Each button was in the shape of a letter of the alphabet and each had a picture of a word that started with that letter. As he pressed the button, a voice could be heard, for example, "This is the letter 'x'." Choices for the game could be set to "Learn the letters," "Learn the sounds," or "Find it," to direct the user to the correct letter. However, in this home the importance of music was secondary to that of reading and writing.

In Janaina's home, there were no expensive musical toys; but singing was a natural part of the day. During my visits, Janaina typically walked around the house singing songs she had learned in her preschool. The ABC song was a favorite. Her parents encouraged this singing, and joined in with her. Janaina's father was fluent in English, and he sang the English songs with her. Her mother, who could not speak English, sang in Portuguese or Spanish or listened and encouraged Janaina to sing in English. Excerpts from my field notes of observations on different days illustrate this.

Then Father and daughter pretended to be strumming guitars. She sang "Old MacDonald" in English, and he sang the "E-I-E-I-O" with her.

Later she pointed to the letters "ABC. Then she broke into the ABC song followed by "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

On another occasion her mother was doing dishes when I arrived.

All at once she and Janaina began to sing the Christmas song, "Feliz Navidad." They sang it together in both English and Spanish.

Then her father asked Janaina to sing the song of the months of the year. She said to him in English, "I don't know how to start it. You start it." He started it in English for her. Then they sang the song together in English. After that she sang "Charlie[sic] Old St. Nicholas". She wanted her father to sing with her, but he said he didn't know it. Then she sang it to him, and he hummed along.

In this family music and singing was used as a way for family members to connect with one another by joint engagement in a joyful activity. However, music and singing were not predominant activities in either Tatiana's or Maria's homes except in occasional instances when they listened or sang along with religious songs from TV or videotapes.

This was not the case in Rosa's home. Music and singing were major influences in her family. Both her father and her older brother, George, were musicians who played in their Brazilian church services. Their musical instruments, a Yamaha synthesizer and a guitar, were placed prominently in the living room, the central part of the home.

In addition to singing religious songs in Portuguese, Rosa sang to her dolls. She became the singing voices of her dolls in her dramatic play with them. All of the singing in this pretend play was in Portuguese despite the fact that Rosa spoke English as easily as any three year old native English speaker.

Similar to Janaina's home, singing together was as natural as talking together; and singing appeared to be a vehicle for family members to build and maintain relationships with one another. Rosa, her mother, and her older brother frequently interjected their conversations with songs. The following quotation from my field notes exemplifies this.

George, her older brother, had stopped in to talk to their mother. As he left the room, he was singing in Portuguese. A short time later Rosa took a stuffed bear; and her Mother said in English, "Oh, I just love that bear." Then they sang a Portuguese song together. It was a song about a bear.

Then Rosa took a rag doll, and she wound the key on the back of it. It was a music box. Rosa and her mother sat silently, reverently, as they listened to the music box play.

It was clear that music and song were very important in their lives.

Evidence from the Study: Making Meaning through Video and Photographs

During my home visits I observed several instances in which children, as well as parents, used images in the form of video and photographs to interpret their world. In all five homes the television was on during some of my visits. Usually it was tuned to children's programming, such as *Teletubbies*. Sometimes a video of a children's story, such as *Pinocchio* was being played. In Maria's and Tatiana's homes, the television was almost always playing in the living room where the children were engaged in various art or dramatic play activities. In those instances, the television was largely ignored. In Janaina's and Augusto's home, the television was always tuned to closed captioning when available. The parents explained to me that this was to help them learn and improve their English. Television was rarely used in my presence at Rosa's home.

Video

Videos were used as digital narratives in much the same way that story reading or story telling could occur. On one of my visits, Augusto watched the video *Pinocchio*; and he excitedly explained and interpreted to me (only in Portuguese) a description of everything that was happening in the video representation of the story. In effect, Augusto became the narrator of the story to me as he explained and interpreted every detail. On another occasion when he was watching *Teletubbies*, he performed the same role as narrator and interpreter of the story to me.

Augusto laughed at the cartoon and then repeated to me in Portuguese what he was laughing at. He laughed at the music and dancing in the cartoon. He made comments in Portuguese about what was happening in the video. For example, he told me when the goldfish went to bed and when Jiminy Cricket wiggled his bare toes. He talked about Pinocchio; and he noted the hat on his head, the clothes he wore, and the color of his shoes. He also talked about the whale. "He looks so big, and look at the cat and the goldfish in the bowl." Neither would he let me forget the umbrella Jiminy was holding, nor the leaves on Pinocchio's nose.

On another occasion, I noted in my field notes:

Augusto was watching "Teletubbies". He narrated the story for me, and he hummed along to the melody of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star". He chattered along in Portuguese about what was in the video, commenting on "their big stomachs," and the "antennae coming out of their heads." At times he got up and acted out what he saw on the video.

Janaina was the only other child who watched television on a regular basis in my presence. However, the context was very different from Augusto's. Janaina only watched children's videos with her father at her side, and with the closed caption option turned on. These instances were also treated as narrative. However, the experience for Janaina was one in which she cuddled closely to her father, as they whispered comments about the story to each other. On one visit I observed the following:

Janaina was engrossed in the story and was snuggled up to her father. The two dinosaurs in the video talked about their fear of never finding their lost little boy dinosaur. Then the scene went to the little dinosaur who was crying, and Janaina looked really intently with her eyes wide and piercing. She had a very serious expression on her face. A song played, and Dad patted Janaina gently on the arm in time with the rhythm of the music.

Then the scene changed to a beautiful sky at night, star studded as a beautiful song of hopefulness played. Janaina whispered to her father in Portuguese, "It's beautiful."

Then Dad cuddled up to Janaina again. When the movie got scary, Dad would turn to look at Janaina; and he would talk to her very quietly, almost in a whisper.

This TV watching was an intimate moment between parent and child. I think the fact that her father was as interested in the video as Janaina was made the moment special. He didn't think it beneath him to watch an animated video, and I think the message to his daughter about the importance of story was a significant one. The interactions between them were very quiet. Although I was only a couple of feet away, I couldn't hear what he said to her. I think this was intentional, that this was meant to be private between the two of them. I understood this to be a close and intimate experience between them.

In Tatiana's family, the children watched a video only once during my visits. This was because the fuse was blown in the living room and the children's room, and they did not have lights to see. The only room with electricity was their parents' bedroom, so their mother set the TV to show a video for them to watch from their parents' bed. The video was one of several biblical stories for children that they received from their church. It was the story of Joseph who had been sold to foreigners and lived in a foreign country, and it carried deep meaning for the family.

Then Tatiana's mother explained that the children love this story; and she loves it, too, because it is the story of Joseph in a foreign land. He learned the language and became close friends with the king; but he still had a hunger for his homeland and for the chance to speak his own language; and he missed his father very much.

It was clear that the theme of this video, longing for home and loved ones, held deep meaning for Tatiana's mother, as well as for her children.

Photographic Images

Both Augusto and Tatiana, along with their mothers, demonstrated this theme of connection to the homeland and distant family by showing me the cherished photos of their homes and families in Brazil. As recorded in my field notes:

There were photos of past birthdays and vacations, as well as photos of friends, cousins, aunts, and uncles.

The photographs of home were used to keep alive their memories of home. This was especially important for the children, whose memories of Brazil were fading.

Evidence from the Study: Making Meaning through Dramatic Play

As would be expected of three and four year olds, dramatic play consumed a large amount of children's time during my visits.

Augusto's dramatic play took the form of engaging his Ninja Turtles and Tarzan dolls in carrying out warfare with one another. He added accessories, such as toy airplanes, trains, cars, and roads to extend the stories he enacted through them.

There was a ramp for cars to go down a plastic road, many matchbox cars and trucks, a tollbooth, police station, bank, a MacDonald's Playland, highway signs, parking lot, and an auto service center.

Meanwhile as Augusto performed his narrative, he explained the organization of the setting he created for his narrative; and he embellished with sounds and gestures, as necessary.

Augusto explained the cars and the layout to me; and when he put a tree on the set he told me what he was doing. He showed me how various accessories, such as the tree or the toll gate worked; and he moved them to different places on the board to demonstrate this. He also made noises like an ambulance and a fire truck when he moved those vehicles along the roads on his set.

For Maria, Tatiana, and Rosa, dramatic play was manifest through their play with dolls, stuffed animals, and puppets. For Maria, a great deal of her imaginative play revolved around her Barbie dolls and her extensive collection of accessories. Maria's parents, who usually sat near Maria as she played, made com-

ments and asked questions about what she was doing. Maria's mother often got down on the floor with her and became a partner in her play.

At this point in time, Maria had been in the U.S. approximately 6 months, and her experience of international travel was still in her memory. One day Maria brought out a suitcase for her Barbie doll. Maria's mother took this opportunity to find out what Maria remembered about Brazil.

Mother engaged her in a conversation, asking her if she wanted to go to Brazil. She asked Maria about her grandmother and grandfather. She wanted to know if Maria missed them. Then Maria's mother named one family name after another, asking if Maria remembered them. She answered "mais ou menos" (more or less), to each name. (Maria's mother had previously disclosed to me her fear that Maria would forget her family in Brazil.) Then she asked Maria if she missed "Robo". Maria asked who that was, and her Mother said "Cachorro" (dog) to help her remember. Again, Maria replied, "mais ou menos."

Once again the theme of missing Brazil arose, and once again it was initiated by the parent rather than the child.

While Maria's play had centered on Barbie dolls, Tatiana had a large variety of dolls and accessories to extend her dramatic play. In addition, Tatiana's older sister engaged in imaginative play with her. Helena, Tatiana's mother, was only occasionally involved, though she was always within earshot of their activities. The two girls used a variety of "little people", as well as, their dollhouse to dramatize their "stories", which involved coming and going and living in their house. Although Tatiana's sister was in first grade in school and could speak English, the two girls primarily spoke Portuguese to each other.

Tatiana also had Barbie dolls that she dressed and undressed. One of the dolls was dressed like a Bahian Brazilian woman. She wore a large colorful hoop skirt and a bandana on her head. Tatiana also dramatized her play through her stuffed animals that she caused to growl and "scare" me. The girls also engaged in a variety of dress up that involved jewelry and ponytail bands. On one occasion:

The children were playing in the living room at the coffee table. They adorned their hair with elastic ponytail holders, and they had several pairs of earrings. One set was shaped like flowers. Another one was shaped like a leaf. Two more were shaped like half loops, and another was a pair of red love knots. There also were two brooches. One was of a brightly colored toucan, and another was of a parrot. They had a pair of copper-colored elongated "diamonds", which the older child, Thaissa, wore. She had plastic bracelets and more ponytail holders. She went out of the room, and moments later returned with a rectangular mirror with a Currier and Ives print, about 24" by 12" in size. She stood it in place on the coffee table, and the two girls took turns adorning themselves and looking at themselves in the mirror.

Rosa's dramatic play was influenced by a big playhouse in her room, a child-sized piano, and an extensive collection of stuffed animals and puppets. In her

play and in her conversations with me, she switched back and forth from Portuguese to English. I responded to her in the language she used to address me. Rosa used her playhouse for dramatic play scenarios in which she was the mother, and her stuffed animals and puppets were children and guests. One day during one of my home visits

Rosa went into the playhouse and invited me in with her, but I told her I couldn't come in because I'm too big. Then she took more stuffed animals into the playhouse with her, where there was a little kitchen. She closed the door to the playhouse and said, "Wait right here." I heard dishes clanking. Then she opened the door and said, "Here's some food," and she offered me a child-sized saucer. I joined in her dramatic play, and I pretended to eat from it.

Evidence from the Study: Making Meaning through Creating Objects and Images (Drawing, Painting, Building)

All of the children were involved in constructing objects and images in various ways. In fact the Head Start home visitor often brought paints, paper, glue, paste, and other materials to the homes when she visited.

Augusto had a special box that contained chalk, and the cover of the box was a chalkboard. He regularly used it to draw and create pictures that he interpreted to me. One example was the day he made a ship, and he carefully pointed the sails that he made. He explained that they were necessary to make the ship go.

Drawing was an important part of Janaina's routine. According to her mother, Lena, "Janaina draws all day long." Then Lena explained that "Janaina only makes pictures of family. She labels the people in her drawings with the names of family members." An example was one of Janaina's drawings that was displayed prominently in the kitchen. Lena explained that Janaina had drawn a picture of their family and pointed it out to me.

On the wall was a dry erase board with a drawing of a lady, a man, and a very small person. A heart and a star were also drawn into the picture.

Lena proudly showed me pictures of Janaina's drawings as examples of her "creative imagination." One picture was a child on a skateboard. Lena, who had not finished high school in Brazil, was very proud of Janaina's artistic ability; and she encouraged her.

Lena showed me a large book of newsprint that she bought for Janaina's drawings. While I visited, Lena and Janaina sat together as Janaina made pictures.

This was a regular scenario during my visits. Her father, also, encouraged Janaina in her drawings.

Then she and her father talked together in Portuguese. He gave her a marker. She went and took the dry erase board, and he wiped it clean for her. She took it back to the kitchen table and began to draw on it. She drew a circle, and then added what looked like hair to it. Then she added a body.

Maria also liked to make creations by drawing pictures and coloring them. She had her own set of materials to work with.

After lunch Maria went to her room and brought out a book that had blank pages where she could draw her own pictures. She showed them to me. Then Maria drew a simple picture of a tree with apples or some sort of fruit hanging from it. She drew a big heart next to it. Her mother proudly explained that Maria loves books and always has a book in her hand. She also told me that Maria loves to draw and color. Then Maria went to her room and came back with a case full of crayons, colored pencils, and colored felt tip markers. She began coloring the picture she had drawn.

The home visitor, Marisa, made weekly visits to the homes of these children. One day she visited when I was there, and she brought a recipe for homemade play dough as a project for the day.

Marisa gave Maria the ingredients. She helped Maria with the measuring cup, and then Maria poured the ingredients into a bowl as they made the play dough. Then Marisa piled the play dough on the counter in front of Maria who immediately began patting it and working with it. Marisa got involved. She showed her how to flatten it, how to roll it in a ball, and how to roll it into a cylinder. Then Maria's mother came over and got right next to Maria and watched her work with the "masa" (dough).

Tatiana engaged in a variety of artistic creations, often with the help of her older sister. The two girls had a basket of colored pencils, construction paper, and glue that they kept in their bedroom. They often brought the basket into the living room, their play area. One day when I arrived, the girls decided to paint in the living room.

The children brought out paints, water, pencil, and paper. Tatiana had the paints. Thaissa drew a picture of a tree with apples on it. Then she gave the picture to Tatiana who painted the tree, the apples, and the tree trunk. They worked on a towel that had been placed as a cover on the coffee table . . . After a while, Thaissa also began painting her drawings. All the pictures were of apple trees with tree trunks, a mass of green leaves above. All the trees were covered with red, round fruit. The whole background was against a blue sky.

Their mother, who had been a few feet away at the open counter, which was her kitchen work area, came over to see what they were doing. She commented on the blue color of the sky that Thaissa painted. Then their mother started to draw a tree on the paper, and Tatiana began painting it. Then Thaissa put drops of red water paint on her paper. She took a sipping straw, and she blew a design on the paper.

Thaissa and Tatiana also had a variety of construction toys (tinker toys, blocks, etc.). The girls often played together building a structure or a city. Sometimes each built her own, as they worked side by side. They also had a set of red construction blocks. Sometimes their mother participated in their constructions as she had in their painting. During one visit, I made the following observation.

The girls sat down on the floor and took out the box of colored construction blocks that they used before. Tatiana laid out a square with her blocks. Then she asked her mother what it was. Helena told her it looked like a person with arms and legs and a body. Then Helena showed her how to separate the “legs” and make it look more like a person. Then Tatiana played with changing the shape and trying different ways of putting the blocks together.

The girls also had an extensive racetrack that they had constructed on the floor of their bedroom. They, then, used the cars and racetrack as they played out their narratives.

I observed Rosa engaging in a communicative event focused on drawing on only one of my visits. It was a very cold winter’s day, and Rosa discovered that she could breathe on the window and make a fog slate. Then she could draw an image on it. Rosa and her mother breathed on the window together. Then they drew a cross on the fog slate. This demonstrated to me that thoughts of their Christian faith were a routine part of their daily lives.

Multiple Modes of Making Meaning and Literacy

While the previous discussion of evidence from this study has focused on modes of communication other than verbal expression, these families did show that they value the skills that they have been taught are necessary for success in school. In addition to the multiple modes of literacy that were evident in these homes, the children were encouraged to prepare for school. There were numerous instances in which parents taught their children to write letters of the alphabet or numbers. One day

Helena, Tatiana’s mother, was teaching three-year old, Tatiana, how to make her letters. Tatiana made her letters in caps on a lined, spiral-bound tablet. She filled the space between the two lines and formed the letters very perfectly. Helena stayed by her side and encouraged her, saying, “That’s right,” “That’s very good,” and “That’s perfect.” This was all in Portuguese.

Augusto had a toy computer, and a box of letters and numbers; and his mother used these to teach the letters and numbers to him, in Portuguese.

Then he took the chalk out and closed the lid. He drew a picture of a “5” and she praised him. A few minutes later he was looking for a number “1”, and he

took a “J”. His mother explained, “‘J’ is a letter, not a number.” Then she helped him find the “1”.

A favorite activity of all the children was to attempt to “write” or “read” their names and the names of their family members. Rosa made a game of reading and writing and tracing letters of the alphabet to represent important people in her life. One day she induced me to trace the shapes of some styrofoam letters that she brought to me.

Then Rosa ran out and came back with a foam letter “R”. She said, “Write my name,” (in Portuguese). I took the letter R and traced it on my paper. Then she got excited and said, “Do another!” She repeated this, until I had made the letter “R” four times. She pointed to each and said, “Rosa.” Then she brought more letters, and she asked me to trace “E” because it is for her Grandmother, Eloisa.

Parents also counted toys, and other household objects with their children to teach them to count. They shared with me their desire for their children to do well in school. They also expressed their wish to read to their children, but they did not have access to Portuguese children’s books; and so they could not do this. Janaina loved books, and she discovered that I could read to her in English. During one of my visits

She brought me one book after another, in English, to read to her; and we talked about the pictures and the colors. Then she went to her box of books, and she kept bringing me books, one after another, to read to her.

While parents may have viewed many of the activities described above as diversions, I believe that these activities demonstrate that children were using the objects and materials available to them in their play to construct meaning of the world around them, as well as to communicate meaning to others in much the same way that people use linguistic tools to do so.

For example, children in their drawing and painting activities created representations for themselves and those around them that related to family relationships, such as Janaina’s drawings of her family. Rosa, in drawing the cross with her mother, was demonstrating her understanding of the importance of this symbol in the life of her family. She did not need special tools to convey her reverence for this object, which was undoubtedly important to this family who provided a ministry of music to their church. Indeed, music itself was a powerful expression of meaning in this family who sang to one another throughout the day, and who placed their musical instruments in the center of the living room.

The use of video in the homes was one way to provide traditional stories to children whose parents were unable to read such stories in English and who did not have access to these stories in Portuguese. Thus the use of video became a story-telling medium. The description of Janaina and her father watching videos together conjures up images that might be associated with parental storybook reading to children, in which cuddling and touching and whispering are engaged in by parent and child.

Longing for Extended Family and the Homeland

A powerful theme that presented itself again and again as I observed the communicative events in these families was the importance of family and a longing for loved ones at home. As previously discussed, Janaina's drawings were all of family members, which shows how important her family was to her; and Rosa's "game" of naming and writing letters for all the people in her family was another example of this.

The poignant conversation with Tatiana's mother regarding the favorite video depicting the Biblical story of Joseph, the photos of home and family displayed by Augusto's and Tatiana's mother, and the conversation initiated with Maria by her mother regarding traveling to Brazil and remembering family members show that thoughts of home and Brazil are not far from the minds of the parents.

Implications for Practitioners

The understandings derived from this study can provide important messages for practitioners, teachers, and administrators of programs for immigrant children, families, and English language learners.

Literacy and Communication Occurs in Multiple Ways

The children in this study were regularly engaged in activities that involve rich meaning-making and understanding, sometimes in traditional linguistic venues, to be sure, but often such activities involved video, drawing, painting, imaginative play, and music. As teachers and practitioners we need to broaden our understanding of literacy to include these multiple modes of communication. We need to consider ways to open avenues for meaning-making in the classroom so that all children, regardless of linguistic English ability and background, have opportunities to engage in meaningful activities. For example students who do not yet have sufficient English language literacy to write a narrative could be allowed to represent their narrative through video, drawings, paintings, or other representational media.

Importance of Faith, Family, and Homeland

A second implication for practitioners is to recognize the powerful role that faith, family, and homeland hold in the lives of these families. Talk about extended

family in Brazil occurred frequently in these homes, and the pain and anxiety of loved ones was apparent when news of their illness was received. Photos of home were brought out regularly. However, all of these occurrences were initiated by the parents who also voiced concerns that their children would forget Brazil and their beloved family members who were there.

This deep attachment to family may seem strange to Americans who pride themselves on their independence from their parents. However, I believe that this attachment to the homeland on the part of these families emphasizes the courage and determination that it took for them to move so far away from their loved ones for the sake of giving a better life to their children, as well as the family members they left behind. All of these families told stories of sending money back to family in Brazil, as well as saving money to bring parents and loved ones here.

In addition, all of the families were, to a greater or lesser degree, involved in a local Brazilian church. These churches provided fellowship and support for these and other immigrant families. It is my belief that as practitioners we need to revere and respect the strong emotional bond that immigrant families have for their homeland. "Children learn what is important within the cultures of the communities in which they operate through the interactions with more experienced members of those cultures or communities" (Anning, 2003, p. 8). These relationships are part of the culture and identity of the parents, and also of the children. I believe that the important role of faith, family, and homeland is an essential part of the cultural context of these children and their parents. I believe that as practitioners, administrators, and teachers of children of immigrants such as these Brazilians, we need to accept the cultural context that has formed them, so that we can find avenues with which they can connect our culture to theirs.

Literacy and English Language Learning

Contrary to what some may believe, many immigrant parents are educated and literate in their native language. Their difficulty with literacy in the U.S. is due to their inability to read, speak, listen, and understand the English language adequately. Despite their strong desire, which Helena referred to as her "passion", to learn English, immigrant parents often work long hours and are thus unable to participate in programs for English language instruction that can be expensive. Unfortunately funding for public programs has diminished considerably in the past few years, and when programs do become available there are long waiting lists.

The children and parents in this study showed that they value narrative. This was evident in children's dramatic play, in their art work, their block construction, and their use of video. Yet the limited English proficiency of the parents made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to read stories to their children.

Clearly, as practitioners, we need to assist parents in accessing English language instruction on the one hand; while encouraging and recognizing the value of the alternate modes of literacy and communicative practice found in these homes.

The multiple modes of literacy used by these children to construct narrative illustrates their adeptness at making meaning through the arts. Indeed, the presence of such multiple modes of literacy appears to be especially important in families where linguistic ability in English is limited.

References

- Anning, A. (2003). Pathways to the graphicacy club: The crossroad of home and pre-school. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 3(1), 5-35.
- Archer, A. (2006). A multimodal approach to academic 'literacies': Problematising the visual/verbal divide. *Language and Education*, 2(6), 449-462.
- Barton, D. (1998). *Literacy: An introduction to the ecology of written language*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Bateson, M. C. (1984). *With a daughter's eye*. (1st ed.). New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc.
- Bissex, G. (1980). *GNYS AT WRK: A child learns to read*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Butler, D., & Clay, M. (1987). *Reading begins at home*. (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.
- Chall, J., & Snow, C. (1982). *Families and literacy: The contribution of out-of-school experiences to children's acquisition of literacy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dickinson, D. (Ed.). (1994). *Bridges to literacy: Children, families, and schools*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Dyson, A. H. (1993). *The social worlds of children learning to read and write in an urban primary school*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers*. (D. Macedo, D. Koike, & A. Oliveira, Trans.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Grillo, R. (1989). Anthropology, language, politics. In Grillo, R. (Ed.), *Social anthropology and the politics of language* (pp. 1-24). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hamilton, M. (2000). Expanding the new literacy studies: Using photographs to explore literacy as a social practice. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context* (pp. 16-34). London: Routledge.
- Heath, S. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, D. (2003). Activity, theory, mediated action and literacy: Assessing how children make meaning in multiple modes. *Assessment in Education*, 10(1), 103-129.
- Kress, G. (1997). *Before writing: Rethinking the paths to literacy*. London: Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2000). Multimodality: Challenges to thinking about language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(2), 337 - 340.
- Kress, G., Jewitt, C., Ogborn, J., & Tsatsarelis, C. (2001). *Multimodal teaching and learning: The rhetorics of the science classroom*. London: Continuum.
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (2001). *Multimodal discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Larrick, N. (1982). *A parent's guide to children's reading*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster.
- Merriam, S. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Morrow, L. (1993). *Literacy development in the early years: Helping children read and write*. (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

- Purcell-Gates, V. (1996). Stories, coupons and the TV guide: Relationships between home literacy experiences and emergent literacy knowledge. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 31(4), 406-428.
- Rogoff, B. (1997). Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: Participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship. In J. Wertsch, P. Del Rio & A. Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of mind* (pp. 139-164). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. (1981). The literate two-year-old: The fictionalization of self. In R. Scollon & B. Scollon (Eds.), *Narrative, literacy, and face in interethnic communication* (pp. 57-98). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Seidman, I. (1991). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Siegal, M. (2006). Rereading the signs: Multimodal transformations in the field of literacy education. *Language Arts*, 84(1), 65-77.
- Stein, P. (2000). Rethinking resources: Multimodal pedagogies in the ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(2), 333-336.
- Stein, P. (2004). Representation, rights and resources: Multimodal pedagogies in the language and literacy classroom. In K. Toohey & B. Norton (Eds.), *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning* (pp. 95-115). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Stenglin, M., & Idema, R. (2001). How to analyse visual images: A guide for TESOL teachers. In A. Burns & C. Coffin (Eds.), *Analysing English in global context* (pp. 194-208). London: Routledge.
- Street, B. (1987). Literacy and social change: The significance of social context in the development of literacy programs. In D. Wagner (Ed.), *The future of literacy* (pp. 55-72). Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.
- Street, B. (1997). The new literacy studies. In B. Street (Ed.), *Cross-cultural approaches to literacy* (pp. 1-21). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Szwed, J. (1981). The ethnography of literacy. In M. Whiteman (Ed.), *Variation in writing: Functional and linguistic-cultural differences* (pp. 13-23). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Taylor, D. (1983). *Family literacy: Young children learning to read and write*. Exeter, NH: Heinemann.
- Taylor, D., & Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). *Growing up literate: Learning from inner-city families*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Teale, W. (1986). Home background and young children's literacy development. In W. Teale & E. Sulzby (Eds.), *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading* (pp. 173-206). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Walsh, M. (2006). The 'textual shift': Examining the reading process with print, visual and multimodal texts. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 29(1), 24-37.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1991). *Voices of the mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Sharon Cecile Switzer

East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania
East Stroudsburg, PA USA

Dr. Sharon Switzer is an assistant professor in the Early Childhood and Elementary Education Department at East Stroudsburg University. She teaches in the K-12 ESL Specialist program, as well as Language Arts in Childhood Education.