



**Gregory, Eve, Susi Long and Dinah Volk, eds.** *Many Pathways to Literacy: Young Children Learning with Siblings, Grandparents, Peers and Communities*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004. 251 pp. ISBN 0415306175, \$38.95

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Parents are children's first teachers. From infancy to adolescence (and beyond), parents provide children with an abundance of knowledge and information. Moreover, parents guide their children in their learning, for instance, how to walk, talk, and play. In other words, parents or adults play an important role in the overall development of children. Other entities that help the child in the context of their development include extended family, peers, and the community at large. *Many Pathways to Literacy* is a book about the entities outside of the school context that guide children in their language and literacy development. It is a collection of case studies that help educators understand how children's cultural partners guide them in the development of literacy which is not based on the mainstream ways of teaching found in many traditional schools.

The authors explain how children learn literacy through a socio-cultural approach to learning, which basically states that, "young children learn as apprentices alongside a more experienced member of the culture" (p. 7). It is within and through the context of social relationships that allow children to become literate in different ways that often are not recognized by the schools. For instance, the authors explain how children develop literacy through interacting in dramatic play and storytelling with other family members such as siblings and *abuelitas* (grandmothers). The implication of research is that providing opportunities through intergenerational activities and projects enhances children's literacy. Other means for literacy learning include interactions with classmates from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds or in different community settings such as churches.

The book is divided into three parts that embrace the essence of syncretic literacy studies: They include Part I: The Family Context: Siblings and Grandparents; Part II: Friends as Teachers; and, Part III: Learning in Community Settings. Each part provides examples or "snapshots" of children's lives from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds including African American, Asian, Latino and Native American. The snapshots provide the readers with a picture of how children attempt to develop literacy with the help of their significant others.



The strength of the book lies in its theoretical foundation, a foundation based on the concept of the funds of knowledge and dismisses the notion that parents have to be “trained” to teach their children literacy. On the contrary, rather than having a prescribed curriculum for families, the researchers employ qualitative methods to examine children and their families. Throughout the book, early literacy is redefined by researchers who “illuminate the work of the invisible teachers in children’s lives” (p. 221). This new way of looking at early literacy provides opportunities for educators to transform their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about families, children and communities, particularly those of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

*Many Pathways to Literacy* provides *caminos* (roads) to explore children and their cultural support systems, such as their families and communities. Those *caminos* must be traveled by teachers and other educators in order to understand how children learn within the context of their families and community. After traveling the *caminos*, they can then begin to understand and use practical applications to further children’s literacy development. The authors refute the pervasive deficit perspectives of culturally diverse children and learning and recognize the need to advocate for all children, particularly those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They call for the nurturance and support of first language development, family and community partnerships, and an overall respect for the literacy practices found in many cultures.

As I was completing this book review, one of my graduate students shared with me how her principal does not allow young children to engage in handclapping games, a tradition that belongs to many cultures such as African Americans and Latinos. This principal clearly misses the point that children learn through many early literacy activities. In this instance, the children are learning a variety of things and gaining and refining skills such as rhyming, phonemic awareness, and vocabulary, among others. Prohibiting children from engaging in cultural practices devalues their culture and inhibits their learning process. The greatest contribution that this book provides to the field of early literacy is the different innovative way of looking at children and families and valuing their funds of knowledge.

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