Chapter 3

Writing from and with Community Knowledge:
First Grade Emergent Bilinguals' Engagements with Technology–Integrated Curricula

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ABSTRACT

This chapter draws from a primarily qualitative study with two first grade dual language classrooms over the course of a semester. The authors detail how multimodal writing engagements provide an avenue for Latino young children, whose language and knowledge is often devalued in schools, to reframe their community experiences at the center of academic inquiry. Through the medium of photography, children are able to enact agency to position the multiple contexts they navigate–marked by linguistic dynamism and diverse transnational experiences–as resources that could expand conceptions of school-based literacy practices.

INTRODUCTION

As we approached the public elementary school for our final writing celebration, a grandmother and aunt greeted us at the door. Despite having received word of the event just a few days prior, they had made time to join the children and their teachers, and had arrived early so as not to miss any part of the occasion. That day, over fifty family members crowded into two classrooms as children shared their bilingual multimodal writings based on photographs they had been taking throughout our semester-long project. Children read their work to one another and to extended family, pointing

excitedly at the images of shared places, spaces, and experiences. We ate *empanadas* and *pan de bono* from the local Argentinean-Colombian bakery, which during the course of our inquiry had become an important community landmark to the research team and the children. With the celebration drawing to a close, one father came sprinting into the classroom, worried that he had missed the event. He worked the night shift, he explained to us, and had unintentionally fallen asleep upon returning home. With emotion he recounted how he had promised his son he would attend and conveyed the importance he placed on education as a recent immigrant to the United States. Father and son settled in a corner of the room with the remaining children to read and discuss the multimodal writings.

Perhaps one reason we found families and children to be so invested in the project was because they could not only see themselves in the curriculum, but they were also active participants in its creation. As we detail in this chapter, multimodal writing engagements provided an avenue for Latino children, whose language and knowledge is often devalued in schools, to reframe their community experiences at the center of academic inquiry. We also found the project to provide counter-narratives to deficit framings about urban spaces and immigrant families' involvement in education. Through the medium of photography, the multiple contexts children and families navigate–marked by linguistic dynamism and diverse transnational experiences–became resources that could expand conceptions of school-based literacy practices.

Classrooms across the US and around the globe are host to students who speak multiple languages and bring with them an array of cultural resources and community histories. Current educational policy emphasizes the achievement and instructional support of students in the process of acquiring English as an additional language, a population we henceforth refer to as emergent bilinguals (García & Kleifgen, 2010). A criticism of such trends has been that literacy policies, with their heavy emphasis on testing and accountability, construct emergent bilinguals from a deficit orientation. The result is instructional interventions that are often remedial in nature (Genishi & Dyson, 2009) and which focus on reading at the expense of writing. At the same time, our increasingly transnational and technologized world necessitates that we expand notions of literacy practices and texts to include multiple modes, media, and knowledges (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996). This chapter explores how researchers and educators might support students' biliteracy learning by taking a language-as-resource orientation (Ruiz, 1984) and drawing on students' cultural and linguistic knowledge in school-based literacy engagements integrating technology. We showcase how blending writing and technology, particularly through photography, can be an avenue for culturally relevant, linguistically inclusive pedagogies. Specifically, we argue that photography as an authoring practice provided students opportunities to enact agency within the school curriculum by centering their multimodal composing on community landmarks and their own identities of place.

THEORETICAL FRAMINGS

The need to expand notions of literacy practices and texts to better represent the diverse emergent bilingual population is situated in our research within the theory of expansive learning (Engeström, 1987). Utilizing expansive learning within an historical analysis, we aim to identify the dual binds, or contradictions, that must be explored for a more just educational system. The theory of expansive learning is object-oriented; the object, as explained by Leont'ev (1978), is the raw material and the purpose of any cultural historical activity. An expansive learning framework entails identifying and working with existing contradictions through a collective potential zone of proxi-

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