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Spotlight session on family literacy

Ethnographic perspectives on immigrant families in Austrialia: Implications for ESL teachers

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Three families

- Joseph's family
- Lin's family
- Susan's family

Key questions

- What were the common everyday reading practices in family groups from different nationality backgrounds?
- What were the purposes for reading amongst the different groups?
- What kinds of texts did the groups select for reading?
- What positive and negative learning experiences were reported by the subjects?
- What implications for classroom teaching and learning could be derived from the research?

Insights guiding the research

- New literacy studies – pervasiveness of reading in daily life (Street, 1984, Barton, 1994, Hamilton, Barton & Ivanic, 1994)
- Literacy as social and situated practice (Street, 1984, Bayham, 1996, Prinsloo & Breier 1996)
- Reader roles (Freebody and Luke, 1990)
- Intergenerational and family literacy (Heath, 1982, 1995)
- Ethnographic approaches (Barton & Hamilton, 1998)
- Cross-cultural literacy (Street, 1993)
- Social-constructivist and transformative perspectives on teacher education (van Lier, 1996, Zeichner & Liston, 1996, Burns, 1999,)

Reader roles

Code breaker:	The reader is concerned with cracking the code. It is a matter of understanding the symbolic graphic conventions which make up the code.
Text participant:	In this role the reader is concerned with the meanings within the text and how the text corresponds to the reader's experiences and knowledge. This involves the way the text is constructed to make meaning including literal and figurative meanings within the text.
Text user:	When adopting this role, the reader is concerned with what they will do as a result of reading the text. This involves using the text in social situations to achieve social purposes and participating in events in which the text plays a part.
Text analyst:	The reader is concerned with how the text attempts to position the reader and what other viewpoints are absent from the text. This involves looking for implicit meanings, opinions, bias and either endorsing or rejecting the point of view put forward by the text.

(Freebody & Luke, 1990)

Procedures
- Interviews with a family from each of the three language backgrounds conducted in their own homes. We selected families in which three generations were represented in order to gain a sense of how reading practices and events differed across family groups and individuals.
- Analysis of the material read in first and second language over a period of one week, through a reading 'diary' kept by the students
- Follow-up interviews with other students from the same cultural and language backgrounds to gain broader perspectives on the areas raised in the first interviews and a greater sense of how individual or general the experiences were.

Implications for teachers: What these adult learners wanted
- Teacher as cultural reading guide
- Teacher as model
- Teacher as reading coach

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