TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES IN PROMOTING LITERACY IN THE CONTEXT OF PLAY IN A SPANISH-SPEAKING KINDERGARTEN
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Abstract
This study focuses on the roles teachers undertake to promote literacy in a kindergarten classroom of Spanish-speaking children. Five early childhood teachers and their children participated in this study. Data were collected through teachers' interviews and systematic videotaped observations during the children's play periods. Inductive content analysis was the method used to analyze the data. The results define and describe the (1) teachers' philosophy about reading, (2) teachers' philosophy about play, and (3) teachers' roles that they assumed in what they perceived to be the context of play. They also (1) identify the roles that teachers assume to promote literacy in what they perceived to be the context of play and (2) describe how these roles promote children's literacy in a kindergarten classroom of Spanish-speaking children. Teacher roles supporting literacy in children's play were identified and described as monitoring, facilitating, interacting, inquiring about, initiating, and extending children's play as well as engaging children in discussion and making decisions during play.

Abstracto
Esta investigación estudia las funciones de las maestras en un jardín de niños para desarrollar la habilidad de leer en niños de habla española de cinco años de edad. Cinco maestras y los niños en su clase participaron en este estudio. Datos para este estudio fueron tomados con entrevistas de las maestras y observaciones que se tomaron sistemáticamente usando cintas para ver por televisión. Los datos fueron analizados inductivamente por el método de análisis de contenido. Los resultados identifican y describen (1) la filosofía de las maestras sobre la lectura, (2) la filosofía de las maestras acerca del juego de niños y (3) las funciones de las maestras para desarrollar la lectura en un jardín de niños que hablan español. Las funciones de las maestras para ayudar a los niños aprender a leer usando el juego de los niños se identificaron y describieron como vigilando, facilitando, intermediando, preguntando, iniciando y extendiendo el juego de los niños al igual que ayudar a los niños en discusiones y en hacer decisiones durante el juego de niños.
Literacy is an important requirement for individuals to succeed in society. Individuals with higher levels of literacy have better opportunities for social and economic success. Although most children learn to read with ease, large numbers of children in America have reading difficulties; because they lack the comprehension skills to meet the requirements of an increasingly competitive economy. A technological society, such as ours, requires a higher level of literacy. This requirement creates serious repercussions for those with reading deficiencies (National Research Council, 1998).

Interventions that focus on literacy strategies can reduce reading deficiencies, especially for those who do not speak English proficiently. For more than three decades, the number of students who lack English proficiency has continued to grow. In 1997/1998 the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBLEMA) indicated that 3.3 million American Public School students lack the ability to speak English proficiently. Since 1968 the Bilingual Act created by the United States Congress identified the unique needs of these students. Policy makers have responded by creating new programs for these students (Placier, 1993). Presently emotional responses and social or economic misunderstandings about anti-immigrant impressions influence the educational policies for non-English speakers. During the 1990's, it has been estimated that more than five million children of immigrants have entered the United States' public schools (Friedlander, 1992). Researchers have developed and tested experimental programs designed to better meet the needs of these students (King, 1994). Some of these programs, however, did not consider the students' language. Students encountered academic problems when they became aware that learning the standard language of instruction in the school led to lower competence in their native language and culture. For them, the transition from home to school became difficult, because it represented a major break from their everyday living (Saracho, 1986). In school they considered the language patterns, social interactions, and the manifestations of values and culture as atypical (Saracho & Spodek, 1983) from those at home. Saracho (1986) identifies four levels that students respond when they experience this situation:

**Level 1 (lowest level):** Students become confused when they experience a drastic difference between the two language and cultures.

*Example:* A series of charts is used to teach the unit on the family. The father usually is blond, has blue eyes, wears a suit and holds a black attache case. Dalia, who does not speak or understand English, sees the charts and discovers that the family on the chart does not resemble her family. Her father has black hair and wears greasy overalls, because he is a mechanic. This experience confuses her.

**Level 2:** Students deny their language and culture, pretending that their language and culture is the same as the school's.

*Example:* Miguel Jimenez, a Spanish-speaking student, changes his name to Michael and may even go a step further and change the pronunciation of his name from Himanez to Geemenes.

**Level 3:** Students adapt to those new or different customs in the culture in which they perceive to have more advanced patterns. Therefore, children will assess each language and culture to adapt only the best patterns or customs to make them their own.

*Example:* Juan José enjoys eating the food from his culture. He makes it a point to celebrate birthdays and holidays with his family and friends, because he usually gets to eat and has a good time. However, when he is with his English-speaking friends, he refuses to speak his native language and only listens to English-speaking stations on the radio.