

## **When illiterate isn't illiterate: Reading reality in a multimodal way.**

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For the last several years the literacy problem of youth and adults has occupied an important place in discussions held by international organizations and in the agendas of the Latin American regions' ministries of education<sup>i</sup>. Underschooled adults and youths are believed to be incapable of having an opinion, understanding complex issues and participating in social spaces. People tagged and classified as illiterate, uneducated or poorly educated are generally not recognized as active social subjects despite the fact that they participate in institutions, struggle for their rights, constitute families or plan and develop projects for the future. For the most part, the ways they appropriate and use written language is unknown to many scholars, educators or policy makers because the ways they use written language and other semiotic representations is unfamiliar and somewhat unconventional from a literate's point of view, making their meaning making processes invisible to the everyday eye. In this paper I will argue, contrary to popular belief and official discourse, that people like Marta Graciela, one of the adults I studied, interpret complex multimodal representations and participate actively and competently in a variety of social contexts. I will present a complex outlook on literacy learning in order to understand how Marta Graciela interprets the meaning of texts, graphic images, and oral language, and how she uses them in daily life. I will also identify the different tools that mediate her acquisition of knowledge.

Various authors have studied underschooled adults and the literacy knowledge they construct and use in their daily life (Kalman 2003, 2004; Zavala 2002, Niño Murcia 2004). In my recent work<sup>ii</sup> (Lorenzatti, 2009) I have analyzed how adults who never went to school during their childhood or adolescence, make sense of everyday

situations using different modes of representation present in their daily life (Kress 2003).

### **Literacy and multiple modalities: the conceptual approach to understanding knowledge acquisition processes in unschooled adults.**

The theoretical perspective of New Literacy Studies (NLS) focuses on literacy as social practice within wider contexts. This approach offers a methodological and ideological position for debating the apparent neutrality of written practices and creates concepts for analyzing the social and cultural diversity in Latin American countries. When the bond between written and oral language is conceived of as more flexible, their relationship is more complex and thus, form and function in real communication overlap in certain situations. The ideological concept of literacy highlights the fact that written language plurality is historically conceived and culturally built and therefore inserted in relationships (Zavala, Niño Murcia y Ames, 2004). This suggests examining who reads and writes at each event, how reading and writing are accomplished in the different social circles where the subjects move, and how the expectations and consequences related to reading and writing play out.

These meaning-making practices include not only speaking, reading and writing but also other modes of representation (music, movies, and graphic images) as well as the vital presence of mediating tools, either human or symbolic. Kress's outline (2003) on multimodality offers theoretical possibilities for understanding how adults that did not go to school during childhood and never learned to read written language well, manage to build and give meaning to different semiotic representations occurring in their daily life. The recognition of the existence of numerous cultural resources involved in message construction (oral language, writing, images, gestures, music, and objects as tri-dimensional models) helps us to overcome the dichotomy view of literacy/illiteracy which has long dominated pedagogical discussions, and provides new analytical perspectives for studying the meaning making processes that emerge in situations of complex graphic compositions. Kress posits that the written mode will be increasingly displaced by image in many areas of public communication, even though written language continues to be preferred by the cultural and political "elites".

Accepting that writing is but one of the modes of representation present in texts (Kress and Brezemer, 2009) could potentially influence (and renew) the design of educational opportunities for unschooled and underschooled adults. Kress points out that the writing and image are based on different logics of representation and clearly have different affordances. This term refers to the potential of the different modal components that that make appropriations and different significances possible.

Written language is generally organized in a linear way and read in one direction, from left to right in Romanic script, for example; the setting of graphemes and spaces form words. The reader must fill the words with meaning, constructing from context, and polysemic options and cultural contents. On the other hand the organization of image is controlled by a spatial logic, and by simultaneous representation of its visual elements arranged in a spatial disposition. Here the observer's role is to give order to the simultaneous elements.

At present there is a strong multimodal component in different environments and it is important to examine the affordances of these different modes of representation. This approach allows the analyst to reconstruct the ways adults like Marta Graciela interact with socially constructed signs without centering on writing but by adapting it to other modes. (Kress, 2004) and I now describe Gracelia's situation as a case study for these wider arguments.

### **Images, flavors and fragrances: Martha Graciela: a case study**

It is important to understand Martha Graciela's history in order to appreciate some of her living conditions. She was born in a rural area of Bolivia where only boys attended school, girls were not allowed to; as a result only males learned to read and write. Since she did not go to school, she felt obliged to learn how to use other forms of representation, such as oral language, images, and gestures according to the communicative practices that arose from the diverse contexts and activities that made up her life. In order to investigate these activities and do justice to Martha's communicative skills I accompanied Marta Graciela on several occasions to different sites to observe how she dealt with the demands for reading and writing she encountered during her day and I also interviewed her about specific situations. When possible I audio recorded and took photographs

as well as extensive notes. I draw upon this material below in my account of Martha's engagement with literacy and other modes.

Although she can sound out some words, she depends heavily on other elements carrying meaning in order to understand the texts she encounters during her day. Images and oral language were the modes most used by Marta Graciela in order to become part of and participate in different social circles. For analytical purposes, the different ways she makes meaning will be analyzed separately, although in her daily activities they are simultaneously present in most cases.

Marta Graciela recognizes letters, numbers and written words in different media. At night school she works on traditional school exercises like copying words and making sentences, but she struggles to sound out words, find the right letters, and make sense of what she is asked to do. She often waves her hand in the air and calls out "Teacher, Teacher!" trying to get the instructor's attention and help. In this chapter I will portray a different Marta Graciela, and illustrate how she makes use of other modes and cues such as graphic image, flavors and fragrances. In the interest of showing her to be a competent meaning maker, I show how Marta Graciela is a sophisticated reader of multimodal texts even though she flounders when asked to pronounce words or read a sentence out loud in class. There is even evidence to suspect that in other contexts, Marta Graciela grasps the meaning of writing although she is reluctant to openly admit this.

PLACE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Image is one of the modes present in Marta Graciela's social spaces that make up her daily contexts. Photographs and drawings are found on religious objects, on posters in shop windows, on domestic tools, in different institutions on the street, and so on. What follows is a description of some of the situations Marta Graciela experienced daily where graphic images contributed directly to her understanding of meanings; I will also examine how Marta Graciela uses images in religious worship, her household, and public institutions. In the context of her religious practice, she interacts with different texts containing images. She remembers that when she was an assistant teacher of a group of students she used religious magazines and a bible for children which had many colored and black and white images.

In the illustrated version of the Bible depicted here (Fig 2), each verse is accompanied by several drawings allusive to its content to help understand the pastors' sermons and facilitate the memorization of the verses. At an evangelic group meeting I attended, Marta Graciela asked for the reading of a verse she had identified from an image and associated with a situation she was living at the time.

PLACE FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

There are also full page illustrations that emphasize the main actions of each prayer; Marta Graciela uses these images as a reference for her interpretation of the text; for example, she uses the image in Figure 2 to analyze the presence of divine intervention in human life and relates it to a mother's care. Looking at this picture, she muses :” this is a bird feeding its little birds. This is how God looks after us, like this bird takes care of its young. I mean,, kids are baby birds and mothers look after them”. (Reg. 4/10/2007)

The presence of images is not only important in the religious domain but also in the domain of work. Marta Graciela sells cosmetics from a catalogue and the drawings and photographs used to illustrate it help her sell the products. She goes through the neighborhood, door by door, offering products to people. She also does this with the people that attend adult school with her. To sell her products, first of all she shows the catalogue, she asks them to look at the products available, especially those which are on sale at a discounted price. Then, when her customers choose a product she asks them to write their names on the page, on top of the image they want to buy. The writing is done by the buyer and serves as a reminder to Marta Graciela but she also memorizes the chosen product. This same procedure is repeated when she places her order. She asks a friend of hers to fill out the order form using the information from the catalogue. Finally, when the products arrive, she organizes them according to her clients' previous requests using their names handwritten in the catalogue to guide how she packages them.

All these actions involve a graphical image and the use of her memory. Marta Graciela identifies the product by its photograph and then remembers the corresponding product for each client. During my interviews with her she did not clearly say if she could read the client's name. When I insisted, and asked her this question again, she simply replied: “I remember it”. She completed the final job leading up to the distribution of the products to her customers at home. There she would place the

products on the table, sort them into plastic bags and give them to each client, depending once again on her memory.

At home, Marta Graciela also distinguishes written objects using graphic images. Due to her poor health, she takes several medications and controls closely what she eats. How she identifies the pills she has been prescribed gives a glimpse at how she has appropriated literacy practices. For example, she must differentiate the pills she takes for her cough from those she takes for gastritis. My questions about how she does this led to a description of each medicine and clearly showed how Marta Graciela closely paid attention to the different characteristics of her medications: she described them in detail regarding their shape, color and size.

Marta Graciela also drinks several different kinds of medicinal teas and she uses color to recognize and distinguish the packages. For example, a yellow box means black tea, green and white indicates a digestive tea which she also identifies with the image of the plant's leaf that is shown on the outside of one of the boxes. Although she considers the graphical image and the color the most important characteristics, she finally adds the sense of smell and the identification of aromas as a new indicator as well. She associates the plant drawn on the box with a real leaf and as a result, she succeeds in giving a particular meaning to the box and recognizes the tea. Another situation in which she uses images is when she is in the supermarket. Here she interprets different characteristics of the merchandise to distinguish different products from each other. During a visit to one such store, I saw how she used the designs of commercial wrappings, colors and smells. At one moment, she chose two bars of soap and holding one in each hand she asked me if I could tell the difference between them, placing me in the position of the person with 'reading' difficulties that literacy programmes often assume for their learners (Rogers, 2004). It was not easy since they were quite similar. As she sensed my hesitation, she started giving me some hints to help me identify them. "This has one color (lifting one bar of soap), and this one has another (as she lifted the other one). Yes, yes, here...if you take a look (she smells the soap). This one must be herbal or something like this. What does it mean? You should have a look at the colors. They mean something. That's the way life is"<sup>iii</sup>. (Registered 09/12/2007).

Because the wrappers and their designs were quite similar, Marta Graciela chose to give priority to the color of each one. To this she added another characteristic of the product, its' smell, and this helped complete the meaning. In fact, the soaps did have

different fragrances. Marta Graciela made explicit the relationship between these modes of interpretation and knowledge. “Let’s see, what about this one, what does it smell like? Let’s see... this does not smell very much, let’s see this one, it’s more perfumed. Sure, this is the way to learn!”<sup>iv</sup> (Registered 09/12/2007)

These examples illustrate that reading is a lot more than deciphering a chain of letters. In this particular case, where consumers must differentiate products before purchasing them, Marta Graciela interpreted several aspects of the goods in order to make a decision. It illustrates how the product’s characteristics – colors, flavors and fragrances – allow her to pay close attention to the objects she picks up and compare them. This kind of multimodal interpretation is used by reading customers, and is not only a strategy used by non-reading buyers. Readers also factor in and use different representative modes to give significance to their actions: for example, when purchasing a product, even if it has not expired, a customer can determine that it is rancid by the way it looks and smells and prefer not to purchase it. These different ways of reading reality integrate text, image, smell, color to show how complex messages are in a multimodal sense. Letters are not the only carriers of meaning when dealing with physical objects, color, design, smell size and shape work together to create meaning and it is the meaning maker’s job to interpret them.

The example of the hand soaps is a complement to another situation in the supermarket. Marta resorts to the multimodal representation to recognize a type of laundry detergent when a woman shopper in the store was looking for a low foaming soap for her automatic washing machine. The shopper first asked me where the low suds detergent was and I immediately tried to read the labels on different packages to locate it. This was somewhat time-consuming so Marta Graciela told me: “look over there”, pointing to the bubbles logotype that identified the low foaming product. In this case the image of the bubbles was enough to choose the product. The existence of central and lateral elements signals readers to shift their sight from the center to the sides of the packages. This example illustrates how the image itself and its elements are full of meaning and that it is not necessary to decode every written word to interpret the commercial packaging (Kress, 2003).

Another telling example is how Marta Graciela situates herself in the city. The urban landscape makes it possible to travel through the streets without having to decode the signs. During my time with Marta Graciela, I could see how she used the shapes and

colors of signs, landmarks and buildings to orient herself and at a downtown corner she told me she recognized a certain crossing from the big, red and white sign of a well-known transnational company on a specific corner. She moved around the city center by identifying signs and buildings at each corner instead of reading specific street names.

In a previous paper (Lorenzatti, 2007) I described how a group of youths who attended night school, identified commercial firms from their signs. While going through the neighborhood, these youths could express their knowledge about the consequences of written culture. They saw that some shops did not post any written commercial identification which they interpreted to mean that the owners might be evading taxes. In this example, these youngsters are aware of their social world, the obligation to pay taxes to the State and its close relationship with displaying written identifiers (or not). Apart from being guided by the physical landscape of the city, Marta Graciela is also able to read some signs. Like in any other reading event, this identification is associated with the context where the reading was taking place. For instance, I took her to visit a lawyer to help her with a legal procedure needed to get the deed to her house. When we were looking for a place to park the car, she saw a parking lot halfway down the block. I asked her how she had recognized it and finally she said she could read a little. From the different situations I observed her in, I concluded that she could read some texts and also used writing to make interpretations, although it was never clear to me how she used them (Rafat, Rogers, Street; 2009).

Marta Graciela uses images to help her with her daily chores in a number of ways: since she does her shopping in the center of the city, she uses public transportation to get to shops and stores; she is able to identify goods in supermarkets and neighborhood shops using images, and she also uses a catalogue to sell cosmetics. In church Marta Graciela works as a teacher's aide at Sunday school and as part of her duties she uses pictures to teach children how to interpret Bible stories. The examples examined here show Marta Graciela to be an active, engaged interpreter, she makes meaning from a variety of representations; her signifying work is a far cry from the usual passive social portrayal of illiterate adults as dependent and limited.



## **Oral language and mediation**

Much of the spoken interaction that occurs in the evangelist church is based on the written word and this context provides a powerful illustration of how talk plays a fundamental role in the interpretative practices of written texts. At the church meetings, the leader's oral word relies on counseling and interpretation of the written word. The spoken word is used to mediate God's speech, as represented in writing in the bible. The only person in the meeting who has the sacred text in front of her is a female leader. She is the one who reads it out loud and interprets what it says; as she reads the verses she also explains the general meaning of the text as she understands it. Her speech fosters the participation of others who give significance to the text based on their life experiences. The congregation exchange dialogues, share points of view on any given problem, and offer advice to each other on what to do.

They believe that all actions will always be guided by the light of the divine word. Marta Graciela says: "what is important is to read the word which gives food to our souls. Greatness is to know God's word, this word makes you free. Let us say the word of God will heal you, here is health, and here is the word". The vision of the word is regarded as a sign; a way of influencing others and oneself. Here the word, written and oral, is viewed as a sign from God and has influence over people's actions. Zavala (2002, 176) points out that "the word can leave the page so as to irradiate different forms of power". From what I witnessed at the church meetings and Marta Graciela's expressions during the interviews, for her the Bible is a written document that reveals the "truth", guiding the faithful in their daily actions. In this particular religious context, it is the spoken word that sustains social practices in the written culture.

Marta Graciela's approach to spoken language in the other institutions we visited differed from how she understood it at church. In other social spaces, particularly in large institutional settings such as public agencies and banks, she interacted with employees as a first hand strategy for navigating the bureaucracy and institutional procedures. In these institutions oral language many times became a bridge towards achieving particular goals such as collecting public support funds, paying a bill, having a teller read to her from the computer screen. For example, when I accompanied her to the electric company, she asked numerous questions of the employees until she reached the office where she had to file a complaint about being over charged. On entering the

building she greeted the guard and informed him of the reason for her visit; she asked him then where she should go. He escorted her to the billing office.

On the way there she again asked a cashier about which way to go, albeit in a different way. This time she tried to explain her situation so she would be sent to the precise office and the person in charge. Furthermore, the cashier did not give the information verbally, she answered with gestures, which were understood by Marta Graciela. However she determined that this information was not precise enough and asked yet another person. In this case it was another security guard to whom she directly made the question: where is “billing”?

The sequence of questions and answers she pursued and the dialogues with different people once inside the institution gave her the necessary information to get to the right office. In this particular example she uses the interrogative form as a way of finding her way physically through the institution and it also works as a mediator of the written signs posted along the way to indicate the locations of different offices.

Gestures, looks, and common shared meanings in different social contexts form part of the conversational knowledge all speakers use, regardless of their fluency as readers or writers (Gumperz, 1984). Based on the evidence presented here, it is possible to argue that Marta Graciela is not handicapped, nor dependent nor incompetent: she navigates through the institutional landscape in ways similar to how others do it. The difference is that throughout her life she learned to conjugate diverse sources of information, and to ask for assistance when she needed it, not to depend exclusively on the written word,.

Asking questions to get directions is not the only way Marta Graciela uses interrogative forms. On other occasions she asks questions, but in this case it is to confirm what she already knows. I observed this when she collected her state aid pay. Instead of standing in line, she went right up to the bank teller, and asked a series of questions in order to get more information because she does not trust the department of labor data (the department of labor authorizes her stipend). Marta Graciela moved towards the cashier to confirm the right place to collect her money: “Are you paying for the plan P?” The cashier did not give her a direct response, he only answered: “You have to line up”v . Then she asked a general question about her situation. Since she got an unexpected answer, she changed the focus of her question by adding:” I do not have

to wait”, (20/9/2007) indicating her specific purpose of getting near the counter. Marta Graciela seeks confirmation of her ideas so as not to spend more time at this place than necessary, particularly if she is not going to be able to pick up her stipend there. Since she often invests a lot of time in doing this type of procedures, she dislikes queuing and not getting positive results, and has developed this strategy to shorten her waits.

Martha Graciela also asks people to help her with her own writing needs. She spent a lot of time doing paper work and tried to keep a record of the offices she visited. She explained, for example, how she located office buildings she visited for the first time and how she solicited help from strangers, asking them to write down the exact address for her. On one occasion, she had to go to an agency located down town and a neighbor had given her directions on how to get there, but she did not have the street number. She took the bus to the correct street and got off at the stop nearest the location of the building. The following excerpt from her narrative explains the procedure she followed for keeping a written record of the address:

What do I have to do? I clearly point to the right place now, they write it down for me ... I pay attention to the surrounding setting .....,to the way I should go ... I get off the bus on the corner for example and I have to move back...yes. **Yes, that is the way I have managed for my whole life**”<sup>vi</sup> (Reg, 20/09/2007)

Once in the vicinity of the building, Marta Graciela gets off the bus and walks back towards the approximate location of the office she wants to visit and looks around to get her bearings. Once she locates the building, she asks a person to write down its exact address on a piece of paper she carries for this purpose or on the side of a printed document. She points to the building and the passerby writes it down so that she can keep a record of her visit and have the address in case she has to return. She also makes a mental note of surrounding landmarks such as billboards or store fronts.

Marta Graciela is conscious of her relation with mediators and the role they often play in her encounters with the bureaucracy. She states “there is always someone who knows” signaling her ability to find out what she needs to know by mobilizing the knowledge of others. Relating to others socially for Marta Graciela involves questioning and re questioning, a strategy she refers to as “making life”. She uses others’ presence and voices to confirm what she already knows. As suggested by several authors, Martha Graciela uses oral and written language in deliberate ways to establish and maintain

social relations and to participate in social and culturally valued activities. (Dyson, 1997; Heath, 1983; Kalman, 2004)

### **Mediated multimodality**

Thus far I have argued that Marta Graciela interprets complex representations and participates actively in a variety of social contexts that require interaction with others around texts. I have illustrated through a series of examples how she used visual image and oral language to acquire knowledge, and interpret written objects in different social spaces. However, as illustrated by the example of keeping her own written records, these representative modes do not operate independently, they operate in synchronization with the participation of other persons who become brokers or intermediaries for Marta Graciela.

Relevant research has concluded that the appropriation of knowledge takes place during collective activities with others—in the case of literacy this alludes particularly to other readers and writers (Kalman, 2009; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1999). Multimodality per se does not necessarily generate appropriation but it does provide simultaneous cultural resources in the construction of meaning. Marta Graciela simultaneously interacted with different modes of representation and mediators as a way of constructing needed situated meanings.

One of the places where intermediaries were abundant was at her church. Here different people act as mediators of the divine word. They interacted with Marta Graciela in different ways; the pastor, the church group leader, some neighbors who are part of the congregation and also Marta Graciela's friends, they all predict and share the word of the bible with a group of persons. For example, the Pastor—a woman long active in the church—gives sermons and teaches at the Biblical Institute. Marta Graciela attends both places. The Pastor explains the “holy word” and promotes the participation of the faithful by creating closer and more direct approach to the verses by inviting the women attending the meeting to express their thoughts and sharing their personal problems. In some situations Marta Graciela resorts to others' assistance; she may need a person to confirm what the pastor has said in order to fully understand and remember the verses. Sometimes Marta Graciela meets with some of her neighbors at her home to read the Bible and in this context, she becomes the preacher.

Intermediates also participate in the work environment; they read the catalogues to Marta Graciela to indicate who was buying the wares, or the price of the products.

She accepts this relation with “the others” who she believes know more than she does; that is why she demands their guidance. In her close circle of neighbors, friends and family there is always a person who can help her guide her. This is easily seen when she says: “there is always someone at home to whom I can call for help, sometimes the clients themselves.

In public institutions she not only interrogates the employees about what she does not know but also decides who she needs to interrogate. The questions are directed to those she thinks will have the answers she needs and will be able to help her, fundamentally because of their position in the institution, such as a security guard or the bank teller. It appears that Marta Graciela’s choices regarding with whom to talk to or who might mediate written text for her are not random choices, She selects them according to her knowledge about institutions and employees who will have access to the information she needs.

This evidence shows how Marta Graciela actively develops “mediated multimodal strategies”; she incorporates knowledge about social contexts, issues and situations and uses literacy by integrating multiple modes of representation as well as mobilizing the participation of other people. When recognizing her own strategies Marta Graciela considers herself to be an intelligent person because she is able to successfully invite other people to read to her and in this way she is able to satisfy the social demand for dealing with written texts. Interacting with others to convey meanings has proved to be a common daily activity. (Heath, 1983)

Kalman (2003) reviewed research from several sources on mediated literacy practices from several countries. One of these papers (Schefflin y Cocharan-Smith, 1984) describes the role immigrants’ children play as intermediaries between the adult family members and schools, international organizations, and companies. Another study shows how working class adults ask for help from neighbors and more literate friends to meet their reading and writing needs (Fingeret, 1983) Asking for help did not make these adults feel dependent on others or ashamed. According to the evidence presented in this chapter, Marta Graciela did not feel inferior to others when she required help to guide her actions either.

### **Final thoughts: The social distribution of literacy and mediated survival.**

Several years ago Scribner and Cole (1981) defined literacy as a social practice and they considered it as a sequence of activities that require the use of technology (pencil or computer), abilities (specific knowledge – “know how”) and social knowledge. Street (1995) broadened this definition to include what people think or believe about reading and writing, not only their observable actions.

In Marta Graciela’s case, literacy can be understood in relation to her use of social knowledge in order to meet demands for reading and writing rather than her personal control or mastery of written language. It is also important to point out that she selects and uses technology according to a given situation. For example, she uses a pen to sign papers at the bank; she explores product packages and recognizes product designs; and uses images to sell cosmetics, she points to the computer screen in the bank. She also makes deliberate choices about how to approach a given social demand for reading and writing while simultaneously shaping her use of oral language. For example, in institutions she uses questioning as a way of navigating her way through the building to find a specific office, and in church the word takes on the value of sole and unique truth. She also understands certain types of printed material. She uses many devices and texts as in her interactions with others and picks up on their forms of expression.

This suggests that Marta Graciela’s unfamiliarity with many aspects of written language is not attributable to a lack of individual capacity or interest in learning to read and write, but to the inequalities inherent in the social distribution of literacy. . The evidence shown throughout this chapter provides an empirical basis to discuss how multimodality plays a role in individuals’ lives. The convergence of the multiple modes of representation (oral language, writing, graphic images), the presence of mediating tools and people who act as mediators are at the center of how Marta Graciela makes meaning in the social and symbolic world. Including the interpretation of multimodal resources adds a new dimension to the definition of literacy. Being a reader or writer implies using current technology and deciding on what aspects of reading and writing one wishes to accomplish. (Meek, 2004) It also implies that the presence of mediators is part of how social literacy practices work and how interpreting and producing a written text is related to the language practices that appear in the context of use (Kalman, 2003) Finally, this study displays the different ways people with reading and writing

experiences similar to Marta Graciela's, make use of varied modes and strategies to understand texts that appear in daily life.

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For example, The Ibero-American Programs of Literacy and Basic Education of young and adult individuals approved at the XVI Ibero-American Ministers of Education Conference (Uruguay, 2006). The resulting document shows progress in some of the concepts related to most national literacy programs. Its' authors also consider that these problematic issues should be transformed in a state policy and included in a wider process of basic education. Short -term campaign models associated with political opportunities should be avoided. It is also necessary to connect literacy with other social programs, like income creation, health, and basic sanitation, among others.

<sup>ii</sup> The research work was developed between 2005 and 2009 from a socio anthropological perspective. Its central purpose was to study the literacy practices of non-schooled adults and their social environments: the church, public institutions (bank entities, Labour Ministry, electric lighting office services, school for young and adult individuals) their own places, a legal office, a tea house and the urban sector. Semiotic and sociological approaches contributed to understanding some the ways they construct knowledge and appropriate communicative practices as well as its influence in their creation of a personal project for the future. Attention was paid to understanding the role that school plays in these adults' lives.

<sup>iii</sup> "Este tiene un color [levantando el producto con una mano], éste tiene otro color [haciendo lo mismo con la otra mano]. Si, si Ud. se fija... mirá [lo huele]. Éste debe ser de algo de hierbas o algo así y ¿qué significa?.....Ud. se tiene que fijar por los colores, significa una cosa. Así es la vida"



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<sup>iv</sup> “A ver y éste ¿qué olor tiene? a ver... no tiene gusto a tanto... a ver... es más perfumado. Claro ¡¡así se aprende!!”

<sup>v</sup> "Están pagando el plan P?", el cajero no le contestó de manera directa: “Tiene que hacer la cola”

<sup>vi</sup> : ¿Qué tengo que hacer? Señalo bien un lugar, me anotan... esa vez lo señalo bien, miro que hay al frente...., cómo tengo que hacer entonces ya me fijo. ....me bajo por ejemplo en la esquina y me tengo que volver... si. **Si, así, así me he manejado toda la vida'**. (Registro, 20/09/2007)