VARIATIONS OF MATERNAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN'S EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT IN CHINESE AND AMERCIAN INDIAN FAMILIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

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Abstract

This paper presents a study that aims to help early childhood educators understand the cultural context in early language and literacy development. It examines how mothers in Chinese and American Indian families support their young children's emergent literacy development during everyday interactions. Twenty mother-child dyads in each cultural community participated in the study. The results of the study indicate that Chinese and American Indian mothers differed greatly in the ways they supported their children in early literacy. The Chinese mothers tended to privilege print-based literacy interactions more than the American Indian mothers. The American Indian mothers tended to privilege the literacy interactions that were based on oral narratives of life and personal experiences. Moreover, the mothers in the two communities emphasized and supported different aspects of their children's early literacy development. The Chinese mothers tended to support their children in explicit, event-specific and elaborative ways. In contrast, the American Indian mothers tended to support their children in implicit and contextual ways. This study suggests that early childhood educators must understand the specific meanings of early literacy in different cultural contexts to maximize the learning potential of every child in the early childhood education settings.

Resumen

Este documento presenta un estudio cuyo propósito es ayudar a los educadores de la infancia temprana a entender el contexto cultural en el desarrollo temprano del lenguaje y la lecto-escritura. Examina como las madres de familias chinas e indias americanas apoyan el desarrollo de la lecto-escritura temprana en las intracciones cotidianas. Veinte parejas madre-hijo de cada comunidad cultural participaron en el estudio. Los resultados del estudio indican que las madres chinas e indias americanas difieren grandemente en la forma en que apoyan a sus hijos en la lecto-escritura temprana. Las madres chinas tendieron a privilegiar las interacciones de lecto-escritura basada en lenguaje impreso más que las madres indias americanas. Las madres indias americanas tendieron a privilegiar las interacciones de lecto-escritura basadas en narrativas orales sobre experiencias de vida y personales. Además, las madres de las dos comunidades enfatizaron y apoyaron diferentes aspectos del desarrollo temprano de lecto-escritura. Las madres chinas tendieron a apoyar a sus hijos de manera explícita, específica del evento y elaborada. En contraste, las madres indias americanas tendieron a apoyar a sus hijos de forma implícita y contextual. Este estudio sugiere que los educadores de la infancia temprana deben entender los significados específicos de la lecto-escritura temprana en diferentes contextos culturales para maximizar el potencial de aprendizaje de cada niño en los escenarios educativos de la infancia temprano.

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Résumé

Cette étude vise à aider les enseignants du préscolaire à comprendre le contexte culturel dans lequel s'opère le développement précoce du langage et de la faculté à lire et à écrire. Elle examine le rôle que les mères de familles chinoises et indiennes d'Amérique jouent dans l'émergence de l'apprentissage du lire et de l'écrire de leurs jeunes enfants au cours de leurs interactions quotidiennes. Vingt paires mère-enfant de chaque communauté ont participé à l'étude. Les résultats obtenus indiquent que les mères chinoises et indiennes d'Amérique diffèrent grandement dans l'aide qu'elles apportent à leurs enfants au cours du développement de l'apprentissage à lire et à écrire. Les mères chinoises ont plus tendance à privilégier les interactions basées sur la chose imprimée que les mères indiennes d'Amérique. A l'inverse, ces dernières préfèrent baser leurs interactions sur des narrations orales portant sur la vie en général ainsi que sur leurs expériences personnelles. De plus, les mères des deux communautés privilégient différents aspects du développement précoce de l'écriture et de la lecture de leurs enfants. L'aide que les mères chinoises apportent à leurs enfants est plutôt explicite, élaborant et se concentrant sur des événements spécifiques, alors que les mères indiennes ont tendance à aider leurs enfants de façon implicite et en contexte. Il ressort de cette étude que les enseignants du préscolaire doivent impérativement comprendre le fonctionnement exact des mécanismes d'apprentissage du lire et de l'écrire dans des contextes différents, et ce afin d'optimiser le potentiel d'apprentissage de chaque enfant dans un environnement éducatif préscolaire.

Introduction

Research suggests that language and literacy development is a gradual and emerging process of constructing meanings in the everyday context of home, community, and school (Clay, 2000; Halliday, 1975; Perez, 1998). Adult support in everyday interactions with young children in various contexts is essential in their journey to become literate (e.g., Daiute, 1993; Lee, 1993; Strickland & Taylor, 1989; Morrow, 2001; Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). However, the support provided by adults in different communities may vary depending on different cultural and child-rearing beliefs (Chang, 1998; Dien, 1998; Heath, 1983; McCarty & Watahomigie, 1998; Perez, 1998; Sperry & Sperry, 1995; Smith, 1998; Torres-Guzman, 1998). For example, middle-class Euro-American parents tend to emphasize print-related literacy activities when interacting with their young children (e.g., Morrow, 1995 & 1997; Neuman & Roskos, 1997), whereas parents in other cultural communities may emphasize cultivating rich contexts for literacy development rather than print-based activities (Heath, 1983; Morrow, 1995; Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2001 & 2000). As a consequence of these different exposures to different styles of adult support, children from different cultural communities may respond differently to the literacy practices in early education settings. Children who are used to the print–related activities at home may fit right in at the school environment. But, children who are used to other forms of literacy activities may feel lost when confronted with print-based literacy activities in the school setting. Therefore, it is important for early childhood educators to understand the different literacy practices in different communities so that they can design literacy activities that are responsive to children with different cultural experiences.

Only until recently, print-based activities were treated as the only form of literacy. Other forms of adult-child interactions, such as oral narratives based on personal experiences, were not considered as literacy-related activities at all (Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2000 & 2001).

However research has shown that oral language is the primary vehicle for developing literacy (Lee, 1993). The oral discourse occurring in the everyday context such as talking about past events (Miller et al., 1997) is central to children's ability to process written language (e.g., Snow, 1993). Children's spontaneous oral language during social interaction with adults can facilitate literacy development (e.g., Beals, 2001; Daiutes, 1993). Even though oral forms of communication between adults and children are increasingly considered to be the basis for becoming literate, few studies have so far focused on documenting the different forms of oral literacy in everyday interactions between children and adults in different cultural communities. Moreover, few studies have clearly defined what can be counted as literacy activities in the cultural contexts despite some suggestions (such as Perez, 1998).

This study examines the everyday interactions between adults and children in Chinese and American Indian communities. We chose these two communities as our focused cultures because they have distinct differences in their literacy tradition, child-rearing beliefs, and attitudes toward education. Chinese culture has a long history of (printed) literacy. Chinese parents tend to place children's educational achievement as priority (e.g., Ho, 1994; Stevenson & Lee, 1996; Tseng & Wu, 1985). In comparison, American Indian culture has a long history of oral tradition (literacy). Adults regard life-related learning as the primary educational goal for young children (e.g., Tharp, 1994). Given the differences, we would like to explore: 1) the characteristics of the literacy-related activities initiated by adults in Chinese and American Indian families and 2) how adults support their young children's early literacy development in the two cultural communities.

Methods

Participants

Chinese Sample. The Chinese community where we conducted our study is located in the industrial part of Nanjing in the People's Republic of China. The study was conducted in the summer of 1999. All the residents in this community were workers of a large vehicle manufactory factory. Twenty mothers and twenty children participated in the study. The average age of the children who participated in the study was four years and one month (S.D. = 3 months). The sample was comprised of an equal amount of boys and girls. All the children were the only children in the families. At the time of the study, 25% of the children spent 4 to 6 hours per day at the factory daycare center, 55% spent 3 to 7 hours with their grandparents, and 20% spent time with their mothers most of the day. The average age of the mothers was thirty years and two months (S.D. = 8 months). The average length of their formal education was seven years (S.D. = 0.46). 65% of the mothers were workers in the factory and 35% were unemployed. Five local contact persons who were the friends or relatives of these families recruited the participants. The first author and one research assistant accompanied by the local contact persons initially visited the families. During the initial visit, parents were informed that the researchers were interested in the everyday activities of the mothers and children. A consent letters were signed and the mothers completed a biographic information sheet. Each family was visited two more times before the data collection began so that the family would feel comfortable with the presence of the researchers.

American Indian Sample. We conducted our study in two American Indian tribal villages located in the Standing Rock reservation of South Dakota in the United States. The observations took place in the spring of 1995 and 1996. All the children we observed lived in

extended family settings.[2] 45% of the families were receiving government benefits. Twenty mothers and their children participated in the study. The average age of the children was four years and one month (S.D. = 2 months). The sample was comprised of an equal amount of boys and girls. All the children in the sample were first-born. 57% of them had one younger sibling and 43% had two younger siblings. None of the children went to schools at the time of the study. 75% of them spent 2-4 hours with their grandmothers[3] and other relatives and 25% spent most of the day with their mothers. The average age of the mothers was twenty-three years and five months (S.D. = 2 years). The average length of the mothers' formal education was seven years (S.D. = 0.72) . 90% of the mothers were unemployed and 10% of the mothers were working in local restaurants and bars. The mothers were contacted through three American Indian undergraduate students who were enrolled in a child development course in a university 150 miles away from the reservation. These students were originally from the tribal villages. The researchers, research assistants, and the American Indian contact students initially visited the families. The mothers were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study by the researchers. Once the mothers gave oral consent,[4] the American Indian contact students completed a biographic information sheet about the participants. Each family was visited two more times before the data collection began so that the family had opportunities to get used to the presence of the "strangers."

Procedures

Data collection.—The mothers and children in the Chinese and American Indian families were observed and videotaped at home during their daily routines. The participants were observed for eight sessions in a period of four weeks and each session lasted about two hours. 345 hours of video-recorded data were collected from the Chinese families (17.25 hours for each mother-child pair in average, ranging from 15-19.20 hours). 322 hours of video-recorded data were collected from the American Indian families (16.1 hours for each mother-child pair in average, ranging from 12.3-17 hours).

Data transcription.— All the video-recorded mother-child interactions in the everyday context were transcribed verbatim to provide an overall context for the study. All the transcription was transcribed and checked by native speakers of the two communities. There was an overall 95% reliability across the transcribers.

Data coding.—Since the purpose of our study is to find out 1) the characteristics of the literacy-related activities initiated by mothers in Chinese and American Indian families and 2) how mothers support their young children's early literacy development, several measures were used to reflect this aspect.

1) We examined the overall maternal initiations of literacy-related activities in relation to other types of activities in everyday interactions. The purpose of this measure was to understand how frequently the mothers in the two communities were involving their children in literacy-related activities. The data were identified and coded in two categories: The initiation of literacy-related episodes and the initiation of non-literacy-related episodes (or other episodes). An initiation of literacy-related episode is defined as an interaction between a mother and her child in which the mother initiated an interaction that was related to the process of helping the child become literate. For example, the following interaction between a Chinese mother and her child was considered as a literacy-related episode:

(The mother was unpacking a new toy that the child just received from a neighbor)

Mother: It is very tough to open the box.

(To the research assistant) Could you please get me a pair of scissors?
Assistant: (Goes to fetch the scissors)
Child: Here, Mommy (runs toward mother with the scissors)
Mother: You stop! Children don't hold scissors. It is dangerous.
Come here, can you tell Mommy what the characters are on the toy box?
I think you know this one (pointes at the character "water/shui").
(Looks at the child).
Child: Ice (bin)
Mother: No, no, no! Look at it carefully. That is "shui" not "bin"

It is clearly that in this episode the Chinese mother tried to teach her child how to recognize the characters "shui" and "bin."

Based on the theoretical framework of emergent literacy (e.g., Clay, 1991; Daiute, 1993, Ready & Daiute, 1993; Daiute & Griffin, 1993; Snow, 1993) and the social cultural theories of literacy learning (e.g., Bourdien, 1977), we also considered the following interaction between an American Indian mother and her daughter a literacy-related episode.
(The mother and the child were chatting in the kitchen)

Mother: Okay. What is --your name?
Child: *Tishipapa*
Mother: *Tishipapa*. What does that mean?
Child: Mmm. Eye.
Mother: What?
Child: Eye.
Mother: And you're named kind of after your Grandma.
Whose name was--? Which means Green eyes. Right?
Child: Mmm, huh.
Mother: Okay. And your Grandma Babe,
How did you hear about her?
Now is Grandma Babe, whose Grandma is? She, my Grandma.
Child: Mmm, huh.
Mother: Your Grandma Shelly's Mom.
And she was really a strong woman, wasn't she?
A long time ago, back in the 1930's, Grandma was,
Um, young and she was having babies.
She lived in a ranch.
And they were just getting started on their ranch.
And they were way, way, way out in the country.
Um, and you know what it is like when you're out in the country.
Well, they didn't have any, um, telephone or no cars.
And , let's see.
You know who Aunt Joan is.
Aunt Joan was a little girl.
And you know who Uncle Bud is?
He was just a little boy.

And you know who Uncle John is?
He was just a little boy.
And Uncle Wayne was in Grandma's?
Child: Belly.
Mother: Yeah. Well one day Grandpa Frank.
You know who he is.
Child: (Nods).
Mother: Okay. Well, he went off to work that day
And back then, it was very important for all
the grandmas to get all of the housework and stuff
done, so that supper was ready by the time Grandpa got home.
And, uh, Grandma Babe had many babies.
Three babies already and she knew she was going to have this baby
that day after Grandpa left.
And she was stuck down at the ranch by herself
with these three little kids, gonna have this baby.
Child: (Giggles).
Mother: So, she told Aunt Joan to take care of the other kids, and
Child: Was she little then?
Mother: Your Aunt Joan was little then.
So, she told 'em to take care of the other kids and she went
into the bedroom for a while.
Well, by the time Grandpa Frank came home that night –
Grandma Babe –
He didn't even notice that Grandma Babe wasn't pregnant (laughs) anymore.
And, he had, she had supper and then realized there was a new baby there.
So, Grandma Babe had that baby all by herself.
That's how strong she was.
Down, down at the old place is what they call it.
Did you ever see the picture of the white house?
That's how your Uncle Wayne was born.
That's pretty tough, huh?

We considered this interaction to be a literacy-related episode for several reasons: First, the interaction initiated by the mother is a family story or a narrative talk (Beals, 2001) that included a main character (Grandma Babe), a place and setting (white house in the old place, ranch), an event (Grandma gave birth to a baby), and a theme or a moral of the story (a strong woman). In many aspects, this story or narrative talk is very similar to a written story that is read to a young child (Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard and Wang, 2001). Second, in narrating the family story, the mother modeled how to begin a story, how to unfold the story, and how to end the story. Third, even though this story is not print-based, it is a type of discourse that tells about the events that has happened in the past. According to Beals (2001), much of children's first exposure to print in school (both reading and writing) is in the form of narratives or stories. This process is certainly important for children to become literate (e.g., Daiute, 1993). As Snow

(1993) puts it, parents socialize children into ways of talking, this is the basis of text discourse in the future.

We identified and coded the other mothers' initiations that were not relevant to the process of becoming literate as the initiation of non-literacy related episodes (or other episodes). After the literacy-related episodes were identified and transcribed, we then examined the types literacy-related episodes initiated by the mothers in the two communities. The purpose of this measure was to see how mothers in these two communities oriented their children in literacy-related aspect. We examined the length of time that the mothers engaged their children in each literacy episode. The purpose of this measure was to see how much time the mothers were willing to spend with their children on literacy-related aspects.

We examined the manner in which mothers supported their children in literacy development. Three types of maternal support were identified and examined. The first type of support was identified as explicit and implicit support. An explicit literacy-related support is defined as a mother's initiation that was directly print-based. For example, when opening a letter, a Chinese mother asked her child whether she knew the character *receiving* (shou) on the letter cover. After getting no answer from the child, the mother told the child that the character meant "Shou" (receiving). Then she traced her right index finger in the air as if she was writing it.

An implicit literacy support is defined as a mother-child interaction that is not print-based, but it implicitly contributes to children's literacy development or it bears relationship to the process of becoming literate. The American Indian example given earlier indicates that the mother is socializing her child in oral discourse. Even though this interaction is not print-based, it has many similar functions as a mother read a printed story to a young child and it forms the basis for later literacy.

The second type of support we identified was contextual and event-specific support. Contextual support means that a mother not only talked about a particular literacy-related event, but also reinforced the context that related to the event. For example, when an American Indianan child described to her mother about a day at her aunt's house, she told her mother that her aunt served her corn bread for lunch. The mother then asked the child if she knew what the bread was made of, how the corn bread was made, who made the bread, if anyone else was at the lunch beside herself and her aunt, if she knew how corns grew, if she knew that her own grandmother used to spent "days and days" peeling corns, etc. These questions helped the child understand the whole context of corn bread rather then just the words "*corn bread.*"

An event-specific support means that the questions asked by the mothers were specifically related to the literacy-related event, not to the context of the event. For example, when reading a book with his mother, a Chinese boy saw a girl who was holding *bing tang hulu* (a kind of preserved fruit coated with sugar or honey). The boy told his mother that a long time ago (last winter), he had *bing tang hulu* in the street with his Dad. The mother asked the boy whether the *bing tang hulu* was coated with sugar or honey and whether he could point out the *bing tang hulu* characters in the book for her. All the questions asked by the mother specifically referred to "*bing tang hulu.*"

The third type of support we identified was elaboration. Elaboration means that a mother expanded the child's knowledge on literacy-related activities. For example, when a Chinese child pointed at a picture in a book and told the mother: "It is a rabbit." Her mother elaborated on the child's picture recognition by asking her: "Can you show me the word *rabbit* in the book.

How many strokes does the word rabbit have? etc." In this interaction, the mother expanded the child's original comment and oriented her to the printed matter.

Reliability. The reliability was reached by randomly selecting 35% of the coded data. The overall reliability for the coding was 89.2% (with 93% for the overall literacy initiation, 88% for the types of interaction, 91% for maternal time spent on interaction, 88% explicit/implicit support, 87% contextual/event-specific support, and 88% elaborative support). Different coders checked all the coded data.

Results

Proportion of Literacy-Related Interactions Initiated by Mothers

Table 1 shows that nearly half (43%) of the interactions initiated by the Chinese mothers with their children in an everyday context were literacy-related. Of all the interactions that were initiated by the America Indian mothers, only a small-portion of it was literacy-related (10%). To examine if this difference was significant, an arcsin transformation ($y' = 2 \arcsin (y^{1/2})$) of the proportion data was first conducted (Winer, 1971). A t-test conducted on the transformed data indicated that the Chinese mothers were significantly more likely than the Native American Indian mothers to privilege literacy-related activities with their children, $t(38) = 14.66$, $p < .001$.

TABLE 1

Proportion of Literacy Interactions Initiated by Chinese and American Indian Mothers

Community	Literacy	Other
Chinese	43%	57%
American Indian	10%	90%

Types of Literacy-Related Interactions

The Chinese and American Indian mothers not only differed in initiating literacy-related interactions, but they also differed in their preference of different types of literacy activities in their initiations. Table 2 shows that the Chinese mothers (83% of all the literacy-related initiations) were more likely than the American Indian mothers (22% of literacy-related initiations) to initiate print-based literacy interactions, $t(38) = 40.32$, $p < .001$. The America Indian mothers preferred interactions that were related to oral narration of children's personal, family stories, and oral folk tales.

TABLE 2
Proportions of Types of Literacy Interactions Initiated by Chinese and American Indian Mothers

Type	Chinese	American Indian
Print Based		
Word/Character/logo recognition and labeling	21%	4 %
Picture and photo Identification	16%	7%
Children's rhymes	10%	2%
Children's songs	9%	6%
Reading	8%	1%
Classical poem recitation	8%	0%
Character/word writing	7%	0%
Drawing	4%	1%
Non-Print Based		
Children's personal stories Telling	8%	24%
Folk tales	4%	19%
Anecdotal stories about family members	2%	35%
Other*	2%	1%

*The types of literacy-related initiations that occurred only once was grouped under the category "other."

Mean Time Mothers Spent on Literacy Interactions

Table 3 indicates that the Chinese mothers spent a significantly longer time on literacy related interactions after they initiated them than did the Native American Indian mothers, $t(38) = 9.02$, $p < .001$.

TABLE 3

Mean Time Chinese and American Indian Mothers Spent on Interactions

Community	Duration (Seconds)
Chinese	73
American Indian	56

Differences in Support Offered by the Mothers

Explicit and implicit support.—The Chinese mothers and American Indian mothers varied greatly in their support of their children's literacy development. Table 4 has shown that the Chinese mothers were significantly more likely than the American Indian mothers to explicitly direct their children's attention to the print-based literacy activities, t (38) = 48.16, p < .001.

TABLE 4

Proportion of Explicit and Implicit Support Given by Chinese and American Indian Mothers

Community	Explicit	Implicit
Chinese	82%	18%
American Indian	14%	86%

Contextual and event-specific support.--Table 5 has indicated that the Chinese mothers were significantly more likely than the American Indian mothers to focus on the specific aspects of literacy events (such as in the *bing tang hulu* example showed earlier), t (38) = 20.92, p < .001. American Indian mothers tended to spend more time in providing the context that was relevant to the literacy event such as in the *corn bread* example previously described.

TABLE 5

Proportion of Contextual and Specific Support Given by Chinese and American Indian Mothers

Community	Contextual	Specific
Chinese	34%	66%
American Indian	71%	29%

Elaborative support.--Table 6 suggestes that the Chinese mothers were more likely than the American Indian mothers to expand on their young children's answers in literacy-related aspects, $t(38) = 21.04$, $p < .001$. The American Indian mothers tended to accept the children's "version" and they seldom added to what their young children had told them.

TABLE 6

Proportion of Elaborative Support Given by Chinese and American Indian Mothers

Community	Elaborative	Non-Elaborative
Chinese	64%	36%
American Indian	17%	83%

Discussion

Every culture has its own beliefs and goals on child socialization (Harkness & Super, 1996; LeVine, 1977; Steward, M. S. & Steward, D. S., 1973; Wang, Mylander, & Goldin-Meadow, 1995; Wang, 1998). In everyday interactions with the young, adults realize their beliefs and goals through constant and deliberate efforts. Literacy, whether in its oral or print form, is often used as an important vehicle by adults to pass cultural messages (Wang, 1998). When literacy is valued as a measure of achievement in a culture, adults in that culture will work hard to ensure the success of their children. For example, our study has demonstrated that Chinese mothers are eager to engage their children in literacy-related interactions (Table 1). They constantly orientated their children to prints (Table 2), they spent longer time interacting with children in literacy-related activities (Table 3), and they supported their young children to achieve literacy competency through explicit, event-specific, and elaborative ways (Tables 4, 5, & 6).

However, when child socialization is regarded as a holistic process (e.g., Joe, 1994; Phillip, 1983; Tharp, 1994) by a culture, adults in that culture will make an effort to orient their children to seek meanings in their daily experience. Our study suggests that even though the American Indian mothers did not engage their children in literacy-activities as frequently and intensively as did the Chinese mothers (Table 1), whenever they did, they encouraged narratives that were life-related rather than print-related (Table 2). They did not "impose" on their children like the Chinese mothers. Instead, they let their children play the major role in their own development (Tables 3 and 6). They focused more on the implicitly and the contextual aspects of learning (Tables 4 and 5).

Our study has demonstrated the different literacy socialization practices exist in Chinese and American Indian cultural communities and what those differences are. This finding echoes the comments by McCarty and Watahomigie (1998): "There is no single, uniform literacy; no one, straight-line path to literacy; nor is the literacy club open only to a privileged few. Instead, there are multiple literacies, many paths, and a variety of ways for children to acquire and use

their literacy potentials..." It is exactly this "many paths toward literacy" that our education system needs to respond to.

Based on our study, we would like to offer a few suggestions for early childhood educators to consider in their classroom practices:

1) Before or immediately after children enter the school environment, teachers may want to find out how literacy is practiced at home and in the community. This will give teachers a better sense to design literacy activities that are responsive to children with different cultural and life experiences.
2) Teachers need to carefully observe children and provide them with a variety of literacy activities. Teachers also need to be sensitive to the different learning styles of children. For example, some children may expect teachers to question them during literacy-related activities because they are used to this style of interaction with adults (for example, the Chinese children in our study). Whereas, others may be more responsive to the oral form of narratives and personal stories.
3) Narratives or personal stories have been regarded as an important link to later literacy in recent literature. They are personal and meaningful to young children. Therefore, it will be a good idea for teachers to engage children from different family and cultural backgrounds in such activities. Cote (2001) has suggested that mealtimes in early education settings may be a very good opportunity for teachers to engage children in narrative talks.
4) Teachers need to allow children to choose their own literacy activities at the early stage of schooling.
5) Teachers need to try different ways in the classroom to support their children's language and literacy development. For example, they can offer supports that are explicit, implicit, event–specific, contextual, and elaborative.

To optimize the learning potential of children from different cultural backgrounds, early childhood educators must try to find innovative ways to bridge the literacy continuum of a child—the home and school literacies.

Notes:

1.The families in our study preferred to be called American Indians.

2.In the American Indian extended families that we observed, children spent parts of the day with relatives such as aunts, uncles, and grandparents who live in separate households.

3.In the American Indian families we observed, a child can have several grandmothers. These grandmothers were not necessarily genetically related.

4.The American Indian mothers felt comfortable to give oral consent rather than written consent.

5. Other statistical analyses in this paper that involved proportion data were conducted on arcsin transformation data (Winer, 1971).

6.The folk tales cannot be fount in print. They are passed through mouth generations after generations.

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