



## Tapping In: Understanding how recently immigrated Hispanic-Latino families engage and learn with media, by Amber Levinson.

Research Brief - March 2015 (Updated May 2020)

### Overview:

Through ethnographic and quantitative data, Stanford researcher Amber Levinson examines the language and literacy experiences of low-income Latino immigrant families during the 2013-14 academic year. All families were also provided with iPads and selected apps, to examine how families took up these media tools. This brief highlights selected findings and implications from the study.

### Research questions:

- What role does media play in the language and literacy experiences at home for low-income Latino immigrant families, specifically children developing as dual language learners?
- What opportunities might digital media and tablet technologies offer these children and other family members who are also learning English?

### The study involved collecting data in two phases:

#### **PHASE 1:** Field research on families' media use at home (parents and children).

This study focused on seven Latino immigrant families with young children in an urban setting in the San Francisco Bay Area. The study began by documenting families' existing routines with media at home, using ethnographic case studies as well as a survey. All seven families' primary home language was Spanish. Parents' length of time in the United States ranged from one to eleven years. Each family had at least one child between the age of five and seven years old (siblings ranged from age two to nine) and all children were enrolled in public elementary schools.

#### **PHASE 2:** Studying the way families used their new iPads.

Mid-way through data collection, the researcher provided each family with an iPad equipped with language- and literacy-related applications. The iPad applications included: Reading Rainbow, Barefoot World Atlas, and Toontastic.

### Selected findings and implications:

- *Pre-iPad: Media was used for language learning and language-rich play:* Parents used media intentionally to help their children learn English and also develop their Spanish. **Parents all felt that children's media was an important tool for introducing their children to English, and/or to provide additional exposure to Spanish.** In addition to watching or playing with programs, **some families also produced their** own media, which provided interesting opportunities to revisit important moments in their lives and to engage in language-rich play.
- *Pre-iPad: Media acted as a bridge between settings, including home and school:* Media played an important role for families in creating connections between home and school. For example, families used Internet translators (like Google Translate) to understand their children's homework, and to explore new words that kids had heard at school. Parents used YouTube to review math concepts so they could help children with their homework. **YouTube was also used at home to help children learn more about what they had**

**developed an interest in, and sometimes these interests came from topics covered in school.**

These examples all pointed to ways that educators can think about using technology to make home and school more connected. Families were innovative in their use of technology for bridging settings, and parents themselves took advantage of technology to further their own English learning (whether doing work for classes or independently). Media was also acting as a bridge between families and their countries of origin, both via direct communication and via cultural artifacts such as TV programs and music that parents introduced to their children as a way of preserving culture.

- *Post-iPad: Children used iPads for reading and producing stories:* The iPads introduced to families led to some new practices with media, largely because of the specific apps that were installed on the iPads. Families enjoyed using the e-book apps (which offered audio narration options), and some parents liked reading together with their children in part to improve their English. In addition, **children enjoyed using media production tools such as Toontastic, which allowed them to create and narrate their own stories.** Families also used the iPads for the same activities that they did previously using smartphones or TV (games, video translating, etc.). It was evident that families of all backgrounds may face challenges finding quality apps for their children. **Schools and community-based organizations have a role to play in making suggestions for content families can use at home.**