Literacy Development of Latina/o Children

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Latinos in the United States live in a variety of settings including:

- small cultural neighborhoods where the 1st language is spoken at work and in homes
- ethnically diverse neighborhoods where English oral language and print are commonly used
Does it make a difference if the language of instruction for minority students is English or the language spoken in the home?
“Multilingual skills constitute an important national resource which deserves protection and development.”

Crawford 1997:1
The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 makes no mention to the benefits of maintaining and promoting multiple language skills.

Reese & Goldenberg, 2006
Zentella (1997) studied Puerto Ricans in New York and found that...

Language behaviors and attitudes can not be understood without exploring fears about:

- racial
- ethnolinguistic
- and economic subordination
Additive Bilingualism ...

a second language and culture do not displace the first

- associated with educational advantages and greater metalinguistic development
Subtractive Bilingualism...
the acquisition of a second language and culture takes place at the expense of the first and has been associated with disabling educational settings for language minority students (Cummins 1989, 2000)

- associated with devaluation of Spanish, subordination of Spanish-speaking populations, and underachievement (Garcia 1995, 2002)
Latino immigrant parents' motivations for reading orally to their children, and their understanding of literacy, are influenced by their own experiences from their countries of origin.

(Reese and Gallimore 2000).
The community also influences literacy development...
... providing access to a variety of printed texts

There are considerably more varieties of printed texts available in middle-income neighborhoods than lower-income neighborhoods.

Neuman and Celano (2001)
Children who are required to use multiple languages and literacy skills in daily life must learn which languages to use in various contexts.

- Literacy practices related to religion: Spanish
- Literacy practices related to law/politics: English

(Farr 1994)
When language is used for powerful functions of employment, higher education, and government it is used for “high-power” stages

Fishman 2001

when primary language use is restricted to non-power spheres, the true essence of the language can be lost
The study regards the opportunities for literacy across social contexts...

- In both communities, Spanish (the primary language of instruction) was available in the public elementary school

- Each community has differing amounts of Spanish use outside of home & school
Researchers examined the linguistic worlds of children from Spanish-speaking families, according to the following criteria:

1. Availability of text in the community (in Spanish and in English)
2. Accessibility to different types of literacy in the community (in Spanish and in English)
3. The status of Spanish language and literacy uses in the community
Is it enough for students to have availability to text in Spanish?

Will this improve children’s literacy development in Spanish?
The study, performed by Reese and Goldenberg (through California State University), focused on communities in California and Texas during the 2001-02 school year.
A reasonable hypothesis...

when a greater availability of Spanish texts are available to students, their literacy development in Spanish is enhanced

... however, exposure and availability is simply not enough
Exposure to a variety of literacy is crucial...

- legal
- financial
- religious
- entertainment
- medical
The subjects of the study:

• Spanish-speaking children in kindergarten through second grade

• participants from two schools in California, both in the Los Angeles area

• participants from Platero & Garden Communities
  (names have been changed by the researchers)
Platero community

• Urban neighborhood
• Densely-populated
• Low-income
• Exclusively Latino
• Most families live in apartment buildings, duplexes, and triplexes
• A lot of “foot traffic”
• High crime and gang activity
• No public parks
• No close public library, but the presence of a book-mobile once a week
Platero community

• Language on the streets, in local businesses, and in the corridor of the school is almost entirely Spanish
• Rachera music is played in cars and homes
• Signs inside and outside of businesses are in English and Spanish
• Establishments target the immigrant community’s needs (markets stock items specific to ethnicity of their patrons)
• Clerks greet patrons in Spanish
Platero School

• Spanish is used in initial academic instruction, and is maintained after students learn academics in English

• an “outreach,” opening the grounds and library to the community and offering parent classes (English & computers)
Garden community

• suburban community
• middle-income
• predominantly White Non-Hispanic
• most families live in two-story homes, single-family homes (many with yards), and condos
• described by families as “calm, orderly, and a safe environment in which to raise children”
• a public library is accessible, however it contains few literary materials in Spanish
Garden Community

- language on the streets, in local businesses, and in the school playground is English
- signs inside and outside of businesses are in English
- establishments may have isolated sections that include *Productos Latinos* (beauty & health products from Latin America), *Hispanic Foods* (with limited selections), *People en Espanol* (the only item available in Spanish at a large chain drug store visited during the study)
- clerks often refuse to greet patrons in Spanish
- churches only provide services in English (except for one Roman Catholic Church which apparently sponsors a mass that does not take place in an actual church)
Garden School

- a dual-language program is in place for both native speakers of English and native speakers of Spanish
- goal: for each child to become proficient in both languages
- an “outreach,” to aid the Latino families who are on the lower end of the socioeconomic distribution in the district
- opens the school grounds to the community, during non-school hours
### Table 2.

**Availability and proportion of literacy materials in Spanish**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Platero</th>
<th>Garden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Books in Library</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent in Spanish</strong></td>
<td>2,475</td>
<td>110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total children’s books in library</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent in Spanish</strong></td>
<td>1,960</td>
<td>30,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total magazines in library</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent in Spanish</strong></td>
<td>115</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total newspapers for sale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent in Spanish</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total magazines for sale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent in Spanish</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total books for sale</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent in Spanish</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The proportion of literacy materials available to members of the community in Spanish was greater in Platero than in Garden.

... the availability of literacy materials is only one literacy resource that a community can provide.
Communities must also provide opportunities for children to observe and participate in literacy use for a variety of functions and purposes.

Platero provided many more opportunities for children to observe and participate in literacy use than Garden.
In Platero...

- A sign for a check-cashing facility read *envío de dinero a Mexico* (sending money to Mexico) and parents might fill out the appropriate forms to complete such a transaction in their native language.
- Medical clinics provided services in Spanish.
- Cell phone merchants advertised deals for service in Spanish.
- Religious services were offered in Spanish.
- 43 commercial establishments offered services in Spanish, and 40 offered services in English (or English and Spanish).
In Garden...

• the only service offered in Spanish was at the Filipino market which offered a money-sending service and an auto repair shop

• all other communication and literacy is available in English

• there is an absence of religious services in Spanish, which is of particular concern to many parents who say that their children read to follow along with the mass
In Platero and Garden, families value bilingualism and Spanish maintenance.

91% of parents think that it is “very important” for their children to maintain Spanish.

100% of parents think that it is “very important” that their children learn English.

Parents reported no concerns that their children would be able to maintain Spanish.
... some parents in Garden discussed times when their children experienced Spanish language loss or erosion

... none of the parents in Platero discussed their children’s loss of Spanish or a diminished interest in using Spanish
Students from Platero and Garden were given the Woodcock Johnson Proficiency Battery to measure achievement...

... achievement differences were not profound
• students in Garden, who had accessibility to more literacy opportunities in English, scored slightly higher in English

• students in Platero, who have lower socioeconomic status, scored slightly higher in basic reading in Spanish

➢ the greater accessibility of literacy opportunities in Spanish are reflected in Platero’s higher Spanish achievement scores
In both Platero and Garden...

- schools served as an outreach to the surrounding community

- they attempted to involve parents in their children’s education

- they promoted primary language use of the students
Children received messages regarding the status and social desirability of Spanish, their native language in both communities...

... in Platero, children were encouraged to use Spanish throughout their community and the language was valued

... in Garden, children were discouraged from using Spanish in the community context, and the language lost desirability
Of their findings, Reese and Goldenberg state that:

“...the need for schools to redouble their efforts to promote heritage language use, not just as an interim measure to facilitate comprehension of school materials and events by non-speakers of English but also as a valuable linguistic resource in its own right.”
Resources

Crawford, James

Cummins, Jim
Dolson, David

Farr, Marcia

Fishman, Joshua
Garcia, Eugene


Genesse, Fred; Paradis, Johanne; and Crago, Martha
Neuman, Susan, and Celano, Donna

Reese, Leslie, and Gallimore, Ronald

Reese, Leslie, and Goldenberg, Claude
Thomas, Wayne, and Collier, Virginia

Zentella, Ana Celia