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## Writing for Love and Money: How Migration Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families

**Kate Vieira**

Oxford UP, 2019, pp. 200

KATE VIEIRA

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Along with migration, digital writing has become a part of everyday reality. As people around the world have increasingly been migrating to different countries in search of a better life and more money, digital literacy is being used to strengthen love and stay in touch with family members who are physically far away. Kate Vieira's *Writing for Love and Money: How Migration Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families* focuses on digital literacy fostered by migration. Vieira discusses how migration results from economic

inequalities in Latvia, Brazil, and the United States, how migration brought about a new kind of literacy (digital) for fulfilling emotional communication (love), and how family members learn to write and learn to keep in touch with their relatives who reside in foreign countries to earn money and seek a better life. In my own case, this seems spot-on. During two years of study here in the U.S., I saved a little money from my teaching assistantship stipend and bought two mobile phones (a Samsung for my mother and an iPhone for my wife) and a tablet (for my nephew). Last summer I went to Nepal and while there I opened a Facebook account for my mother and then taught her about using Facebook and calling via its Messenger app. Now she is able to call us (both video and audio) via Facebook Messenger and check postings for updates to know the latest news from her relatives.

Vieira carried the study she describes in the book out by collecting data from transnational families through life-history interviews and field research from 2011 to 2016. Vieira's results disprove the theory that the migration of knowledge workers to developed countries results in a "brain drain" in the homeland. Instead, Vieira argues that migration is supportive for literacy development since migration "[promotes] experiences of literacy learning in transnational families as they learn new ways of writing to reach the two life goals that globalization consistently threatens: economic solvency [money] and emotional intimacy [love]" (2). Vieira's research reveals that familial separation through migration has resulted in upward social mo-

WRITING  
FOR  
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MONEY

How Migration Drives Literacy Learning in Transnational Families

bility in the families studied, which leads to learning new kinds of literacies for the family members.

The book is organized into five chapters. In chapter one “What’s New about Writing for Love and Money?,” drawing ideas from social literacy practices, Vieira details how transnational families write and learn for love and money. Vieira describes how migration is fostering new forms of literacy, for instance, the use of remitted webcams from a sister allowing a young boy to become an expert at IT and ultimately to open his own IT business and earn money; the computer class taken by a Latvian mother to learn computer literacy in order to keep touch with her son who immigrated to Belgium; the letter written by a teenager from the United States to send to his younger sister in Mexico, teaching her some new words in English. As an international student coming from Nepal, a developing country, I was particularly fascinated by the research findings—that digital literacy has been promoted to strengthen love and keep in touch with family members and relatives. For the last few years, I have been observing many international migrants, including students and full-time job holders, sending electronic gadgets (mobile phones, laptops, tablets, etc.) and money to their families. In my case, as I mentioned in the beginning, the process described in the book is mirrored in my life, as my migration has been key to learning digital literacy for my mother and sharing love between us (me, my wife, and my three-and-a-half-year-old daughter).

In chapter two, “Writing for Love and Money on Three Continents,” Vieira describes the three locations in which she conducted research: Jau in Sao Paulo, Brazil (South America); Daugavpils in Latvia (Europe); and Wisconsin in the United States (North America). At the onset of the chapter, she discusses a bit about the theory of comparing cases, that is, comparative case study research—comparing and contrasting one locale with what happened in other places and historical moments. Vieira explains multiple dimensions (across history, across scale, and across sites) of the phenomenon, which helped her “see migration-driven literacy learning across people’s lifespans (transversal); among people differently positioned in relation to the forces of globalization (vertical); and across differently positioned communities in Brazil, Latvia, and the United States (horizontal)” (34). Further, Vieira discusses her research design and why she uses a lifespan approach to ethnographic research. She conducts literacy history interviews (LHIs)—a distinctive research tool that elicits memories from participants. She further conducts ethnographic fieldwork and collects data by talking with participants, taking notes on their reading and writing, interacting with them, and asking them for the opportunity to follow up with questions in formal and informal interviews. The chapter offers readers social, historical, and geographical information on how Vieira situated herself while carrying out the study. Her personal association with these communities gives her a sense of urgency and responsibility to carry out research and learn how migration-driven literacy learning operates. Overall, Vieira embraces an ethnographic approach to research design, presents a holistic view of the researched phenomenon, collects data from multiple dimensions of the phenomenon, and conducts research that spans multiple years.

In chapter three, “Learning to Log On: From Post to Internet in Brazil,” Vieira discusses migration-driven digital literacy learning experiences in Brazil. From the life history interviews, Vieira obtained information about participants’ experiences of using different modes of communication, for example, the participants’ experience of writing letters, using phone cards, using the Internet, receiving emails, chatting, and logging on to synchronous video calls. Vieira’s discussion of shifting modes of communication reminds readers, particularly those who were born before 1990, how quickly modes of communication altered from letter to video chat. Vieira expounds on the effect of technological changes in the Internet era and how labor, learning, and laptops altered educational experiences. Because of the availability of polymedia and access to the Internet, a change occurred in communication. Due to the change, for instance, mothers of migrants were afforded the opportunity to engage with their children or grandchildren who reside in foreign lands. The remittance of laptops, in particular, ensures the development of new kinds of literacies in transnational families. Vieira also describes her own example of giving laptops as a writing remittance to her brother-in-law in 2004 and to a friend in Brazil. Similarly, she discusses the materiality of writing remittances (i.e., pencils, lined paper, computers, phones) and describes how capitalist production imperatives can result in the unequal distribution of literacy technologies. Vieira presents a comparison of different transnational families’ social classes with whom she worked, and her comparison showed none of the wealthier families received hardware from their family members who were in study abroad, since the families could buy the hardware themselves. This helps readers to understand unequal economic distributions and its relation to sponsoring digital gadgets for enhancing the lives of middle and lower-class families. It can be further understood that the migration of middle and lower-class families to developed countries has been a sponsor for enhancing digital literacy among their family members, and thus, helping a bit in reducing the digital divide globally. From the chapter, it is apparent how capitalism is pervasive in sponsoring literacy technologies in people’s lives.

In chapter four, “Learning Languages: From Soviet Union to European Union in Latvia,” Vieira documents how migration drives digital and multilingual literacy learning experiences in Latvia. Particularly, Vieira discusses three kinds of migration-driven literacy learning in Latvia: migration-driven print literacy, digital literacy, and anticipatory literacy. Among the three, the development of anticipatory literacy is pervasive in developing countries. Vieira states that anticipatory literacy learning resulted due to the fear of the eventuality of needing to migrate. She discusses how parents, in particular, were preparing their children for possible migration. Her research reveals that parents were orienting their children to learn multiple languages (e.g., English, German). Hence, their children were taking English classes, creating blogs to showcase English competency, and taking tests for going abroad—all in anticipation that they may need to migrate elsewhere. The instance that Vieira brings up here portrays the current situation of people in developing countries—they hold hope to travel to developed countries and prepare accordingly.

In chapter five, “Teaching Homeland Family: Love and Money in the United States,” Vieira presents the perspective of two multigenerational migrant families in

Wisconsin in the United States with regard to migration-driven literacy learning experiences. Vieira presents migration as a fund of knowledge that is gained through lived experience, since writing remittance travels across borders and can foster a binational and bidirectional educational exchange. She shows that migrants contribute to the literacy enhancement of transnational families. Vieira finds that, despite experiencing exploitative conditions and financial hardships in the U.S., an immigrant, Carolina, from Mexico managed to be supportive to her family back in Mexico. Vieira presents the story of Carolina and Jose, Carolina's brother, to talk about writing remittances—support for writing by giving money, sending hardware (e.g., laptops), and teaching. Carolina supports her family members back home, for instance, she taught her sister English. Carolina's brother, Jose, seeks to use his law degree to empower migrants from his hometown to demand fair treatment and pay. Chapter five reminds readers of the difficult situation of immigrants—who hail from lower-class families and work in the labor force in foreign lands—to showcase how they are supporting and enhancing their family members' literacy.

In the conclusion section, "Migration-Driven Literacy Learning in Uncertain Times," Vieira explains that as globalization is increasing, writing and learning for love and money matters to all people who migrate across borders—and their family members who reside back in their respective homelands. Due to migration, literacy coursed through the lives of families that were separated across borders, and this expanded and proliferated their literacy. Seeing the phenomenon of migration in this way, Vieira argues that the brains of the people who have migrated have not been drained. Rather, migration has tied up their love, enhancing digital literacy as all family members must increasingly use digital tools to communicate.

From my observation, many Nepali immigrants come from Nepal every year to the U.S., whether through the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program (DV Program), student visas, or by taking illegal routes. Upon their arrival, no matter how much financial hardship they have, they manage to send their families some digital gadgets (laptops, tablets, watches, mobile phones, etc.) and sometimes money. The people who earn a great deal of money through their endeavors often donate to and sponsor their native country's institutions (schools, colleges, etc.), for example, either by constructing buildings or providing resources. Those people who are in academia—with limited financial resources—also contribute to their native countries in different ways, for instance, by conducting workshops virtually, giving presentations, serving as editors, and many other concrete ways. In my case, I have been serving by giving presentations in my area of expertise and working as an editor and reviewer for journals, and sharing academic resources. These life experiences demonstrate that "migration is not an educational problem to be solved, but instead as an educational resource to be supported" (Vieira 14). In other words, Vieira's book explores the idea of migration as a means to sponsoring literacy. Deborah Brandt's theory of literacy sponsorship is a pervasive thread in the sense that remittances and supporting family members, through enhancing digital literacy in one's home country, can be considered a form of literacy sponsorship. Across the world, migration is accelerating daily as people search for jobs, education, and a better life. Though data were collected in

three places, Vieira's book represents real scenarios that have become common across the world. This book shows how literacy develops outside the classroom and provides some research avenues that could guide future scholars in the same vein. Vieira provides sufficient information to understand the research sites, the participants, and other needed information to comprehend and apply the author's research methods. I found her research to be based on strong, solid ethnographic methods.

However, as a reader, I also noticed some weaknesses in the book. For example, Vieira presented the research method she uses in the Appendix section. As a reader, I think it would be helpful to incorporate the research methods within each chapter so that readers can understand the methods alongside her comparative case studies. Additionally, Vieira focuses on the positive side of migration-driven literacy; however, her book does not delve into the often heart-wrenching situation of many immigrant people's parents in their home countries, not having anyone to take care of them in their old age. Another vital aspect is that as young literate people leave their home countries in search of better jobs and opportunities, immigrants are losing their indigenous literacy and knowledge. Nonetheless, given that Vieira discusses the relationship between migration and literacy development, this book is essential reading for graduate students, researchers, and teachers who are interested in migration-driven digital literacy. This book is even more useful for community literacy researchers, as it describes how a researcher situates herself to carry out ethnographic research in different communities and the broader theoretical implications of that research.