Transgenerational Learning within Families

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ABSTRACT: This article proposes a data-driven, transgenerational learning model to reconceptualize the study of literacy learning within families. Based on an empirical study composed of case studies of six families, the data and findings of the study foregrounded the "messiness" of learning within families. Studying learning within families requires viewing how learning is socially and culturally organized. Problematizing the notion of the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and beliefs from parents to children, the article highlights how a transgenerational lens provides an alternative way of viewing how and why parents and children engage in learning experiences around reading in the home and school.

Objects are fickle things. They can bring back floods of thoughts and emotions that influence the ways in which we see people, places, and things around us. Marcel Proust described this phenomenon and talked about how he was brought back to his childhood when he hesitantly took a bite of a cookie when he visited his mother as an adult. Proust (1982) wrote,

> And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die. (p. 57)

Simple objects, like a cookie or a book, are not so simple. For seven years, I have studied the ways in which objects, such as books, and the act of reading those objects mediate how parents and their children socially co-construct and support each other's reading abilities. I have had a particular interest in the ways parents and children interpret their reading abilities to

construct identities attached to a myriad of school-based labels such as "learning disabled," "language disorder," "Attention Deficit Disorder," and "dual-language learner."

Conducting an empirical study composed of case studies of six families foregrounded the "messiness" of the ways in which the parents and their children define and defend their reading abilities and school-based labels through social, cultural, and temporal factors. The study required a fundamental shift in viewing how learning is organized within families and how families engage their children in learning experiences. Instead of situating learning within families as the unidirectional, intergenerational transmission of knowledge and beliefs from parents to children, I argue that a transgenerational lens provides an alternative way of viewing how and why parents and children engage in learning experiences around reading in the home and school. Replacing *intergenerational*, the term *transgenerational* refers to the stance that learning and knowledge transcends generations and is influenced by factors that cross space and time. Within this model, parents and their children engage in reciprocal socialization, as there is a constant movement of ideas and knowledge within families as both the parents and their children co-construct learning contexts.

In this article, I propose a data-driven transgenerational learning model to reconceptualize the study of literacy learning within families. I use the term *model* loosely to suggest how it provides guidance in conceptualizing the learning context, which has multiple entry points for family members. For the research presented in this article, *literacy* is defined as sets of social practices around reading and writing. In describing the transgenerational model, I outline key factors that developed from my data. Before moving into a discussion of the model, I provide an overview of learning within families as it relates to an intergenerational model of learning in order to problematize the concept that learning in families occurs when parents transmit knowledge and experiences to their children.

A Review of Learning within Families

Within the literature, the term *intergenerational* references how beliefs and behaviors are transmitted from the parent-generation to the child-generation through the ways in which parental characteristics or behaviors influence or are correlated with various aspects of childrearing. Van Ijzendoorn (1992) provides the following definition of intergenerational transmission:

> Intergenerational transmission of parenting indicates the influence of parents' own experiences as a child on their childrearing practices and attitudes. Intergenerational transmission is part of the socialization of the "socializer," and the concept concerns the origin of parenting behavior and attitudes in the earlier generation. (p. 76)

Van Ijzendoorn's definition attunes us to the ways in which parental belief systems, attitudes, and behaviors, which originate from the parents' childhood experiences, influence their children's growth and development. The term *intergenerational* is widely used within the fields of family science and family studies, which employ the term to study such topics as the intergenerational transmission of educational attainment (Heineck & Riphahn, 2007) and ethnic and racial socialization (Hughes et al., 2006).

Figure 1 provides a visual of an intergenerational model. Within this model, the parent generation, labeled as Generation 1 (G1), is seen as a set of role models and socializers for their

children's generation, labeled as Generation 2 (G2). An intergenerational approach to childrearing suggests that there are certain predicting or correlational relationships between G1 and G2.
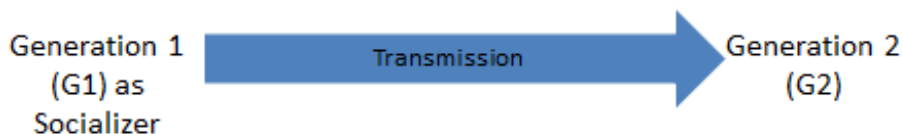
Generation 1 (G1) as Socializer → Transmission → Generation 2 (G2)

Figure 1. Transmission model of knowledge from parent-generation (G1) to child-generation (G2).

There is a large body of literacy research that examines how literacy values, behaviors, and knowledge are transmitted from G1 to G2, in an attempt to understand how parents influence the literacy success of their children. In a frequently cited and influential study, Bus, van Ijzendoorn, and Pellegrini (1995) used the term *intergenerational* to frame a meta-analysis of studies that examined the effects of book reading between parents and their children. The authors' meta-analysis examined predictors such as socioeconomic status and the frequency of book reading for particular reading skills, such as phonological awareness and word reading. The authors concluded that book reading between parents and children was related to positive outcome measures for language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement. Hoff (2003) and Pan, Rowe, Singer, and Snow (2005) advanced the discussion of the relationships between maternal socioeconomic status and reading growth through the examination of vocabulary and word development. Curenton and Justice (2008) studied the influence of mothers' educational levels and beliefs about shared reading on their children's early literacy skill development. The authors found that maternal educational attainment was associated with their children's development of reading conventions and print meaning.

Furthermore, intergenerational studies on literacy learning have expanded to bilingual families. Wu (2005) examined attitudes and behaviors that Chinese parents had towards bilingualism and how these attitudes influenced the ways in which they raised their children to be bilingual. Griva and Chouvarda (2012) studied Greek families and how parental beliefs and attitudes towards learning English and Greek impacted the ways in which their children developed bilingually. These studies examined factors such as positive and negative attitudes that influenced how parents become involved in supporting bilingualism in the home and school.

Transgenerational Literacy Practices

While I do not reject the idea that parents transmit or socialize their children into particular ideas and ways of acting, believing, and using language and literacy, I argue that a transgenerational perspective is needed to address the complexity of knowledge over time and space to integrate past histories, present experiences, and future possibilities. Replacing the idea of transmission of knowledge with *transacting with knowledge* designates the fluidity and constant motion of knowledge among family members in the process of the reciprocal socialization of learning. Through social transactions, not only are social practices co-constructed between G1 and G2, but knowledge also becomes shared. Through the process of

sharing and constructing knowledge, both the parents and their children develop dynamic and changing relationships with each other and with the context.

In this study, learning within families is defined through the central construct of participation in social and cultural practices in the home, at school, and in the community in which language and discourse mediate the construction of knowledge around literacy (Compton-Lilly, 2007; Heath, 1983; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Pennycook, 2010; Taylor, 1983). As with other studies in the area of family literacy (Taylor, 1983), this study examines the transactions between parents and children as a starting point for analysis. Other studies, however, extend the study of family literacy to siblings (Author, 2014; Baghban, 2002; Gregory, Long, & Volk, 2004) and grandparents (Gregory et al., 2004). These latter studies further support the need for a transgenerational approach to the examination of literacy in the home and in school as it is constructed by individuals across and within generations. Therefore, taking a transgenerational approach to social activity that starts with the parents and their children can, at times, be arbitrary. In spite of this, applying a transgenerational perspective to learning recognizes that families are influenced by a myriad of sociocultural factors and people.

Central to the social construction of learning experiences in the home is the construct of literacy practices. Barton (2001) described literacy practices as "the general cultural ways of utilizing literacy which people draw upon in particular situations" (p. 96), which differ from literacy events, defined as the observable ways that people use reading and writing. Both literacy practices and events are mediated by individuals, objects, and social structures. Reading, therefore, is not synonymous with literacy, but rather, is viewed as one component of literacy. Literacy practices within families are defined by the bundle of literacy events, or the visible acts of reading books, magazines, or other types of texts, which I will call *reading events*. Thus, the study presented here explains how literacy practices give rise to, define, and give meaning to reading events within a transgenerational space.

Studying Transgenerational Learning within Families

The empirical, qualitative study presented here is an ethnographically influenced study that incorporated comparative case studies of six families, two of whom were followed longitudinally. The study is centered on three lines of inquiry. The first line of inquiry investigates how to revalue the strengths that readers bring to the act of reading. The term *revaluing* positions readers as bringing knowledge, skills, and abilities to the reading process. Revaluing is based on a sociopsycholinguistic perspective on reading (Goodman, 1996a). Within this perspective, reading is studied as a constructivist process during which readers integrate the language cuing systems (i.e., semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic) with psycholinguistic reading strategies (e.g., sampling, predicting, confirming, and disconfirming). An underlying tenet of sociopsycholinguistic perspectives is that all readers make miscues, which are categorized as being of high quality or low quality. High-quality miscues do not change the meaning of the sentence or story, while low-quality miscues do. For instance, the second-grade participant, Jenny, read the sentence, "The two friends spent many happy hours together" as "The two friends spent many hours together." But Jenny's omission of the word *happy* did not disrupt the grammar and meaning of the sentence or story. The revaluing of readers, particularly readers who are deemed struggling readers, means highlighting and discussing their high-quality miscues, which allows readers to "understand and appreciate their own knowledge of language" (Goodman, Martens, & Flurkey, 2014). A developing body of

research centers on how educators use revaluing techniques within classroom settings to develop the self-monitoring skills and self-confidence of struggling readers (Martens, 1998; Moore & Gilles, 2005).

This study moves the revaluing process out of the classroom setting and into homes as it encouraged parents to participate actively in the revaluing process. Consequently, the second line of inquiry investigates how to assist parents in understanding the reading process better by having them actively engage in reading and reflecting with their children. The second line of inquiry is based on the perspective that revaluing readers means focusing on the readers' strengths. According to Goodman (1996b), "If we understand as educators some basic facts about how reading works and how it develops, we can build on strengths of all learners and support them as they grow into literacy" (p. 15). Therefore, the second line of inquiry is designed to assist parents in understanding how reading works and develops, so they can better assist their children when reading with and advocating for them.

Finally, the study investigates the social and cultural elements rooted in families' literacy practices around reading events. The study was designed to investigate how parents and children use discourses to organize learning contexts in the home as well as to define and defend the labels that become associated with their identities as literate individuals. Because parents do not have the same knowledge of the reading process as teachers and academics, they draw on their personal models of reading to create and co-construct reading events. The collection of reading events over time and space created particular types of literacy practices that constructed the reading identities of their children. Therefore, this last line of inquiry aims not only at revaluing the families as readers from a sociopsycholinguistic perspective but also at revaluing them through sociocultural perspectives that suggest that all families are literate and engage in home literacy practices with their children.

Table 1. Participant Data

Parent(s)	Child	Grade	Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI)*	School-Based Label
**Carole	Christie	3rd	Pre-primer	Classified with a Speech and Language Disability Learning Disability
Nancy	Becky	3rd	Level 1	Classified with Learning Disability Occupational Therapy Retained in Kindergarten
Donna	Nina	4th	Level 1	Speech and Language Disability
Terry	Peter	1st	Level 1	Classified with "Other Medical Conditions" Placed in a 1st grade transition program after kindergarten.***
Francis	Sophie	4th	Level 5	Bilingual Greek and

Steve				English
				Dual Language Program
**Maria	Thomas	6th	Level 6	Bilingual Spanish and English
				Dual Language Program
	Jenny	2nd	Level 2	Bilingual Spanish and English
				Dual Language Program

*Leslie & Caldwell, 2006
**Families followed longitudinally
***After transitional 1st, students have the option of going into 1st grade or moving on to 2nd grade.

Study Participants

Table 1 provides a list of the six families who participated in the study. With the exception of Maria's family, five out of the six families had one focal child who participated in the study. I followed Maria's and Carole's families longitudinally and revisited both families after two years and conducted follow-up observations and interviews, including follow-up oral readings and retellings.

Five families were white, middle-class, working families. Maria's family, on the other hand, was Hispanic and of low socioeconomic status. Maria's and Francis and Steve's families were the only two bilingual families who participated in the study. Both families lived in a large urban city in the northeast. Because of the prevalence of private and public dual language schools in the area, Maria and Francis had sent their children to dual language schools since kindergarten. Maria's family was bilingual and biliterate in Spanish and English. Maria immigrated to the United States from Ecuador and married her husband in the United States, where Thomas and Jenny were born. Thomas and Jenny attended a public dual language elementary school. Francis's family was Greek and English, and Francis also immigrated to the United States, where she married her husband Steve, who was monolingual English speaking. Sophie was born in the United States and attended a private dual language elementary school. Unlike Thomas and Jenny, however, Sophie spent summers in Greece, where she lived with Francis's mother. The other four families lived in a suburban area outside of the same urban city. Christie, Becky, and Nina attended school in the same school district, and Peter attended a different one in the same county.

Regardless of their socioeconomic statuses and the languages spoken in the home, all of the families described themselves as active in their children's educational experiences. The mothers described how they regularly met with their children's teachers, attended parent-teacher conferences, and communicated with their children's teachers when questions or concerns arose. Carole's, Nancy's, Donna's, and Terry's families had children with individualized educational plans (IEPs). They reported that they attended child study evaluation meetings, reviewed their children's IEPs with their children's teachers and administrators, and provided tutors for their children. The two bilingual mothers discussed how they participated in school in order to support their children's bilingualism. Maria, for instance, reported that by sending Thomas to a

dual language school she was able to participate as the class mother throughout his elementary school years.

As part of the criteria for participating in the study, the families had to have a child who was deemed both by the school and by the parents as a "struggling reader." While there was constant negotiation between the parents and the school as to the exact area of "struggle" for the child, all parents agreed with the school that their children were struggling readers. As a result, the mothers, who received fliers regarding the study through their schools or mailing, reported that they wanted to participate in the study so they could better understand how to engage with their children when reading. During the screening interview, the mothers described how they had many unanswered questions about how best to support their children in the home when reading with them. In addition, with the exception of Nancy and Francis, the mothers articulated that they could empathize with their children, because they connected their children's reading struggles with their own struggles when they were a similar age. Nancy and Francis were the only mothers in the study who felt frustration over their children's struggles with reading, because they could not relate to their daughters' difficulties (see Author, 2010, 2012, 2015 for more information on the individual families).

The data, findings, and conclusions of the study, however, suggest that not all the children were necessarily struggling readers. Table 1 provides a descriptive list of the participants and shows the reading levels based on the *Qualitative Reading Inventory*-4 (QRI-4; Leslie & Caldwell, 2006) collected at the beginning of the study. The QRI-4 is an informal reading inventory composed of word lists and comprehension passages used to determine frustration, instruction, and independent reading levels. Specifically, Peter, Sophie, Thomas, and Jenny were grade-level readers. The other three children struggled with grade-level texts and story comprehension. Out of the three who struggled with reading, two were labeled as having a speech and language disability and one as having autism.

Study Data

I met with the six families over a 10-week period, each weekly session ranging from one to one-and-a-half hours. In addition to my observations in the home and community, I referenced oral readings and retellings as well as interviews as the central data sources for the study.

Oral Readings and Retellings. I collected oral reading and retelling data on the parents and the children. The participating family members read books or magazines that either they self-selected or I selected for them based on their QRI-4 results and observations. The study collected a total of 12 oral readings and retellings for the parents and 24 for the children. Oral reading data were analyzed through miscue analysis procedures (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 2005). Miscue analysis is an evaluative tool that draws from sociopsycholinguistic perspectives on reading. Miscue analysis allowed me to evaluate the reader's miscues as a window into how they controlled the reading process. Because miscue analysis procedures place meaning at the core of the process, rather than accuracy, I was able to differentiate high- and low-quality miscues. High-quality miscues highlight how readers effectively engage with the reading process to construct meaningful text, and I shared these with the readers to allow them to reflect on the reading process from a value-oriented perspective.

For the miscue analysis procedures, the miscues were coded on a typescript for (a) word-for-word or multiple word substitutions, (b) word omissions, (c) word insertions, and (d) self-corrections. After the miscues were coded, the sentences were analyzed for

(a) the percentages of sentences that were syntactically acceptable or grammatically correct, (b) the percentages of sentences that were semantically acceptable or that made sense, and (c) the percentages of sentences with miscues that produced a meaning change. Word-for-word substitutions were coded for their graphic similarity. Substitutions were coded for high graphic similarity (e.g., reading *would* for *wouldn't*), some graphic similarity (e.g., reading *would* for *want*), or no graphic similarity (e.g., reading *or* for *were*). After the coding was complete, I identified sentences with high-quality miscues.

After the participants read orally, they provided a retelling. The retellings were transcribed and scored using an analytic rubric with the following criteria: (a) characters, (b) problem, (c) resolution, (d) events, and (e) details. Each criterion was rated on a scale of 1–4, with 1 being the lowest and 4 being the highest. Once each descriptor was rated, they were averaged together to compute the overall retelling score. Two research assistants and I scored the miscue codings and retellings to ensure agreement among the scores.

Interviews. The use of interviews allowed me to target how parents and their children defined and interpreted their own and each other's reading abilities by documenting their discourses around literacy practices and reading events. Each interview was composed of a semi-structured interview called Family Retrospective Miscue Analysis (Family RMA) and unstructured interview questions regarding the family's educational history, the children's progress in school, the families' educational goals for their children, extracurricular activities, and daily activities. The Family RMA allowed parents and their children to reflect together on their own, and each other's oral readings. For the Family RMA, I showed the family members their sentences with high-quality miscues and asked the following questions: (a) Can you tell me what you did here? (b) Why do you think you made the miscue? (c) Does the miscue make sense? (d) Was the miscue corrected? Should it have been? Why? (e) Did the miscue affect your understanding of the text? (Goodman, Martens, & Flurkey, 2014). The Family RMA interview specifically targeted the participants' interpretations and beliefs about reading as I asked them to respond to their high-quality miscues. The unstructured interviews, along with the ethnographic observations, were critical in documenting the social and cultural contexts of the families and their educational experiences.

A total of 80 hours of audio data were collected across the six families. Discourse analysis was the major data analysis method for the oral data. All oral data were transcribed and coded using an inductive approach through the process of denoting and connoting to generate codes for concept formation (LaRossa, 2012; Thomas, 2006). Using an inductive approach required me to read the transcript multiple times in order to engage in denoting and connoting the oral data. Denoting data entails breaking down and highlighting important text segments, or utterances, after all the oral data is transcribed. After identifying important text segments, the segments are linked together to form particular concept codes through the process of connoting. Connoting allows researchers to think about the text segments in a thematic and abstract way as codes are collapsed into concept codes and, ultimately, into thematic codes. Table 2 outlines the concept and thematic codes and provides examples of each. The transgenerational learning model developed out of the following thematic codes: time, physical spaces, identity, actions, and emotions.

Table 2. Discourse Codes and Examples

Thematic Codes	Concept Codes	Examples
Time	Syndicated	"He goes to resource room four days a week."
	Progressive	"I couldn't get information from what I was reading until about the fifth grade."
	Generational	"I do not remember my parents reading to me."
Physical Spaces	School	"She only gets 100s in school."
	Home	"It was a Henry and Mudge book we were reading last night."
Identity	Personality	"Thomas is very quiet."
	Disability	"I have to get over that she is labeled as special education."
	Reader Identity	"He feels himself a good reader."
Actions	Services	"I took him to a neurologist."
	Social Behaviors	"Peter was being difficult in the resource room."
	Reading Behaviors	"What letter does that word start with."
Emotion	Non-Affirmation	"She is being very nasty today."
	Affirmation	"You did a good job, honey" (gives daughter a hug).
	Objective Ambivalence	"As much as it killed me to keep him where he is, I knew it was the best thing for him."

A Transgenerational Lens into Learning to Read

Here, I outline the transgenerational learning model by expanding upon the constructs of time, physical spaces, identity, actions, and emotions, which influenced how the family members interpreted their own and each other's reading abilities. As these sociocultural factors impacted the families' learning context, learning moved from the cognitive arena into a sociocultural plane on which the family members renegotiated and defended their beliefs about learning and literacy. While I separated the factors for discussion purposes, they, in fact, worked in conjunction with each other to create a larger transgenerational space.

Time

Within a transgenerational space, the families talked about literacy through short and long timescales to frame and organize discussions around reading and literacy so that the past, present, and future came together to create a lattice of time. The families within this study drew upon and revived selected past experiences to understand their children's experiences around literacy practices and reading events across timescales.

On the one hand, the families referenced time to structure daily events through short timescales. Terry discussed how Peter "started receiving resource room four days a week," and Nina said that she practiced her flashcards every day at home. On the other hand, time within a

longer timescale was a means of tracking progress. Progressive time provided benchmarks for how parents and their children viewed their educational, social, emotional, and physical developments. For instance, Terry described her son Peter's progress in reading thusly: "In the beginning of the year, he wouldn't be able to do what he does (now)." Christie said that she is a good reader because she started third grade. Progressive time became a window into how individuals perceived themselves and others in regards to their developing abilities.

When it came to reading, the starting points of time were often related to a grade or a school age. This point was particularly evident when revisiting the families. When I revisited Maria's family two years after the initial visitation, Maria's daughter Jenny had developed from being a novice bilingual reader at four years old to becoming an independent bilingual reader at seven years old. During the revisiting phase of the study, Jenny repeatedly used school-based grade levels to describe her reading progress. When I asked Jenny how she thought she learned to read, the following dialogue developed.

Author:	How do you think you learned how to read?
Jenny:	Because in first grade the teacher was nice. When we wanted to know something in English she always come to us and tell us what the word is.
Author:	How do you think you learned to read in Spanish?
Jenny:	I know a little bit of Spanish in kindergarten so she teaches how to read in Spanish and so I can know more Spanish.

A more multifaceted use of time by the participants was the reference to generational time, which is a convergence zone of long and short timescales. Similar to Compton-Lilly's (2015) description of a temporal discourse, generational time is a complex timescale in which families reach back into their distal social histories related to their educational experiences to interpret what they observe in the present time. In the following example, Sophie's father Steve discussed Sophie's reading of *Yo, Vikings* (Schachner, 2002).

> I'm just thrilled that she reads as good as she does. In my opinion, I was educated in public school and I can see the difference. She's definitely at a higher level than I was at her age. Way to go [addressing Sophie].

Steve made sense of Sophie's oral reading by relating his experiences with reading in school, on a long timescale, with Sophie's reading in the present, on a short timescale. The convergence of these timescales was telling in terms of how Steve perceived himself and Sophie as readers and his belief that public and private institutional structures give rise to different types of students. As exemplified in Steve's discourse, the use of generational time by the participants highlighted the complexity with which family members interpreted each other's reading abilities.

Physical and Metaphorical Social Spaces

Learning occurs within activity, and activity happens within a space. I use the term *space* as a general term to include physical, digital, and metaphorical spaces as well as figured spaces (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, pp. 41–42). When discussing their children's abilities within reading events, families made connections to home and school. For instance, when I interviewed Donna on what she would like to see her daughter accomplish as a reader, she replied,

Confidence. I want her to see some confidence and one way for her to do that is for her to get material that she can feel successful with. She's a fourth grader. Realistically, at this point, will she ever read fourth grade? Maybe in the eighth grade she'll be able to read the fourth grade level, but not now.

For Donna, her daughter Nina's reading abilities and progress could not be separated from her participation in school. Donna utilized discourses, such as grade level, attached to the physical school, to document her daughter's growth. In other words, Donna interpreted Nina's abilities as a reader through school, which was not only physical but also a figured world in which social position and ability mattered and were reproduced within the structure of schooling. In the figured world of school, grade level became a symbolic representation of her daughter's reading ability.

In addition to references to school, home was a complex and multidimensional space connected to learning. Borrowing the words of Dyson (1989), the participants deemed school as the official world for learning to read, and home was the unofficial world. Home was a space with permeable boundaries and structures. While this may be the case, the home also tended to be a contentious space as this unofficial space met the official space of school.

The parents in this study wanted to emulate schooling practices in their homes because they felt that by aligning the home with school, they would support their children. For instance, all the parents said that they read with their children every night when their children were young, and both the parents and their children reported that their children recreationally read at home on a regular basis. When discussing this point, Maria, a Spanish-dominant mother, replied,

I do not remember my parents reading to me. I read and pray with Jenny in Spanish every night. Reading bedtime stories is not part of the Ecuadorian culture, but I do it because the teacher recommends it.

Maria's dialogue illustrates the permeability of home boundaries. By reading with Jenny in Spanish, Maria was not only establishing a learning context that promoted reading in her native language; she also created a learning context in the home that was built on school-based activities and beliefs about learning. Maria contrasted this learning context with her home experiences, which suggests how families abandon and acquire new practices based on the multiple spaces within which they participate.

Another mother, Donna, actively pursued school activities to do in the home with Nina. During one session, Donna showed me a baggie full of flashcards that had she created for Nina and a notebook filled with photocopied pages from a program that Nina was using in school.

I try very hard to work with Nina. I asked the teacher for the stories and asked for things that Nina is doing at school. Nina brings them home. I asked the teacher to pick out words that I could help her with. I make flashcards for Nina and put all the words on index cards. Every night I help Nina with those words after her homework.

These examples illustrate the multidimensional and permeable boundaries within the home and how institutional practices infiltrate how parents and children establish learning contexts through school-based activities. A transgenerational learning model uncovers these

inner cartographies that map out the relationships among social, cultural, and physical spaces and how they give rise to certain types of activities that mediate learning within families.

Identity

Transgenerational learning within families requires close examination of how identities of family members align and challenge one another and come to shape and co-construct the learning experiences in the home. I use the term *identity* to describe how the participants articulated their self-perceptions and the perceptions of others through discourse. As such, I examined discourse as identity enactments that related to the participants' sense-of-self and sense-of-others during activity (Holland, et al., 1998; Moje & Luke, 2009).

The families varied in degree with respect to how they defined and defended their children's identities as readers. There were times when they used language to position their children as effective or ineffective readers. During one emotional session, Nancy talked about her daughter Becky's struggles with reading:

> Becky is not a confident reader or a good reader. She barely reads. She has a learning disability. I don't know exactly what is Becky's problem in reading or how she is being helped in school. I know that she is working on a K-1 level.

Through the use of discourse, Nancy positioned Becky as a struggling reader who had a disability, a prevalent construct within educational systems that have built-in structures to separate children into those who can succeed and those who cannot (McDermott, 1996). Nancy's construction of Becky's identity as a reader developed partly because Nancy was unable to relate to Becky's struggles. When I probed further into Nancy's frustration, she replied, "I cannot relate. I feel that she tries so hard. She doesn't have any strengths. I just want her to be a normal child." Not only was Nancy positioning Becky as a struggling reader, but she was perpetuating the idea that children who have learning disabilities cannot learn "normally."

Therefore, a transgenerational learning model accounts for how family members can identify with each other. Identifying with each other requires family members to align themselves with each other as a social group that creates coherence within a family culture. In the case of Nancy and Becky, when there was a lack of coherence in how family members identified with each other, tension and discord could arise.

Other parents, however, were better able to relate to the perceived struggles of their children and focused on developing their children's effective reading identities. Carole, for instance, was able to make sense of Christie's experiences as a struggling reader, because Carole found cohesive experiences between her own educational history and Christie's. When I asked Carole to reflect on her daughter's reading, she replied,

> Her abilities are actually better than I had initially hoped and the challenges she has with her language problem wasn't going to stop her. She is reading. She's showing growth.

Carole often compared her struggles with those of Christie and said, "First of all, I had a reading problem that discouraged me from reading. I do try to keep myself sharp. I have a reading focusing problem."

These examples illustrate the social negotiation of identity and ability. Whereas Nancy was excluded from the culture of a disability, Carole felt herself and Christie as members in that

culture. While Nancy felt that Becky was not a reader, Carole's sense of Christie, who she identified as having a "language problem" and who read at a lower reading level than Becky, was that she was a reader. Level did not guide the ways in which Carole defined Christie's identity as a reader as it did for Nancy. Regardless of being labeled in school, the positive sense of identity dominated Carole's perception of Christie, because there was progress in relation to something that Carole could not do when she was Christie's age.

Engagement with Reading

Engagement with reading is about actions: what family members do and say during reading events and how they react to their own and their children's perceived reading abilities. The families drew from their meta-literate knowledge when engaging in literacy practices and reading events. Meta-literate knowledge is built upon the families' beliefs systems and ideologies around how they learned to become literate. It encompasses a metacognitive knowledge of how individuals employ reading strategies when reading, how family members engage in social practices that involve reading, such as helping with homework and reading bedtime stories, and how they participate in their children's educational experiences, such as determining appropriate services for their children.

For instance, the fourth-grade bilingual Greek and English participant, Sophie, orally read and retold *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* (Allsburg, 1979). When I asked Francis and Sophie to reflect on Sophie's high-quality miscues, Francis responded in a less than positive manner. Sophie read the sentence, "Lights were on and he knew she must be home" as "Lights were *open (self-corrects) on* and he knew she must be home" (Allsburg, 1979, p. 12). Francis said,

> It was okay. I noticed that even though I see them [the words] upside down, she [Sophie] runs ahead and reads a word and she reads something else that's not there. Instead of "the lights were on," [she read] "the lights were open." Sometimes it's like reading not what you see but reading what registers in your mind because you're used to [it]. And specifically about this [one], I want to tell you sometimes, and maybe it's my mistake, you know how it is in Greek. The expression, "turn off the lights" [is expressed as] "open" and "close." So it could be my mistake. I know it's not the right way a lot of times. She'll say "Mom, can you close the lights" when she goes to sleep instead of turn off the lights.

Francis' statement provided a window into her meta-literate knowledge, which she drew upon when ascribing meaning to Sophie's miscues and about reading across two languages. Francis felt that Greek interfered in Sophie's reading abilities in English and blamed herself, because Francis is the native Greek speaker in the family. In her dialogue, while Francis addressed Sophie's substitution of *open* for *on*, she did not address the fact that Sophie corrected her substitution to the expected response. The focus on the substitution without addressing the self-correction and stating that she "runs ahead" to read "something else that's not there" suggests that Francis took a word-oriented view of reading, with accuracy as an important reading behavior. Francis did little to reference the fact that Sophie clearly understood the story or self-corrected when making low-quality miscues. In fact, Sophie was a student who did not demonstrate herself to be a struggling reader throughout the study. Yet Francis felt that Sophie was struggling, because her grades had dropped from A's to C's.

Another common theme among the families, specifically the four families who had children with IEPs in school, was their involvement in their children's educational experiences around reading. These four families were particularly active in advocating for reading services for their children. Nancy talked about going to Becky's Committee on Special Education meeting to advocate for Becky's services. Nancy said,

> I told them that I want to know what they might be using [for Becky's reading program]. I want a say in her reading program. I said that I want to put her on a reading program and they said okay. Now whether or not it's going to happen…

These types of parental actions were reactions to Nancy's perceptions of Becky as a reader who, Nancy believed, "lost her reading strategies."

Before her son Peter was identified in the first grade, Terry's concern over the possibility that her son might have dyslexia caused her to ask her sister to tutor Peter over the summer before his first-grade year. As Terry described it,

> My sister is an inclusion teacher and I asked her to work with Patrick over the summer. And she used Wilson. She said that Wilson is used with dyslexia and felt that it might benefit Peter.

The bilingual families also demonstrated a desire to advocate for their children's reading experiences. Maria's family highlights the extent to which families might go to ensure that her children could attend a dual language school. Because Thomas and Jenny's zoned school was not rated highly or rated as dual language, Maria enrolled them in a highly rated dual-language school through the assistance of her friend. Maria traveled with her children one hour each way on public transportation in order to for them to attend the school. When revisiting Maria's family two years later, I asked about her feelings about Jenny's movement towards becoming an independent bilingual reader. Maria replied, "Muy feliz de que ella puede leer en ambos idiomas. (Very happy that she can read in both languages.)" Working at a pizzeria while her daughter attended school and living a distance away did not permit her to be involved in a variety of school functions with Jenny; yet Maria's actions illustrated her powerful engagement with her children's bilingual and biliterate learning.

For the families who participated in the study, their beliefs that their children would become literate through the support and guidance of the family were concretized in their actions embedded within social activities. Family engagement around literacy learning not only identifies what parents do to support their children's learning but also how and why they do what they do to engage in their children's education.

Emotion

One particularly notable factor that influenced how and why the families engaged in literacy practices and reading events was connected to emotion. The family members within the study exhibited a range of emotions as they engaged in activity and talked about their experiences. The study of emotion in relation to learning is an understudied area, but many researchers recognize the strong relationship between emotion and cognition (Damasio, 1994; Gonzalez Rey, 1999). It was evident early on in this study that family members displayed emotionally laden responses when talking about their children's educational abilities and

peter

experiences. For instance, Terry explained how happy she was with her decision to get Peter services, because she observed improvements in his reading abilities. Terry connected Peter's experiences with her own. She felt that by her helping Peter to receive resource room services, he would receive the support in school that Terry did not have as a student who was labeled with a learning disability in the fourth grade.

Observing their children orally read caused emotive responses on the part of the parents. At one particular session, Donna became frustrated with what she described as Nina's slow reading and entered into the reading event to help her orally read the words. Nancy also felt frustrated with the slow pace of Becky's writing or when Becky did not take her advice on how to write a word. During these scenarios, the parents sounded short, as their speaking tone changed, and they moved closer to their children to help them point at the words on the pages.

Watching their children read caused the parents to resurrect different emotions in regards to their own reading experiences. After Terry watched Peter read in the first reading session, she connected Peter's miscues with those that she had made when she was his age. Terry said,

> I remember skipping the words when I had to read in school. I struggled like Peter. It's all coming back to me now. I was not a reader when I was his age and never read books. My parents never read to me and I just had to learn how to figure out reading on my own.

Terry's comment illustrates the power of transgenerational learning. As a socially driven model, transgenerational learning recognizes the role of emotions and demonstrates how memories of the past can resurrect a number of emotions within us that cause us to react in a certain way. Terry felt empathy as she emotionally connected to Peter's reading behaviors. This empathy contributed to Terry's decision to advocate for special education services for Peter.

The children articulated and physically demonstrated different emotions when engaging with reading events. At one particular session, Christie became visibly and physically upset with her oral reading abilities, which caused me to stop her reading. Emotions are contagious, and as Christie became upset, so did her mother Carole. Carole responded to Christie's behavior in the following way:

> You are making me so uncomfortable. You are acting so reluctant. This is such a waste of good energy. I have to run away when she acts like this, and I'm bombarded with this horrible energy. She can't be possibly learning so why are we doing this. I'm sorry but I don't mean to be mean.

This short episode provides a window into how emotionally trying particular reading events are on families. Emotion permeated through the family members, moving from parent to child or from child to parent. As Carole and Christie's example illustrates, the parents' emotive responses were not always directed towards their children's reading abilities, but instead towards the emotions that their children emanate within the learning activities.

A Transgenerational Model

Figure 2 provides a reconceptualization of an intergenerational model of learning into a transgenerational model as a nonlinear representation of learning within families. Figure 2 conceptualizes how family members (represented by G1 and G2) transact with each other in a

singular point in time (the dot in the middle of the plane). The plane represents a present sociocultural space defined by the following factors: connections to the social spaces within which family members participate, the range of emotions that they bring to various activities, their identities, both in terms of self-identification and those they co-construct with other people, and the ways in which they engage in social and reading experiences. The line that transverses the plane represents time—the past (the line at the left), present (the dot in the middle of the plane), and future (the line on the right). The model shows the fluidity of the social plane in relation to time. The plane can shift in any direction to move back in time as individuals bring in past experiences to interpret present experiences, or it can move up in time as individuals react to present experiences to generate future possibilities. At the same time, while all these factors influenced the learning context for the families in this study, not all families addressed them equally. For instance, some families, such as Terry and Peter's family, used discourses related to time when talking about literacy practices, while other families, such as Nancy and Becky's, had little reference to time. Each family created its own transgenerational learning portrait as it foregrounded certain elements over others.
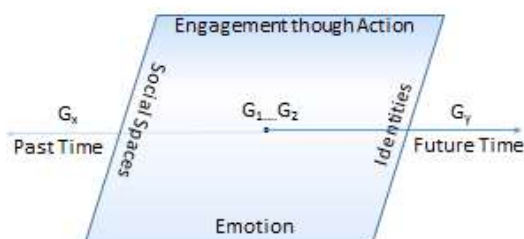

Figure 2. Transgenerational model of learning.

At the same time, the transgenerational model portrays how knowledge about and around literacy transcends generations. Parents (G1) and their children (G2) can cross generations by moving backwards to bring in previous generations (Gx) or moving forwards to work towards possible future generations (Gy).

To illustrate how family members transact with each other within a transgenerational space, consider Carole's final interview. I asked her whether she noticed if she worked with Christie differently since participating in the research sessions. Carole responded,

> Absolutely. Basically if she's chosen a proper word even though it's not the exact word, I hold on … who cares. I'm more patient. I give her more credit. And I have found that she can read much more sophisticated books instead of "run Jane run." Which I remember in my reading program reading "run Jane run" and thinking that I'm a little bit more sophisticated than that and my comprehension was beyond on. My empathy is with her.

Carole's response exemplifies how transgenerational factors influenced her interpretation of Christie as a reader. Carole opened the dialogue with how she reacted differently to Christie's reading by discussing Christie's word substitutions, which Carole began to differentiate as high-quality or low-quality miscues. A "proper word" for Carole was a high-quality substitution, which can be left as is. Carole, however, did not stop there. She went on to bring in affective

factors. Carole described that she was more patient and empathized with Christie, because she observed how Christie could read beyond what Carole had initially thought. Carole defined Christie as someone who "can read" and who read "more sophisticated books than run Jane run." At this point, Carole crossed timescales and used generational time to make connections between Christie and herself by recalling past images of reading books like *Dick and Jane*. Aligning herself with Christie, Carole also positioned herself as a more advanced reader by linking her own experiences in school, which became a metaphorical space for defining her own reading abilities.

Concluding Thoughts

Similar to Proust's experiences of a cookie transporting him to another time, watching a child read can trigger a flood of sociocultural emotional factors that influence how one acts, thinks, and believes. The findings from this study support this point by suggesting that the ways parents and children co-construct their children's reading abilities—which cause them to support or challenge the ways in which their children were labeled or positioned as readers in school—are based on a myriad of connecting transgenerational factors. Consequently, revaluing rather than remediating readers and supporting parents and their children requires entering into a transgenerational space in which it is easier to understand the complex relationships that time, space, engagement, emotions, and identities transact with each other to inform the decision-making processes of families as the families engage in learning experiences related to home and school.

Through examining the literacy practices through a transgenerational lens, three conclusions can be drawn. First, to understand literacy practices within families effectively, we must be able to enter into this transgenerational space to recognize the use of generational knowledge and beliefs. This space is defined as a fourth space where past, present, and future connect to create a space that holds its own separate identity. Therefore, it is important to further examine this space and the factors that characterize and define it for families. While I identified five elements that arose out of my data, my list is not exhaustive. Further investigations into concepts of time (particularly in relation to memory) and emotions are needed to examine how they inform the perceptions that readers have of themselves and of others. Subsequently, further questions are worth investigating regarding how other social spaces related to various institutions, such as work, connect to the transgenerational factors.

In addition, while I worked with parents and their children, transgenerational factors also play their roles in the ways teachers and parents support or challenge the ways in which children are labeled as struggling readers in schools. How parents and teachers talk about and label children as struggling readers is far from neutral. Yet school-based assessments and decision-making processes act as if it is. The decisions that the parents in this study made regarding how their children were supported in the home and school were saturated with a variety of factors that had, at times, little to do with assessment data.

This point leads to the second conclusion: the findings suggest that revaluing the children also means revaluing the families of those children. The term *family* does not necessarily mean just the immediate family with whom we work. Instead, it also means understanding the historicity of the family and inquiring about family members and past experiences to comprehend better how the past relates to decisions in the present. Learning and understanding literacy are deeply rooted in our histories and lived experiences. Families carry models and

beliefs about learning that are solidified through activities and relationships that families have with other people and institutions such as schools. Learning within families is located in sociocultural factors that give meaning to literacy and the worlds within which the families participate.

Finally, examining literacy practices through a transgenerational lens allows educators and researchers to revalue families by understanding how particular frames of reference regarding reading abilities are temporally constructed through social interactions. In order to do so, Whitehead's (1925) ideas of conservation and change are critical for understanding the range of choices that families make for their literate survival. Conservation and change are key aspects of how families endure over time and space. Conservation refers to the idea that while we maintain parts of our experiences, environment, and existence, we create change in order to address a variety of circumstances that arise in our environment. Parents in this study who had less than pleasant experiences in school conserved many of these thoughts and feelings, and through conserving them, they recalibrated the future of their children through change. The past is not relived as is, but instead, the images of the past influence how we react in the present and create certain courses of action for the future.

In making sense of literacy learning, Compton-Lily (2011) argued that parents "repeatedly returned to some stories while neglecting and forgetting others or framed some stories as examples of larger patterns" (p. 248). Questions regarding what makes families generate change to maintain consistency in their stories and experiences are worth addressing as well as what role education plays in conserving and changing experiences that families have in school. At the same time, longitudinal examinations of the children-participants' experiences around school-based labels as they grow into adulthood are critical and necessary to clearly understand the ways in which certain transgenerational elements undergo processes of conservation and change over time. The key goal is to understand how reading abilities and schooling labels are not solely dependent on isolated cognitive scientific influences but are influenced by transgenerational factors, as we work with families in reimaging the future and creating alternative courses of action and identities.

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