

"I learned how to spell English on Channel 18": Television, language, and literacies in Sudanese refugee families

Kristen H. Perry
University of Kentucky
Annie M. Moses
University of Pennsylvania

Literacy is a social practice

- n Literacy practices are:
 - n Historically and contextually situated
 - n Dynamic and malleable
 - n Multiple and purposeful, and some are privileged above others
 - n Informed by values, beliefs & attitudes
 - n Deeply enmeshed in social, cultural & power structures

(Barton & Hamilton, 1998, 2000; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Street, 1995, 2001)

Emergent, Intergenerational & Adult Literacies

- n Emergent literacy
 - Children learn much about literacy before entering school (Clay, 1998; Teale & Sulzby, 1986)
- n Family/intergenerational literacy
 - Continuum of acquired abilities & social constructs that influence literacy (Gadsden, 2000)
- n Adult literacy
 - Life-long, informal learning in meaningful contexts (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener, 2004)

Television, Literacy, and Children

- n Children watch a great deal of television, videos and DVDs
 - Provides opportunities to experience literacy (televisual texts)
 - Connects with children's lives outside of viewing (e.g., Buckingham, 1993; Marsh, 2005; Robinson, 1997)
 - Actively (cognitively) engage with content (e.g., Huston and Wright, 1998)
- n Children can learn from what they see on television
 - Viewing is associated with both positive outcomes and negative outcomes (e.g., Anderson, et al., 2001)

Television, Literacy, and Children, cont.

- n Viewing educational programs have been shown to positively effect aspects of children's emergent literacy:
 - vocabulary, letter recognition, word recognition, concepts of print, letter-sound correspondence, and fluency
- n What children watch, as well as how much they watch, matters for their literacy development

(e.g., Ball & Bogatz, 1970; Linebarger, 2000; Rice, Huston, Truglio, & Wright, 1990; Singer & Singer, 1994)

Research questions

- n What types of programs did these children watch?
 - How did these programs shape their literacy practices?
- n How do these Sudanese parents view television in the American context, and in relation to language and literacy development?

Ethnographic methodology

- n Data collection
 - Participant observation in homes & community
 - Interviews of parents and children
 - Artifact collection
- n Data analysis
 - Coding
 - n Programming type
 - n Channel/network
 - n Who's watching
 - Data matrices
 - Identifying patterns and themes
 - n AtlasTI software
 - n Microsoft Excel

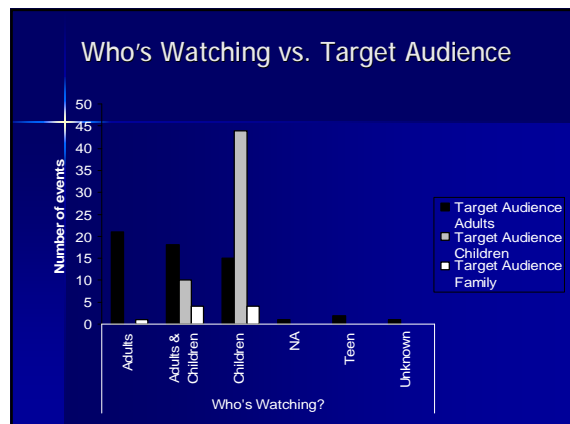
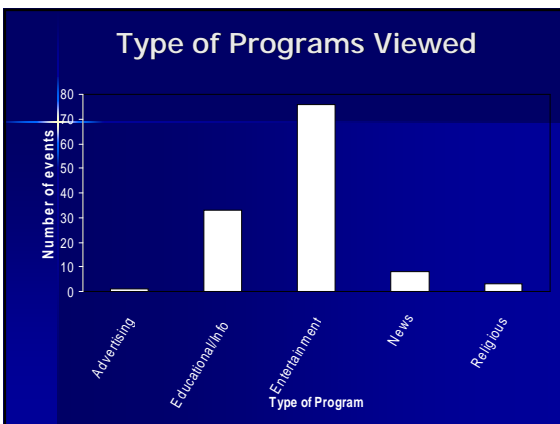
Participants

- n Reputational selection (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999)
- n Three families, all sojourned in Middle Eastern countries (Egypt and Lebanon)
- n Families differed by parents' level of education
- n Focal children in kindergarten and first grade

PARENT	EDUCATION LEVEL	FOCAL CHILD(REN)	GRADE
M: Viola	Law degree	Boni	1 st
F: Isbon	Some college	Samuel	Kindergarten
M: Falabia	Nursing degree	Juana	1 st
F: Primo	High school		
M: Akhlas	7 th grade	Remaz	Kindergarten
F: Amin	Some high school		

Sudanese Families Watching Television

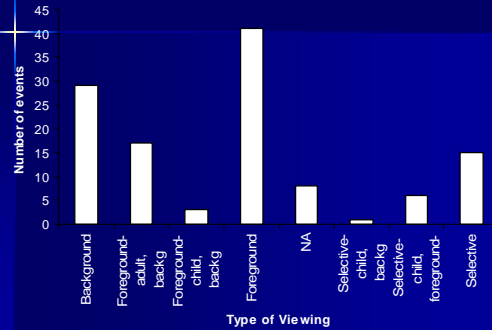
- n Descriptive data revealed that these Sudanese families watched many entertainment programs and some educational / informational programs
 - Children in these families mostly watched programs created for them (as a target audience)
 - Particularly when adults and children viewed television together, children saw some adult / general-audience programs



Sudanese Families Watching Television, cont.

- n These families more often attended to programs than they had programs on in the background
 - At times, adults and children engaged in other activities while also viewing programs (i.e., selective viewing)

Type of Viewing



TV is a family-wide resource:

- n Connection to Sudanese culture
 - Often watched African programming
- n Medium for religious practice and learning
 - “You must listen to this one—it’s better”
- n Resource for learning about US context
 - History/historical figures
 - American society (Hollywood, Dr. Phil)
 - Current events
 - Pop culture

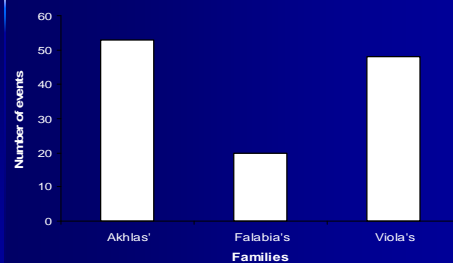
Adults and television

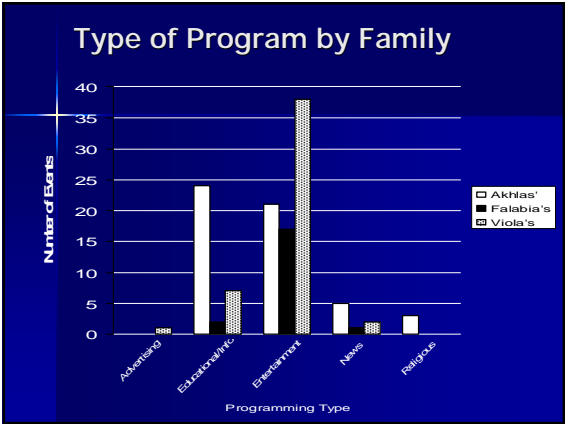
- n TV is an important source for adult learning
 - Information resource (news, weather)
 - English language learning opportunities
 - n Learning vocabulary, practicing reading captions
 - n Watching ESL programming on public stations
- n Belief: TV can be a learning resource for children
 - re Scooby-doo: “Is it educational?”
 - Also worried about too much time in front of TV and its effect on school work

Children, television & literacy practices

- n Beliefs about TV reflected parents’
 - “It helps you learn, for little kids”—Remaz
 - “Kids don’t watch Jackie Chan”—Samuel
- n Access to important content knowledge
 - Hurricanes, “magic E”, border collies
- n Motivation to read media-related print
 - Sounding out print on DVD covers
 - Figuring out text on computer games

Television Events by Family



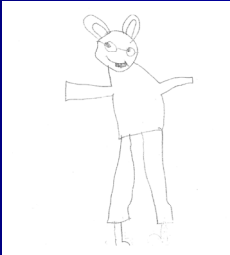


Media-literacy connections

- n Types of programming watched seemed to correspond with book and computer choices
 - "That's a new movie, Hannah Montana—she's famous"—Juana
 - "I like Lizzie McGuire. This is all the shows that we watch." —Juana
 - Boni talking about seeing *Arthur* on TV and at school library

Media-literacy connections

- n Children also made connections as they composed their own texts
 - "I'm making Arthur!"—Remaz
 - "Now, I want to write Spiderman. I want to write a story."—Samuel



Implications

- n Television helps to shape families' literacy practices
 - Provides opportunities to learn about US society while also maintaining connections to African heritage
 - Provides opportunities for adults and children to learn languages and literacies
 - Represents a resource for families as they engage in literacy practices outside of television viewing (e.g., engagement with other literacy tools)
- n In doing so, television should be considered:
 - In the study of how refugee families learn about and use languages and literacies
 - In how we help refugee families navigate the US context