1. Introduction and Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

> *… Él también les leía cuentos a los hijos, él también … se ponía ahí a enseñarle... las letras a ellos...en eso ha cambiado en que ellos- pues él ya no les puede enseñar pero pues él sí, sí sabía más que yo porque él estudió la secundaria y yo no... en eso sí ha cambiado, en que él sí les puede ayudar más.... lo buscan ellos [los hijos] porque pues él era el que jugaba, el que les enseñaba, el queee decía- llegaba y decía –pues ora' vamos a ir a la calle o los voy a llevar al parque- entonces eso es lo que les afecta a ellos, les afectó mucho.* [He would also read the children stories, he would also ... be there to teach them ... the letters to them ... that's what has changed, in that they – well he can't teach them anymore but well he did, he did know more than I because he studied secondary and I didn't ... that's what has changed, in that he can help them more .... they (the children) look for him because well he was the one who would play, the one who taught them, the one who'd say – he'd come home and say – well now let's go into town or I'm going to take you to the park – and so that's what affects them, it affected them a lot.]

> Interview with Monica, case study participant

Monica (to ensure anonymity for participants, all names are pseudonyms), a Mexican mother of six children ages eight and under, has been caring for her children, running the household, and directing the building of the second story of their house with the economic and moral support of her husband, Fidel, who lives some two thousand

miles away.   Despite her many responsibilities, Monica made time to meet with me three times in the hope the experience might have a positive impact on her children's school achievement. When we first met, Monica had been in close communication with her eldest daughter's teacher because she was concerned about her daughter's academic performance; Araceli was in second grade that year, and although she had held second place in her group, her grades had recently dropped. Without her husband's knowledge and presence at home, Monica valued the individualized guidance the teacher had given her daughter throughout the school year. Near the end of second grade, the teacher suggested to Monica it might be a positive experience for the family to participate in this study, and so, in spite of her busy schedule, Monica agreed to talk with me. Like thousands of other women, Monica is a woman with dreams and hopes and enough strength and perseverance to make them happen, even if it means being separated from her husband for a time.

As I relate in this study, transnational migration is a theme which involves much more than politics, economy and history, yet it is all that too. It is a reality for millions of individuals and families the world over. In recent years, however, the phenomenon has intensified, and more people like Monica, Fidel and their six children are feeling the effects. Migration brings changes to the family members' roles and responsibilities. Families adapt, altering their routines and traditions, and these changes have an impact on all aspects of their lives. As Monica mentions above, her husband is not there anymore to provide the children with the fun time at the park or the quiet time of story reading and teaching. Literacy and migration are the themes that this thesis deals with. In this thesis I present three families who have recurred to international migration "*para sacar a los*

hijos adelante [literally, to get their children ahead]," and whose thirteen children range in age from two to fifteen. I focus on the reading and writing practices embedded in the daily activities of these three transnational families. I analyze how these literacy practices serve the different members of these transnational families as well as the growing transnational migrant circuit of which they are a part.

The theoretical framework on which I based this study is that of literacy as a culturally situated social practice. Seen as social practice, literacy occurs within culture and everything culture represents, including customs, roles, goals, and history (Barton and Hamilton, 2000). For this reason, proponents of the sociocultural framework of literacy view literacy in close relationship to issues of politics and power (Luke 2003, based on Bourdieu 1991, 1998). Indeed, legislation dealing with language and education often tops news headlines, most often in relation to presumed conflicting interests of different language and ethnic groups.

According to The Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) at the University of California, Santa Cruz (as reported by González Moll, & Amanti, 2005) the most effective pedagogy involves relating the subject matter to what the students know, do, and value. The increased presence of children of Latin American descent in school systems in North America has educators concerned about meeting these students' needs (González et al., 2005). As a result, recent sociocultural literacy research focuses on literacy practices in the homes of these students (González, et al., 2005, and Faulstich Orellana, Monkman, MacGillivray, 2002). Relatively few studies have been done, however, on literacy practices in Mexican homes.   Moreover, the growing presence of transnational families should be of interest to Mexican educators as well

(Smith, 2005). In this thesis, I present three socioculturally based case studies of literacy practices in Mexican families experiencing migration. Case studies have the advantage of being able to show specific, concrete examples of what participants actually do and say, and are thus effective for learning about the underlying ideologies involved in literacy practices.

A sociocultural view of literacy practice also considers the influence of space and time on shaping these practices. The language variety we speak is largely circumstantial to what family we are born into and the social networks in which we move. When people move to new linguistic environments, we take our customs with us, including our customary literacy practices. A new location presents new circumstances, and people adapt literacy practices to accommodate changes in individual and family roles and goals and in response to demands placed on us by school, work, and the law. Over time, if the literacy practices continue to be relevant, they evolve into traditions, if not, they evolve into something new or are discarded (González, Moll, Floyd-Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, Gonzáles & Amanti, 1993). A study of literacy practices of migrants, and especially migrants who cross-linguistic borders, proves relevant then for sociolinguistic concerns of migration as well as for educational concerns. The fathers of the three families who participated in this study are migrants who have crossed a linguistic border.

Sociologists have called for more in-depth, local studies of families experiencing migration in order to better understand the phenomenon of migration and how it becomes embedded in time, space, and society (Castillo, 2005; Goldring, 2005; Guarnizo, 2005). This study uses ethnographic methods of research in order to document local, contextualized data concerning literacy practices of families involved in migration.

Ethnographic methods allow the participants to tell their stories, which can lead to a fuller understanding of the relationship between literacy and migration as they are embedded in the daily lives of members of a transnational migrant circuit.

1.2. Aim and justification for the study

The research carried out in this study aimed to contribute to a small body of literature focusing on literacy practices in transnational families from the Mexican perspective. This study is distinct in that the majority of the data collected are from members of transnational families, and in particular, children, who live in a relatively new sending region of Mexico. By concentrating data collection in the homes of such families, I hoped to attain a fuller understanding of transnational migrants' literacy practices that would, in turn, suggest effective approaches taken by educators, language and literacy policy-makers, and other professionals who work with members of transnational migrant networks both in Mexico and the US.

1.3. Overview

In the first half of this chapter, I present the theory of literacy as a sociocultural construct, the terminology used to discuss sociocultural literacy research, and the ethnographic-based research precedents, which shaped my research and guided my data analysis. In the second half of this chapter, I discuss the history of Mexican migration to the U.S, I present statistics concerning recent trends in the incidence of migration in Mexico and in the south central Mexican state where these case study families live, the

socioeconomic profile of the migrants, and the economic transitions which migrants and their families experience.

Recent studies show that the remittances sent by Mexican migrants play an increasing role in the economies of migrants' families and communities. In 2002, remittances constituted 47% of Mexican migrants' families' total incomes (CONAPO, 2006b).   Migrant families report spending 78% of the remittances received on household expenditures and 7% on education (Suro, 2003). The resulting impact on families could be that, with the basic needs being covered, younger members might be able to stay in school longer and, as a result, participate in learning activities in which academically based literacy practices are central. Mexican census statistics show the percentage of the Mexican population 19 and older having passed at least one year of preparatory high school, rose from 7.5% in 1990 to 10.2% in 2000 (INEGI, 2000a). The percentage of the population 24 and older having passed at least one year of university study rose from 9% in 1990 to 12% in 2000 (INEGI, 2000a). Furthermore, remittances might allow the opportunity for individuals to participate in other literacy activities, which would otherwise be impossible, for example, access to academic and cultural resources such as school outings or computer technology.

In fact, in the region where this study took place, Gustavo Rodríguez, a local social activist comments "on the one hand, it is satisfying that many remittances are used exclusively to avoid desertion from school, even though, in the end, it does not help much since, a large number of students who finish middle or high school end up emigrating anyway, once they find that in their community, in their state, they cannot expect any better lifestyle (my translation, García, 2005, p. 7)." In spite of this, and with the

understanding that people and the phenomenon of migration are in constant flux, I

present information on who sends remittances, how much, and to whom. I discuss how

remittances are used, what they signify, and their effects on society and families.

 I briefly present methodological precedents, which have been used to study recent

Mexico-U.S. migration, terminology used in discussing migration, and the migration-

related terminology as used in this study. I then focus on the migration – literacy link and

present the assumptions under which I carried out this study. I end Chapter One with the

specific research questions, which guided this work.

In Chapter Two, I present the methodology followed in this study, from initial

contact with the community through gaining access to the families, data collection and

analysis. In Chapter Three, I introduce the participants of the study, that is, myself, the

research community, and the three transnational families, looking at each family's history

and experience as related to migration. I present the results of the study in Chapter Four,

reviewing the literacy practices of the case study families as they relate to the research

questions. In Chapter Five I discuss my findings in terms of larger questions concerning

literacy and migration. I also discuss the limitations the study presents and the

implications my findings could have for education. I end with suggestions for future

research on literacy and migration.

1.4 Literacy Literature Review

1.4.1. A Sociocultural Perspective of Literacy

Reading and writing mean different things to different people. A sociocultural

perspective at literacy looks on literacy as a verb more than a noun. As a result,

movement, direction, and intention all play a part in literacy. From a sociocultural perspective, literacy is seen as a social practice involving space and time and occurring within social experience. Literacy is enacted in a domain between people who are fulfilling roles and working toward goals within a culture with its own customs and history. Literacy practices project values and beliefs and in turn influence the same social structures in which they occur. More- and less-competent readers and writers interact, and these interactions effect changes and, when repeated over time, establish traditions. As a result, literacy plays a significant role in socialization and education (Barton and Hamilton, 2000). This study looks at literacy practices in the homes where much socialization occurs and where a sense of literacy first develops.

Except in the case of completing school-assigned homework, home literacy events do not typically have literacy as their core purpose. Rather, literacy events are typically circumstantial to some ulterior, meaningful goal. Literacy becomes a medium for accomplishing life's tasks, and, as one accomplishes those tasks, one's proficiency in literacy develops. The literacy event not only aims at fulfilling some ulterior goal, but also shapes future acts of reading and writing (Barton, 1999, p. 49).   Similarly, Paulo Freire's view (expressed in 1973) is that literacy is "purposeful, contextual, and transformative . . . intimately connected to language itself (cited in Walsh, 1991, p. 6)." Consequently, much literacy learning may take place in homes, and so, literacy in the home has become the focus of much interest in literacy research (e.g. Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Taylor, 1983; Heath, 1983; Guerra, 1998). This chapter offers a look at some of the main contributions offered by recent studies.

Kendrick & McKay (2002) drew on a social constructivist orientation when they

analyzed what images children construct about reading and writing in their own lives, at

home, school, and in the community. They assumed Vygotsky's (1978) theory that

'spontaneous concept development' originates in children's personal experiences and can

be reflected in their drawing. The drawing works as a window to that knowing. They

also drew on Vygotsky's (1988) framework that assumes transmission and acquisition of

cultural knowledge, such as literacy, takes place interpersonally between individuals

before it is internalized on an intrapersonal level. They looked at children to learn what

literacy is and how it develops. Methodologically then, they used children's thoughts,

ideas and drawings as valuable research resources.   I drew on these same theoretical

constructs and in part, on this methodology for the classroom exercise which I developed

extending the subject matter to include migration. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter

Two.

Sociocultural literacy studies assert that parents and families make important

contributions to children's literacy development (González & Moll, 2002). In a

quantitative study, Bennett, Weigel, and Martin (2002) found that families' literacy-

related activities, for example reading aloud to children and engaging in writing activities

in front of children, and beliefs, such as reading enjoyment, correlate highly with

children's emergent language and literacy skills. These findings indicate that such family

literacy practices present learning opportunities to children. Vance's (2005) study of

family literacy practices in the same Mexican community as the present study found that

the father and mother's roles in the family affect children's literacy development.

Children who have access to materials for reading and writing at home and who see their

parents reading and writing are more likely to achieve academically (Vance, 2005). Most interesting may be the fact that families, regardless of socioeconomic status or cultural background, provide literacy learning opportunities (Vance, 2005; Cairney, 2002; Auerbach, 1997).

1.4.2 A Look at Family and Network Literacy Practices

Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988), in an ethnographic study of the homes of inner-city African-American children living in poverty in the U.S., found rich and complex uses of literacy including close family involvement in children's homework activities, with mothers sitting side-by-side with their children in the process. They recorded a wide variety of texts present in the homes, and found that family members were able to discuss the content of the texts. They also observed rich intra-family communication, with members sharing opinions on different topics and attempting to solve economic problems most often incorporating print in meeting their needs.

Other studies have described the influence of broader family and community networks on literacy development (e.g. González and Moll, 2002; Smith, 2001; Guerra, 1998). Based on theory that literacy is socially constructed, these studies, dealing with a 'working-class Latino community,' a 'Mexican-American neighborhood,' and a 'transnational Mexicano community,' respectively, show that contact with these networks provides students with sources of knowledge which affect their values, their sense of identity, and their language.

One of the principal reasons that minority homes, whether so-called because of ethnicity or language, are of special interest to literacy researchers working from a

sociocultural perspective is because of the possible influence on pedagogy. Educators are concerned with improving pedagogy to meet the needs of these learners. González & Moll (2002) found that when teachers recognized the value of households' competence and knowledge, it enabled positive pedagogical actions. González et al. (2005) note that children from varied socio-cultural backgrounds bring to school a wealth of knowledge and skills, which they learn at home. They suggest that effective teaching strategies build on these funds of knowledge when they are presented in contextualized learning situations. Similarly, transnational families, like the participants in this study, might provide linguistic knowledge or skills which educators could draw on in order to enrich school practices (Smith, 2005).

Although homes have become a legitimate literacy research area, research on literacy practices in Mexican homes, where history, cultural values, and beliefs differ, has been limited. Understanding these contextualized literacy practices could help enlighten school practices in Mexico, and in the U.S. and Canada, countries with an increasing number of Mexican heritage students.

1.4.3. Literacy in Mexican Schools and Communities

One of the goals of public education in Mexico is to "transform the function of the schools to favor the goal of learning of all students (García Monsreal & Cruz Rodríguez, 2004, p.1)." Recent studies indicate, however, that Mexican classrooms teach reading and writing as school objects using activities which are de-contextualized and which lack originality and communicative functions (Teague, Smith & Jiménez, 2006; Castillo Rojas, 2004; Ballesteros, 2003). Although the presentation and form of writing,

such as conventional use of accenting, spelling, handwriting and punctuation are highly

valued, teachers seldom integrate them into meaningful and practical tasks. Furthermore,

in studies carried out in the same south-central Mexican region as the present study,

Teague, et al. (2006), Ballesteros (2003) and Jiménez, Smith & Martínez-León (2003),

found a gap between school literacy practices and the wider communities' actual literacy

practices, in which meaning tends to prevail over form.   González et al. (2005) stress that

contextualized teaching of literacy has proven most effective and concerns giving

students formative activities, which are meaningful to them, that is, making explicit

connections between school and students' lives.

In order to foster this connection, schools need to understand literacy practices

present in students' homes. González et al. (2005), suggest going into the homes and

taking inventory of not only the literacy practices but also the wider funds of knowledge

with which the families organize and live their lives. As previously stated, it is within

these day-to-day activities that literacy practices are almost always embedded (Barton &

Hamilton, 2000).

1.4.4. Literacy Terms

Barton, Hamilton and Ilvaniç (2000) refer to situated literacies to show that we may

be literate in one place at one time, while in another place at another time we find

ourselves unable to fulfill the needs and goals of the situation. In this light, we can speak

of being musically literate or becoming computer literate. For the purpose of literacy as a

subject of scientific study, Barton & Hamilton (2000) propose looking at texts, events

and practices – *texts* being, in this case, instances of written language;   *events* being

activities involving the written text – it may or may not include talk which deals with the

text as a subject; and, *practices* being how people use and value these literacy events,

that is, "how people talk about and make sense of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p.

7)." Texts and events are observable, while practices include the unobservable

underlying ideologies involved in these events. I use these three tools as the base of data
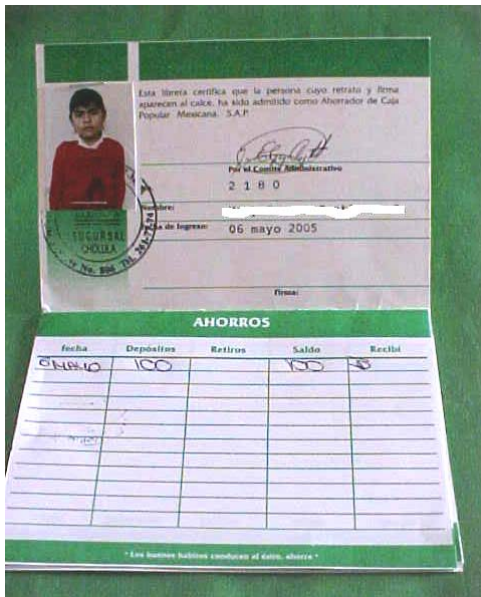
collection in this study.

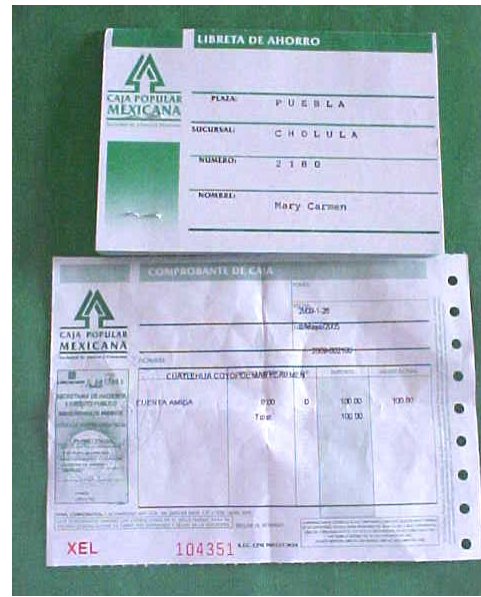*Figure 1.1*. Savings booklet, open to first entry

Figure 1.2. Savings booklet, cover and first deposit receipt

To illustrate the concept of a literacy practice, I present an example centering on

savings accounts. At different times in the past, the Tenahua Tlatehui family opened

various savings accounts. Today each member has his or her own account. The most

recently opened account was for the family's youngest member, Belen. In order to open

the account, various papers had to be presented as well as a photograph and an amount of

money. Upon opening the account with $100 (approximately 9 U.S. dollars) they

received the booklet, seen in *Figure 1.1* in which the cashier had typed the identifying

information of the new account, and had handwritten the date, the amount of the deposit, and his or her signature. Belen's photograph was also included and sealed with the association's stamp. The association's president had also signed the booklet, while the space for Belen's signature, seen in *Figure 1.2*, was still left blank. *Figure 1.2* also shows the printed receipt of deposit on which appears the fiscal seal of the association.

With the members having their own booklets, the family can see how much each has saved, showing a bit of the economic history of the family. Looking at the dates in the different booklets, they remember what was happening at the time. For example, Belen's eldest brother opened his account a couple years before when his grandparents gave him money in appreciation for his help with springtime planting. The children also identify the booklets with the money, which represents their hopes for the future. Their mother particularly wants to have something set aside in case the children should want to continue their education.

For Belen, it also represents her father's continued effort and interest in her well being since he temporarily resides in the Los Angeles area and sends the remittances that make her deposits possible. Belen was able to observe the steps involved in making the document official, involving her mother, a photographer, the cashier, and the association's president. The combined result created in Belen a feeling of importance, pride, and happiness.

The savings booklet is socially constructed in that it required various people to make the booklet a socially-accepted financial document; that is, a document which represents the financial institution's responsibility in holding and eventually providing the deposited money once again to the cardholder. The savings booklet is socioculturally

embedded in that the booklet itself is circumstantial to the practice of setting aside money in a financial institution. We can appreciate how the literacy practice involving savings booklets deals with much more than the words written on them.

A text may have one author or many; it may have one reader or many, and each may play a distinct role or participate for different purposes. Through time, the significance of a text may remain or change in relevance. Through space, the significance of a text may also change. A text may reflect the family history and family or community values or beliefs.   Discussion surrounding the text may enforce traditional values or may reveal a stance toward change. From the example above, we see a family who values each member, no matter one's age or sex, and who trusts the financial future of this institution. Indeed, Luke (2003), based on Bourdieu's social class-based literacy model and a sociocultural view of literacy, finds that literacy crosses into "fields of power and practice in the larger community (p.140)." Luke (2003) sees certain literacy forms as examples of cultural capital and access to them as class-based.   Today, many families spend large sums of money in making certain literacy materials available, for example, in the form of a computer and printer. The *availability* of literacy materials, that is, the physical presence of the tools and the print material that might serve a purpose in a literacy event, makes *access* to literacy, that is, opportunities to participate in literacy, more likely. However, it is only through interactive participation in literacy events that *appropriation* of reading and writing, gradually assumed responsibility and self-direction of an activity, in this case literacy practices, can occur (Rockwell, 1992; Farr, 1994; Kalman, 2003).

In this study, I use *literacy practices* to refer to patterns of collective uses and the assigned value each participant holds for these events including feelings, awareness, and construction of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000).

Following Kalman (2003), I use *availability* to refer to the physical presence of the tools and the print material that might serve a purpose in a literacy event and *access* to refer to opportunities to participate in literacy events.

I use Rockwell's (1996) term *appropriation* to refer to interactive participation in literacy events when people select, use, interpret, adapt and transform texts, making them their own.

The study presented in this paper looks at the availability and access of literacy in the homes of three transnational families in a south central Mexican community and to see if appropriation has come about as a by-product of contact with and use of new forms or practices resulting from migration.

1.4.5. Ethnographic-Based Literacy Research

Because of the social complexity of literacy, many literacy researchers conduct their work using ethnographic-based research methods. The ethnographer's job is to elicit the participants' sociocultural knowledge – that is, how the participant makes sense of social behavior and communication – as systematically and yet as naturally as possible using instruments, schedules, and questionnaires which are developed *in situ*. The instruments are created in response to a perceived need, and interview protocols are developed and modified as the researcher analyzes data and determines what is salient (Spindler & Spindler, 1987).

Taylor & Dorsey Gaines (1988), Guerra (1998), Barton & Hamilton (2000) and

González & Moll (2002) focused on *practices*, observing through home visits what

family members do. González & Moll (2002) delineate three home inquiry-based visits

in which the researcher approached the home as a learner with 'an anthropological lens,'

focusing on family history, household activities, parenting, schooling, and language use.

Following the home visits, González and Moll (2002) stress the importance of

detailed field notes, which yield a partial representation of reality – a "strategic

theoretical reduction of complexity of people's everyday experiences without losing sight

from the rich and dynamic totality of their lives (p. 635)."   Audio- and videotapes can

also aid in faithfully documenting participants' words, providing another rich source of

data. González & Moll (2002) also implemented 'study groups' where theory, methods,

and data were discussed by the various researchers working on the project. Reading and

re-reading the fieldnotes or transcripts periodically, as well as reviewing documents,

helps the researcher gain perspective, create new questions, and recognize patterns and

underlying meanings.   By constantly comparing data collected from participants using

different methods, the ethnographer hopes to understand the participants' view of reality

(Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Each of these methods was used in the collection and analysis

of data in the present study.

1.4.6. Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis begins with writing fieldnotes and

interspersing observer's comments within them, continues with the reading and re-

reading of fieldnotes, and follows with coding the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). In

categorizing literacy practices of *Mexicano* families in Chicago, Farr (1994) adapted four

domains used by Goody (1986). According to Farr (1994), Goody found writing to be

"historically and cross-culturally" central to religion, economy, politics, and law.

Because of changes in American policies at the time of Farr's study, the political-legal

activities in which the *Mexicanos* were involved moved her to merge the domains of

politics and law. Furthermore, the data revealed literacy practices which could not fit

within those categories, and in order to accommodate them, she added the domains of

education, which included both institutional and personal educational endeavors, and

family/home, which included practices of a strictly personal realm.

Faulstich Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner & Meza (2003) drew on Farr's five domains

in their study with other immigrant families in the Chicago area, but added community,

financial and medical domains in order to accommodate the household texts they found.

Farr (1994) contends that categorizing literacy practices within domains allows

researchers to situate the practices in a social perspective rather than concentrating on a

more utilitarian perspective.

Borrowing strategies for categorizing is helpful within the field because studies

and their results can then be compared and contrasted. Variation in analytical strategies

is thus a necessary response to the nature of the data found. For example, cultural

differences may make a previous category obsolete or a new one necessary, or the

difference in research focus may require new categories or find that others are unneeded.

I discuss category formation further in Chapter Two.

1.4.7. Literacy Literature Review Conclusion

The sociocultural focus on literacy, the great influence homes have on children's literacy development and use, and the scant literature available on literacy practices in homes in Mexico, all compelled the research presented here. Choosing a population for study is a compelling subject, and it can perhaps best be explained by returning to Barton & Hamilton's definition of literacy (2000). The idea that literacy involves space and time, as mentioned in the Introduction, relates directly to the idea Pedraza (1987) proposed: "....that a person's migratory history is the most critical factor influencing language behavior as cited in Mercado, 2005 p. 239)." I elaborate on some of the complexities of migration in the following section.

1.5. Literature Review of Mexican Migration

As I mentioned in the Overview, in this section I describe the context in which Mexican migrants have traditionally moved across international borders and the condition of migration in Mexico today, with a particular focus on the state of Puebla, the place where families of many transnational migrants make their homes. I sketch a socioeconomic profile of transnational migrants from this region and the economic transitions which they and their family's experience. I also give estimates on remittances, the impact these have on migrant families, how these families use them and what they come to mean, particularly in terms of written language. I discuss methodological precedents in studying migration and the terminology used. Finally, I present the terms as I use them in this study.

1.5.1. History of Mexican Migration to the U.S.

According to the Mexican *Consejo Nacional de Población* (CONAPO) (2006a), the origins of Mexican migration to the U.S. can be characterized as principally labor-related, conditioned by the demand of labor in the U.S. CONAPO identifies four periods of relatively stable Mexico-U.S. migration. The first period began near the end of the nineteenth century and lasted until the Great Depression. Durand (2004) notes that, during this stage, Mexican emigrants were often considered 'traitors' by their compatriots, for working and strengthening their neighbor instead of their homeland. The second period lasted from the Great Depression until 1941. During this time U.S. demand for Mexican workers decreased and the majority of them were deported.

By 1940, World War II had depleted the U.S. labor force and the U.S. looked once more toward Mexico to satisfy the labor needs of wartime economy (Durand, 2004). This third period, lasting from 1942 to 1964, is termed the *Bracero* era that refers to the U.S. – Mexico-regulated program facilitating temporary contracts for seasonal workers. Initially the program was put into effect in order to meet U.S. food supply needs; in later years the program also supplied workers to the railroad companies (Meissner, 2004). The *braceros* were typically "young, male, temporary laborers from rural areas who went to live in the US and work in agriculture (Durand, 2004, p. 18)."   Against the Mexican government's urging to renew the program, the U.S. unilaterally cancelled it in 1964 because Mexican migrant labor continued to arrive outside the agreed channels, and thus began the period of 'no policy politics' (Durand, 2004), the fourth period of Mexico-U.S. migration.[1]

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[1] Today, the former *braceros* on both sides of the border are demanding that money that had been deducted from paychecks and sent back to the Mexican government finally be returned to them. While the Mexican Congress has approved the creation of a special fund to compensate the former Mexican guest workers, a payment plan has yet to be finalized (Paterson, 2005).

According to Durand (2004) "Mexico's government simply ignored the matter and abandoned its migrants. In this [fourth] phase, *laissez-faire* attitudes and policies reigned, though both governments would pay the costs 20 years later (p. 18)." In the void of policy, the supply and demand for Mexican migrant labor continued and intensified through the early 1980's. CONAPO (2005) reports between 260 and 290 thousand migrants offering their labor in the U.S. between 1960 and 1970. The total estimated number of migrants between 1970 and 1980 increased to between 1.2 and 1.55 million (CONAPO, 2006b).

Throughout these four periods of migration, the majority of the migrants were agricultural workers originating mostly from the northern and central states of Zacatecas, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Nayarit, and Durango, and to a lesser degree, the states of Aguascalientes, Colima, Jalisco, and San Luis Potosí, all of which are considered part of the *traditional* sending region (CONAPO, 2006a). In the early 1980's these patterns began to change, with the ensuing intensification and diversification of migration attributed to two decades of successive economic crises in Mexico and changing economic and migratory policies, both commercial and political, within a context of growing globalization (CONAPO, 2005).

Without a comprehensive national and bi-national migration policy, and in the face of intensified migration, attempts to study the phenomenon have become more complex. Attempts to quantify and describe the phenomenon have also become controversial, as can be seen in the next section.

1.5.2. Present State of Migration in Mexico

1.5.2.1. Incidence of migration in Mexico and profile of Mexican migrants

Figures for migration tend to vary widely, with some figures including both documented and undocumented migrants, and others only one group or the other. Numbers of undocumented migrants can only be estimated. According to Passel (2004) Mexico represents the largest source of immigration to the U.S., accounting for approximately one-fifth of the documented immigrants and 57 percent of the undocumented immigrants in the U.S. The Pew Hispanic Center (PHC) estimates that 3.5 million of the 6.3 million undocumented migrants in the U.S. labor force are from Mexico (Kochhar, 2005). Based on INEGI figures, CONAPO reports between 1997 and 2002, approximately 2.5 million Mexican migrants traveled to the U.S.

The loss in the Mexican work force has been systematic and increasingly perceptible. Today, an estimated 9.9 million people who were born in Mexico (approximately nine percent of the population) presently reside in the U.S., and a reported 16.8 million people born in the U.S. are of Mexican descent (CONAPO, 2006a).

The socioeconomic profile of the Mexican migrant has been changing, increasing in heterogeneity. As shown in Table 1.1, a smaller percentage of younger people are attempting to cross, but percentages for young people remain extraordinarily high. PHC (2005) reports that most survey respondents (72%) lack high school education. This figure supports CONAPO's findings, as seen in Table 1.1, but in general, the number of years in formal schooling for Mexican migrants has risen. PHC found that younger and more recent arrivals tend to have higher levels of schooling than the adult population of Mexico at large, with the share of respondents that studied as far as high school being three times as large as for Mexico's adult population in general (Kochhar, 2005). Most

migrants have a conjugal relationship and are the heads of households in Mexico (see

Table 1.1).

Table 1.1
Profile of Undocumented Migrants

Profile Of Undocumented Migrants	1993 – 1997 [*]	2001 – 2003 [**]
Average annual number *	454 489	458 771
**	643 139	484 150
Ages* 12 – 24	29.2%	23.2%
25 – 34	38.3%	32.9%
35 – 44	21.8%	29.8%
45 and older	10.6%	14.1%
Ages* * 12 – 24	52.0%	42.6%
25 – 34	34.3%	38.1%
35 – 44	10.2%	14.8%
45 and older	3.4%	4.6%
Having a conjugal relationship*	62.5%	71%
Head of household**	68.5%	70%
Education* No schooling	8.5%	5%
Primary school incomplete	28.2%	19.9%
Primary school complete	29.2%	26.9%
Secondary begun or more	34.0%	48.2%
Originating in rural areas (less than 15,000 inhabitants)		
**	27.9%	41.4%
*	46.0%	52.5%

*CONAPO, 2006, Seasonal migrants heading to the US, 1993 – 2003.
**CONAPO, 2005, Percentages of those turned back at the border by the border patrol.
***PHC's December 2005 report (Kochhar, 2005).
[*]Statistics collected from Mar. 28, 1993 to Mar. 27, 1994, from Dec. 14, 1994 to Dec. 13 1995, and from July 11, 1996 to July 10, 1997.
[**]Statistics collected from July 11, 2001 to July 10, 2003.

As seen in Table 1.1, the percentage of migrants coming from rural areas has risen

significantly but the PHC Survey reports that newer arrivals are less likely to have been

employed as farm workers than in commerce and sales (Kochhar, 2005). The PHC

Survey (Kochhar, 2005) found that only 5% of the respondents had been unemployed

before leaving Mexico, thus suggesting underemployment rather than unemployment as

the main reason for migrating. CONAPO (2005) places the percentage of migrants who

had been actively employed in Mexico consistently near 70% between 1993 and 2003.

The PHC Survey (Kochhar, 2005) also reports that over the past fifteen years, more

migrants originate from farther south, primarily from the four new sending states of

Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla and Veracruz. This survey reports that 24% of all migrants

come from these four states. This seems high compared to CONAPO (2005) figures

which show estimates ranging from 6 to 14% for all four states combined; however, the

tendency from both studies show a rise.

Looking at Puebla more closely, since this is the home state for the three families in

this case study, migrants are leaving from more places within the state. The traditional

sending region has been the Mixteca, a rural region in the southern part of the state,

inhabited primarily by indigenous people, while the new sending zones now include

central communities such as Atlixco, San Pedro Cholula, San Andrés Cholula (the focus

community of the present study) and the Sierra Norte (García, 2004, Lozano, 2005).

Circular migrants, who measure their goals according to accomplishments achieved in the

sending community and migrate with the intention of returning to their home

communities, are the most prevalent found in the state of Puebla (Binford & D'Aubeterre,

2000).

1.5.2.2. Reason for migrating

Portes & Rumbaut (1996) report "evidence suggests people do not migrate out of

invidious comparisons with the sending country, but in order to survive and prosper in

the country of origin (p. 291)." Recent reports about Mexican migration support this

claim. Suro (2003), in a report summarizing results of a two-year study by the PHC and

the Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF), reported that remittances:

> ... are keeping large numbers of working-class families from slipping into
> poverty....though most of the money goes for food and rent, anywhere from
> a quarter and a third of remittance recipients report putting some of it into
> savings, educational expenses or small investments.... an important source
> of sustenance for those that remain behind.... (p. 5).

This, together with the fact that most migrants are employed in Mexico before leaving for

the U.S., points to jobs paying such low wages that families cannot fulfill their basic

needs.

When I asked the participants in this study their reasons for migrating, general

responses supported this line of reasoning. Ernesto, one of the case study fathers said,

"...*pues más que nada porque allá el dinero no no alcanzaba y este pues también para*

salir un poco más adelante, para que no le faltara nada a mis niños" [... well more than

anything because there the money didn't last and well, to get ahead a little, so that my

kids wouldn't be lacking anything]. Monica, the wife of another migrant explained,

> "*Porque ya no alcanzaba el dinero ... para nosotros, o sea, para la casa, ya
> había poco trabajo y teníamos que meter a los niños a la escuela y ya no nos
> alcanzaba el dinero*" [Because the money didn't last ... for us, or, for the
> house, there was little work and we had to get the kids into school and the
> money didn't last anymore.]

It is important to emphasize that both emigrants had paying jobs when they left for the

U.S.

The development of networks is a crucial aspect of migration and the fact of having

family members already in the U.S. also influence the decision to migrate (Kochhar, 2005;

Alba, 2004; Suro, 2003). In explaining how Ernesto had made the decision to emigrate,

Licha, his wife, said,

Porque su hermano de él ya estaba allá y uno de sus tíos y como veíamos que,
pues, los gastos ya eran muy, sí, ya estaban muy fuertes porque, pues, ya
empezaron ir a al secundaria los dos grandes y la niña a la primaria"
[Because one of his brothers was already there and one of his uncles, and
since we could see that, well, expenses were very, yes, they were big because,
well, the two big kids had begun to go to secondary and the girl to primary].

Also relevant is that both families mention concerns about the children's schooling.

Teague (2004) mentions in his description of a Mexican school in the same research

community as this study, "both private and public schools in Mexico have many other

hidden costs, such as money for uniforms, materials and donations (p.27)." Although the

students of these case study families attend public schools, school-related expenses were

among the central factors in the decision to migrate. Ernesto explained,

el año pasado en cuando el día que iban a entrar a la escuela en el 2004, fue
en julio cuando son las inscripciones y todo eso, (...) Donde va Jesus en el
Centro Escolar, fue la cooperación de 1,200 pesos, después (...) de los demás
del otro parte [de Jaime], de Belen también. O sea, ese tiempo sí me vi un
poquito presionado.   O sea, no sé como conseguí el dinero, pero de todas
maneras, yo pagué todo ese dinero, y, pos,' orita,' (...) antes de que entraran
a la escuela, ps' ya, o sea, ya lo habíamos pagado todo eso, y ya 8 días antes,
creo, ya le había comprado los útiles de la escuela y-y sus mochilas. O sea, no
fue lo mismo de hace un año. [Last year, the day they were going to start
school in 2004, it was in July when registration and all that was (...) Where
Jesus goes to school, the family quota was 1,200 pesos, then of the others, the
other part [from Jaime], from Belen too. Really, at that time, I was a little
pressured. Really, I don't know how I got the money, but anyway, I paid all
that money, and, well, now (...) before they started school, well, we had
already paid everything and even eight days before, I think, she (his wife) had
already bought the school supplies and their backpacks. So really, it wasn't
the same as last year.]

The price this father has paid to get his children to school in the required uniform and

with the required materials has been to migrate.

1.5.2.3. Economic transition for migrants and families

According to the PHC survey (2005), 95% of Mexican migrants in the U.S. usually

find work within the first six months of their arrival. However, over a third typically

experience periods of unemployment which may last over a month. Also, the more

unstable the job, the more poorly paid. Other factors, which affect wage levels, are sex –

women typically earn less than men, and time – the longer the length of residence, the

potentially higher the earnings. Speaking English well also improves migrants' wages, as

does possessing a US government-issued identification, such as a valid US driver's

license (Kochhar, R. 2005).

Approximately two-thirds of PHC's survey respondents (2005) were employed in

agriculture, construction, manufacturing or hospitality. Today, 42% of the migrants find

jobs in construction and hospitality industries as compared to 27% fifteen years ago. In

the same time period, the number of Mexican immigrants working in agriculture has

decreased, from 15% to 9%.

Family networks play a significant role in the migrant's job search, with perhaps

80% of the respondents having a relative other than a spouse or child in the U.S., and

45% using family network contacts in their job search (Kochhar, 2005). These family

networks may also serve to buffer the effects of salaries below the US federal poverty

level. Households with multiple earners keep many migrants living above the poverty

level (Kochhar, 2005).

With migrants' incomes typically being low and interspersed with periods of

unemployment, sending remittances home is no small feat. Despite these circumstances,

the number of dollars being sent to Mexico annually has soared into the billions, allowing

for millions of Mexicans to procure the basic food to overcome hunger, and allowing the

youngest members of the population to continue in school, to set new goals and perhaps

to imagine new horizons. Literacy practices are embedded within these endeavors, as are

remittances. Upon receiving remittances, families may find they finally have access to

the literacy tools and resources that are available in the community. Whether and how

families appropriate literacy tools and resources in literacy practices is a part of the focus

of this study. The following section offers a look at who actually receives remittances in

Mexico, how they use them and what they mean for them.

1.5.3. Remittances

1.5.3.1. Who sends how much to whom?

   To quote Suro (2003), "people move north and money moves south (p.5)," with some

six million immigrants from Latin America sending money to families back home on a

regular basis (Suro, 2003). The *Banco de México* cites remittances as the most stable

source of currency for Mexico in the last ten years, with the average rate of growth

rounding out at twenty percent per year over the previous decade. In Mexico, income

from remittances remains second only to income from petroleum (González Amador &

Martínez, 2005).[2]

   At a national conference of Mexican governors, May 2005, it was reported that

Mexico obtains 18 billion dollars annually from an estimated 20 million Mexicans in the

US (Cancino, 2005).   The then governor of Puebla, Mario Marín, reported that the nearly

two and a half million *Poblanos* (people whose origins are in the state of Puebla) in the

US, residing mainly in the New York area (1.2 million), Los Angeles (400,000), Chicago

(120,000), Las Vegas (80,000), and San Antonio and Houston (80,000), send remittances

to Puebla which exceed two billion dollars annually (*Muestra EU*, 2005). This reflects a

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[2] This is, in part, because of the exceptionally high prices at which petroleum has been set
since 2002 (González Amador & Martínez, 2005).

significant increase in recent years even when compared to earlier estimates calculated by

the *Banco de México*. Family remittances rose from 178 million dollars in 1995 to 792

million dollars in 2003 (COANPO, 2005). For both time periods, this placed Puebla in

sixth place nationally for sending and receiving remittances. Thus, although *Poblanos*

made up 3.1% of the Mexican resident population in the US in 2003, they sent 5.9% of

the dollar amount of received remittances nationally.

The PHC-MIF Survey (Suro, 2003) reported 18 percent of the adult population in

Mexico receiving remittances. Furthermore, receivers of remittances were from all

socioeconomic sectors and practically all regions of Mexico. The one characteristic

common to receivers is that the majority are women (Suro, 2003). Indeed, Malkin (1998)

shows it is a woman's role to receive the remittances and to negotiate the male migrant's

status and respect in the community of origin.

1.5.3.2. How are remittances sent and how much does it cost to send them?

Seventy percent of senders report using wire transfer companies, whereas

seventeen percent use informal means such as the mail or individuals who carry the funds

by hand, and eleven percent use banks (Suro, 2003). Although the cost of sending

remittances today is a third of what it was at the turn of the century (González Amador &

Martínez, 2005) costs remain high and reducing the costs has become a priority. One of

the Multilateral Investment Fund's programs aims to cut the costs of remittances by

fostering competition among service providers (Suro, 2003). The state of Puebla has

established locales called *Casas del Migrante* [The Migrant's House] in the US to

provide *Poblanos* with orientation on sending remittances at lower costs, among other

services (Cancino, 2005). Federal and private institutions on both sides of the border are working together to bring costs down as well as to offer a free on-line course dealing with money management and safety and cost issues of sending remittances (González Amador & Martínez, 2005). One of the first steps toward financial cooperation was for the financial institutions to accept a consulate-issued identification as a document to obtain their services (González Amador & Martínez, 2005).

1.5.3.3. What remittances represent

As mentioned above, the majority of remittances are used for basic human needs such as food, housing and education. According to a social activist and parish priest, Gustavo Rodríguez, the remittances sent to the *Mixteca Poblana* and other marginal regions have prevented a hunger crisis in Mexico, and arguably, a revolution (García, 2004). Suro claims,

> These remittances are the expression of profound emotional bonds between those separated by a border ... They also represent a new kind of integration among nations undertaken not by trade negotiators but by ordinary folk to assuage their economic woes (Inter-American Development Bank [IADB], 2003, p.1).

Malkin (1998) discusses gender, status and modernity in relation to remittances in a transnational migrant circuit, and finds migrants use Mexico as the source of their identity. According to Malkin (1998), in part, male migrants are dependent on women to take the remittances and "materially manifest their presence in absence (p.7)." Male migrants seek social status and respect through their generosity, partly in terms of remittances sent. By sending generous remittances the migrant seeks to be recognized as "the benevolent patriarch," and as provider for *La Familia.* In the case where it is men

who are the migrants, women are responsible for generating and negotiating the men's

status in the community of origin.

1.5.4. Effects of migration, remittances and transnationalism on Mexican communities

     and families

     Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) report that goods, information, and

symbols move back and forth re-shaping migrants' communities and making for

significant social transformation 'back home.' Levitt (2001), in a study of a transnational

community spanning a village in the Dominican Republic and Boston, Massachusetts in

the US, documented numerous economic as well as social remittances. She found clothes,

appliances, toys and food originating in the U.S, but also linguistic concepts that people

on both fronts shared. News of illness, infidelity, or the granting of travel visas, spread

equally quickly in both locations. The range, frequency, and intensity of these practices

differ, in part on how much is shared collectively and on whether the migrants and their

community of origin think of themselves as a group (Levitt, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2002).

     Scholars have also addressed the status dichotomy in which transnational migrants

find themselves. While they may be considered of low socio-economic status in the U.S.,

in their homeland, if they are passing economic or other remittances to their families,

they may be rising in prestige. Depending on the degree of development of the

transnational social field, they may also rise in prestige by empowering hometown social

and economic organizations (Levitt, 2001; Malkin, 1998). As migrants begin to

distribute economic and social resources, they also distribute their loyalty between the

two home fronts through transnational practices (Levitt, 2001).

Attempts at maintaining communication with the homeland may be one way for migrants to express loyalty. Faulstich Orellana, Thorne, Chee, & Lam (2001) found that first generation migrants, with relatively few economic resources for traveling back and forth, exerted considerable effort to maintain communication. They found traditional handwritten letters sent through regular mail as well as special delivery services established by other immigrants, which are especially used for sending letters with money. However, if there is no money to share with those 'back home,' communication can falter and relationships become strained (Faulstich Orellana, et al., 2001; Levitt, 2001; D'Aubeterre, 2000; Malkin, 1998). Besides letters, telephone, e-mail, and video cameras were also mentioned, while other electronic forms of communication, such as 'messenger' or 'chat' were not.

Migrants make more telephone calls to Mexico than to any other country (Guarnizo, 2005). According to the Mexican *Comisión Federal de Telecomunicaciones*, (Cofetel), at 4.5 pesos (approximately 50 US cents), the cost per minute is as much as 900% more from Mexico than from the U.S., at a half peso (approximately 5 US cents) (Domínguez Ríos, 2005).

Government official also look to increase migrants' loyalty to their communities of origin through innovative communication techniques. The state of Puebla, together with the *Universidad Autónoma de Puebla* (UAP), is promoting teleconferences, which aim to put migrants in New York in touch with their hometowns, principally in the Mixteca (Martínez Jiménez, 2005). They hope that migrants, who have not been able to return to their homeland, might be able to see with their own eyes what their "*migradólares*" have been able to accomplish. By showing films of building and restoration projects, which

had been funded by remittances, officials hope to give migrants a sense of satisfaction and motivation to continue sending remittances. By showing films of families, officials also hope to strengthen family relationships (Martínez Jiménez, 2005).

DÁubeterre (2000) addressed the effects of migration on gender roles within families. She stresses that migration automatically changes relationships between men and women. In a study on a transnational circuit in Puebla, she found that women carry out "arduous and subtle work oriented toward maintaining family solidarity and relations (p. 82)." She found they do not accept with resignation and passivity the return of their husbands, but creatively work at rescuing the affection and obligations of their husbands.

D'Aubeterre (2000) and Malkin (1998) also discuss the prestige attained by migrants through knowledge of the migrant experience, *un imaginario colectivo* [a collective imagery].   Malkin (1998) found this prestige to be gender-related, describing migration as a practice through which masculinity is constructed, legitimized for men through the discourse of work and hardship, and a transition away from ignorance to valued knowledge.   Migrants do not earn this respect automatically, but rather, negotiate it, as mentioned above, often through female family members. It is also negotiated in the face of *chisme* [gossip] and criticisms, which may be circulated about migrants even in their physical absence (Malkin, 1998).

In the following section, I discuss the methodologies used to study the phenomenon of transnational migration.

1.5.5. Methodology Specific to Transnational Migration

In order to quantify undocumented migration, numerous data collection methodologies have been attempted and new methodologies are constantly being developed. Different studies utilizing different methodologies result in differing figures. Numbers of transnational migrants are calculated (a) as they head toward the U.S.; (b) as they return from the U.S.; (c) as they are turned back at the border; and (d) as they request services at the Mexican consulates in the U.S, among many others. According to Leite, Ramos & Gaspar (2003) the data made available by *Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México* [Survey on Migration at the Northern Border of Mexico] (EMIF) may be the best systematic and continuous observation of migratory movement of Mexicans to the US. EMIF utilizes the first three methodologies mentioned above.

Many of the statistics offered by CONAPO are based on EMIF data collected in collaboration with the *Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social*, the *Colegio de la Frontera Norte*, and the *Instituto Nacional de Migración* (all based in Mexico). CONAPO also uses some data based on figures collected by the Mexican census bureau (INEGI), although it is important to point out that when comparing migration figures based on a survey of families in the same research community as the present study with INEGI figures, INEGI numbers concerning migration appear low (Vance, 2005).

The Pew Hispanic Center (PHC), an independent research organization based in the US develops original methodologies for each study.   In 2003, the PHC in collaboration with the Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF), an autonomous fund administered by the Inter-American Development Bank, which helps finance private sector development projects in Latin America and the Caribbean, conducted a study on remittance receivers

and senders. Data included individual and focus group interviews in five Latin American

sending countries and telephone interviews with transnational migrants living in the U.S.

Another PHC (2005) survey on Mexican migrants concentrated on the labor

background of undocumented Mexican immigrants, their transition into the US labor

market, and their economic status in their new jobs in the US. Over a period of six

months at seven different Mexican consulates across the US, 4836 immigrants requesting

a *matrícula consular*, an identity card, completed a 12-page questionnaire.[3] One concern

in this study might be, for example, whether the profile of migrants seeking this

document might be different from those who do not seek it, thus skewing the data. No

single quantitative methodology may represent the undocumented migrant population

perfectly.

Studies on transnational migration have also been carried out using qualitative data

collection methods. Throughout the recent literature, experts suggest that migration is

best understood in terms of *practices* as they relate to social networks, as they relate

through time, and as they relate through space. Using qualitative methods, Fitzgerald

(2002), D'Aubeterre (2000), and Malkin (1998) analyze practices of negotiation between

members of migrant social networks over time and space.

Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt (1999) call for more qualitative research on migration

and propose "the individual and his/her support networks as the proper unit of analysis....

[Beginning] with the history and activities of individuals is the most efficient way of

learning about the institutional underpinnings of transnationalism and its structural effects

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[3] The usefulness of this card has been the concerted work of interested parties in both the public and private
sectors, especially those who wish to claim some overseeing of the multi-billion dollar remittances,
particularly in regard to lowering the cost of money transfers. Those in possession of this card would be
able to open bank accounts in the US and by and large are undocumented workers.

(p. 220)." Although transnational activities may evolve in reaction to government and commercial policies, it is the individual who initiates and conducts them. Portes et al. (1999) point out that case studies are particularly effective in the early stages of transnationalism, that is, before the social networks develop into complex fields. This is the case in the families of the present study.

Guarnizo (2005) also suggests looking at transnationalism as the mix of habitual or sporadic practices, relations, and interactions adopted by actors – people or non-government institutions which transcend territorial nation-state boundaries, and which implies social, spatial and temporal embeddedness. Because space and time are integral to an analysis of migration, Levitt (2001) and Portes et al. (1999) suggest space- and time-compressing technology are a necessary pre-condition to the proliferation of transnational practices and access to transport and communication technology should also be analyzed in relation to transnational practices. In this study, I present the families' relation with digital literacies and telephone practices.

Guarnizo (2005) also suggests more data, both quantitative and qualitative are needed from both "here" and "there" concerning gender, especially on women, and concerning the cultural effects, especially the intangible costs of migration. Changes in literacy practices and language choices might be one expression of an intangible result of migration, however, rather than causing a deficit, the result might be considered a resource. I discuss this further in section 1.6, but first, I discuss the terminology used in scholarly literature concerning transnational migration.

1.5.6. Terminology Specific to Transnational Migration

In scholarly literature about migrants and migration, terminology is often based on the migrant's legal status in the host country; thus, the classification of *documented* and *undocumented* immigrants, which the PHC prefers. Also, literature refers to *settled* or *permanent* migrants, those who are assumed to have settled in the host country, and *sojourner* or *circular* migrants, those who move back and forth across borders between two residences.

Fitzgerald (2002) deems the term *transnationalism* has been useful in highlighting the variety of migrant experiences in relation to the sending and receiving countries, in contrast to earlier literature based on assimilationist ideology. To make the international – transnational distinction he clarifies "an 'international' is constituted by national units while a 'transnational' organization does not imply constituent national-level units (Fitzgerald, 2002, p.4)." He further disaggregates transnationalism as follows. First, while *trans-* refers to crossing or transcending, *nation* may refer to an imagined ethnic community or a political unit. In discussions of intra-family issues, he notes, the distinction may be insignificant, but in discussions of economic and political analysis this difference becomes important. Second, transnationalism has been used to both refer to migrants who identify with one nation but physically live in another, and to migrants who politically identify with two distinct nations. Finally, in scholarly literature, transnationalism has been interchangeably used to discuss identity issues at various levels, that is, the local, regional and national. Fitzgerald's case study concerns mainly transnational political issues regarding an immigrant labor union, and he describes how the participants' actions, views and concerns often mix the types and levels of 'nation' referred to.

Portes, et al. (1999) also analyze the term transnationalism, settling on an economic-, political-, socio-cultural-based definition referring to "occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contact over time across national borders for their implementation (p. 219)." In this context, *nation* refers to the political or territorialized unit. In contrast, D'Aubeterre (2000), in her study on gender and conjugal relations in a transnational social space, bases her work on an economic-, political-, and socio-cultural-based definition of transnationalism offered by Basch, Glick & Szanton (1995), which de-territorializes the social space.

Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001), speak of transnational migration as characterized by migrants who refer to success *not* as assimilating and growing deep roots in a new land, but rather as returning to their country of origin after achieving the goals that motivated them to migrate in the first place, that is, after earning the financial and/or social resources that enable them to have a better life 'back home' (p. 29).

According to Levitt (2001) when people migrate, they may become integrated into the receiving community and lose ties to the homeland, return home and not continue in migrational practices, or maintain or deepen close contacts on both sides of the border and grow into a *migration social network*. Levitt (2001) explains that migration spreads through social networks. If the networks mature, deepening social, religious, political and economic relations, which span borders, they become *transnational social fields* (Levitt, 2001).   Much recent literature on migration refers to networks, fields, spaces and/or circuits.

D'Aubeterre (2000) chooses to use the term *transnational migrant circuits* because it recognizes actors taking active roles in the construction of their life conditions, a set of

practices carried out by actors in diverse areas of social life (politics, religion, family, marriage) which are shaped from historic conditions and which in turn contribute to modifications in these areas, through negotiation of differing and not always compatible interests. D'Aubeterre (2000) attributes the concept *transnational migrant circuits* to Rouse (1991), who defined it as "the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information for the involved people on both sides of the border who are so strongly tied, they look at themselves as one sole community (my translation, p. 64)."

Looking carefully at how migration has been described also forces researchers to re-conceptualize our definitions of family or domestic group or homes, and so we find terms in the literature such as *transborder homes, binational homes,* and *transnational homes and families.* As D'Aubeterre (2000) explains, the ties between these related groups are "reinforced through time and space by means of an intricate networking of transactions which can be manipulated and constructed according to circumstances and independently of time and space (my translation, p. 66)."

In this paper, I use D'Aubeterre's (2000) concept *transnational migrant circuits* to refer to the continuous circulation of people, money, goods, and information for the involved people, on both sides of the border, who are so strongly tied, they look at themselves as one sole community.

I use the term *family* to refer to the people the participants identified as members of their immediate families, and *extended families* to refer to the families of origin of each of the parents of the family, as well as their families or origin's *families* as they might define them today. In this study, *transnational family* is used to refer to those who identify themselves as *family* and who are actors within the *transnational migrant circuit.*

I use *home* or *household* interchangeably to refer to the smallest edifice which they consider fully theirs, including the *family,* and the environment and atmosphere therein. H*ome place* or *home plot* refers to the land, building, environment, atmosphere, and *extended family* to which the participants identify as belonging to the *extended family*.

In the following section, I present the reader with research precedents, which have dealt specifically with literacy as it relates to transnational circuits.

1.6. A Deficit vs. Resource Perspective: The Literacy – Migration Links and Gaps

In the face of migration, people from different backgrounds and different cultures often come together in order to achieve a common goal.   The common goal may lead people to believe they are working under the same assumptions. Using qualitative data collection through participant observations in homes, classrooms, and community programs, and analysis of transcripts of focus groups and interviews, Faulstich Orellana, Monkman, & MacGillivray (2002) conducted a study with teachers and parents of US-born children of 'Latino' immigrant parents in order to examine how parents and teachers talk about children's academic and social development.

They found that these parents and teachers operated with different points of reference for what a good education was. While parents, some of whom had college degrees, compared their children's schooling to their own schooling, teachers compared the children's schooling to middle-class American schooling. Also, whereas the parents saw obstacles to success as primarily inter-personal, mentioning gangs and drugs, teachers saw obstacles to the children's success as more social, citing prejudices and

poverty. How might these differing points of reference play out in the classroom and in

the homes?

One explanation is that the children participating in the Faulstich Orellana et al.

(2002) study live with parents and study with teachers who are of two historically and

culturally distinct backgrounds. Results suggest that teachers often overlook the

possibility that hardships may give children an understanding of the world that more

materially privileged children may never have, and that this understanding might be

tapped as a source for learning and development. This is comparable to the deficit vs. the

resource perspectives discussed by González et al. (2005).

Through inquiry-based visits in Mexican migrant homes in the U.S., González,

Moll, Floyd Tenery, et al. (2005) found that Mexican parents believed some schools in

Mexico were academically ahead of the U.S. schools, and that discipline was stricter,

with children in US school. Floyd Tenery was surprised to find Mexican immigrant

parents wanted more homework, more communication with the schools, and stricter

discipline. This contrasts with Valdés' (1996) study of Mexican immigrant families in

the U.S., which found that the disciplining techniques of detention, and homework

assignments, which were dependent on parental involvement, could be viewed as

interfering with family life. Again, misunderstandings can arise from the differences in

the children and teachers' social and educational backgrounds.

Portes et al. (1999) suggest case studies of literacy practices in transnational homes

are needed to inform language and literacy-in-education policy (Teague et al., 2006; Luke,

2003; Farr, 1991) and to understand the relation between the local and the global (Street,

2005). Case studies, like the ones in this study, offer culturally situated views, which

might aid in understanding the ideologies underlying transnational migration and literacy.

In the following section, I present the assumptions under which I conducted the study,

and the questions, which guided it.

1.7. This Study's Assumptions and Research Questions

I carried out this study under the following assumptions.

- Because transnational migrants continue to play parental roles, I assume the transnational experience should have an impact on the literacy attitudes and practices of children of transnational families.

- I assumed analysis of literacy practices specific to transnationalism might shed light as to the roles of different family members in the migration process, as well as to the role of literacy in the migration process itself.

- I assumed that homes experiencing transnational migration incorporate literacy practices particular to the experience of transnational migration and that these can be used as resources in novel literacy practices.

With a perspective of literacy and migration practices being culturally situated in

time, transcending place, and being used for different ends, I arrived at the following

research questions:

- What literacy practices can be found in the homes of transnational families who live in this community?

- What texts do these families use in these literacy practices and how do they use them?

- What texts do these families produce in these literacy practices and how do they

  produce them?

- What role do different family members play in these literacy practices?

- What purpose(s) do these literacy practices serve in the family?

- What purpose(s) do these literacy practices serve in the transnational migrant circuit?

These questions guided this study. In the following chapter, I take the reader

through a more detailed account of the methodology that shaped this case study,

including gaining access to the families, the data collection process, and the data analysis.