

## 2. Methodology

In this chapter I present the methodology used to collect and analyze the data, describing the steps in detail. Although the study's focus is on three transnational families, more than three families were involved along the way. The qualitative data collection principally followed the three-step, home inquiry-based visits described in Chapter One. Analysis at each step in the study guided the methodological decisions I made along the way. Methodological decisions were also constrained by the families' willingness to work with me. In the following sections, I present the core aspects of the methodology I followed and the reasoning behind them.

### 2.1. COSOLEM

This study was carried out under the auspices of a federally funded research project conducted at a private university in the southeastern region of Mexico. The project, *Construcción Social de Lectores y Escritores en México* (COSOLEM), sought to analyze the social construction of readers and writers of Mexico, and in particular, in one community in central Mexico.<sup>1</sup> This project director offered a qualitative research seminar in which I had the opportunity to practice, observe, and analyze qualitative data collection techniques with a focus on literacy practices. As a research assistant, I attended meetings where we practiced research data collection techniques in role-playing situational fieldwork. We also discussed theoretical issues in an attempt to link scholarly

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<sup>1</sup> Over a three-year period, the project dealt with recording literacy practices at three levels: the schools, the community, and the homes. This study was conducted primarily within the context of the last level – that of the home. As student research assistant, I participated in data collection covering the three levels of the project over a period of two years. The research was conducted under the direction of three researchers, two professors at a private university in the research community where this study was carried out, and the other a professor at a private university in the U.S.

literature and the data, which we were collecting. For example, we addressed theoretical questions of *México Profundo* and *México Imaginario* as discussed by Bonfil Batalla (1987, 1996), masculinity, and migration, all of which were useful in the interpretation of data from this study. González and Moll (2002) proposed the value of such research meetings, putting into practice the Vygotskian mediating function by providing the researchers with a context for the *appropriation*, as defined by Rockwell (1996), of theories.

The COSOLEM project also sponsored my attendance at an international conference on migration and a meeting on educational research, as well as my participation in national conferences on applied linguistics and sociolinguistics and the sociology of language. These experiences also helped to shape my understanding of theories and questions involved in literacy and migration practices.

## 2.2. Quantitative Data: Linguistic Census of School Population

In the fall of 2004, the COSOLEM team conducted a quantitative survey called the *Censo Sociolingüístico de Padres de Familia* (see Appendix A for a sample form) at the Alfonso Cano Elementary School (pseudonym), a primary school in the research community. The census was developed specifically for the project by COSOLEM members in order to obtain a linguistic and social profile of local school populations. COSOLEM researchers had already used the instrument at two other schools in the same city, and members incorporated modifications to the census *in situ* as new questions arose, as suggested by Spindler & Spindler (1987). In part, results provided a quantitative

description of the population from which I chose the participants of this study. (See Vance, 2005 for a more complete analysis of results.)

We obtained permission from the director of the school to conduct the census at the entrance to the school and, on days of festivals or meetings, in the school patio where we approached parents after they had dropped their children off or had finished tending to their children's school business. Approximately 25% of the families at the school completed the census and we believe the results are a reliable and representative socio-economic-linguistic profile of the overall school population. The school requires families to attend bi-monthly parent-teacher conferences, and we were informed as to when they would be held. Also, the responsibility for organizing each school ceremony is rotated among the different classrooms, and parents are encouraged to observe their children's participation. In cases where parents are unable to attend these school-held functions, families typically send a representative usually a grandparent. We took these characteristics into consideration when scheduling linguistic census visits. We also feel assured they are reliable because, for the most part, the results are consistent with results from two other schools where the census was given in the same community: an alternative semi-private school (described by Teague, 2004 and Vance, 2005), and a nearby public school.

Census questions focused on family members in the school and home, the services in the homes, the educational profile of the interviewed parent or adult family member, the linguistic background and practices of the family, and the family's contact with migration and indigenous languages. I was able to share the results, a socio-economic

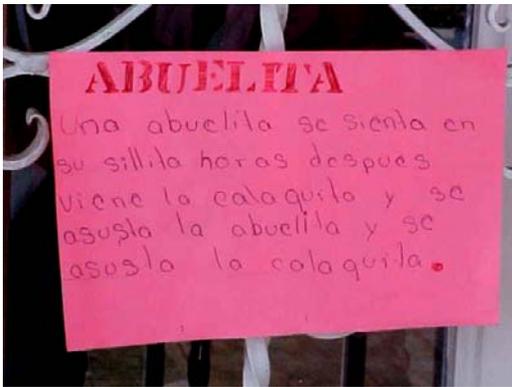
and linguistic profile of families attending the school. I refer to these data principally in Chapter 3, in the description of the community and the participants of this study.

### 2.3. Gaining Access to Families through the School

The interim between February 2004 and June 2005 was important for developing trust and building rapport with the school administration and faculty, the students, and the families. I was first introduced to the director and teachers when I attended a COSOLEM-sponsored teacher workshop in February 2004. This was helpful because I was able to hear teachers speak about their attitudes toward their own literacy practices. My contacts that day led me to work with the teacher Fide Coatl who later expressed her interest in working with me. Because Alfonso Cano students remain with the same teacher and classmates throughout first and second grade, I was able to work Fide and her students over a period of a year and a half. During this time, I carried out two separate research projects based on data I collected in her classroom, and in the course of many visits, I also became better acquainted with the director, teachers, children, parents, and the general organization and history of the school. Other colleagues of mine were simultaneously researching in other classrooms at the school, and two of these papers were published (Sullivan, 2005 and Vance, 2005a).

Part of my strategy to gain access was to visit Alfonso Cano at different times of day. If I wanted to speak with the director or to observe the flag ceremony, I went early on Monday mornings. If I went in order to photograph student-produced writing on display, I could go later in the day, overlapping with lunch and recess. *Figure 2.1* shows a sample of the kinds of student-produced writing exhibited to celebrate the Mexican,

Day of the Dead. *Figure 2.2* shows a sample of a student-made poster for a literacy campaign.



*Figure 2.1. Abuelita. Una abuelita se sienta en su sillita horas después viene la calaquita y se asusta la abuelita y se asusta la calaquita* [Granny: A granny sits on her little chair hours later comes the little skeleton and the granny gets frightened and the little skeleton gets frightened].



*Figure 2.2. Si quieres saber de la cultura Empieza con la lectura* [If you want to know about culture Start with reading].

On these visits, children often accompanied me around the grounds. Also, I was able to chat and have lunch with the teachers with whom I developed a friendly relationship, to the point that we lent books back and forth.

Based on our growing knowledge of the school, the project director and I developed the first of three instruments developed *in situ* in this study. The Teacher / Migration Questionnaire allowed me to estimate the extent of migration in the different classrooms, and gauge the disposition of the teachers to work on a research project with me (Appendix B). I was then able to approach the director with a specific proposal for target classrooms, and he consulted with the appropriate teachers. As a result, Fide and her (then) second-grade class, a fourth-grade teacher and group, and a first-grade teacher and group were invited to participate. I then followed with two observations in each classroom in order to

begin identifying students' names and faces and to learn more about the general atmosphere in which the children studied.

In order to identify children living in transnational migrant circuits, I prepared an experimental interactive literacy activity for the three different classrooms. I drew on methodology developed in Kendrick and McKay's study (2002), *Young Children's Images of Literacy at Home, at School, and in the Community*, based on children's drawings as windows to their concept of migration and the Vygotsky (1988) assumption that transmission and acquisition of cultural knowledge, such as literacy, takes place interpersonally between individuals before it is internalized on an intrapersonal level. This activity extended the subject matter to migration.

I worked together with an elementary school teacher, another member of the COSOLEM team, to design lesson plans that were grade appropriate, and then piloted the lesson with a group of interested children. (For a sample lesson plan, see Appendix C.) I also gave the teachers a copy of the corresponding lesson plan a few days before entering into the classrooms. The activity centered on Sofía Meza Keane's *Querida Abuelita* (1997), a colorful book in which a Mexican child migrates to the U.S and writes his grandmother letters about his experiences. The idea was for the children to use the medium of drawing and writing to express their understandings of migration.

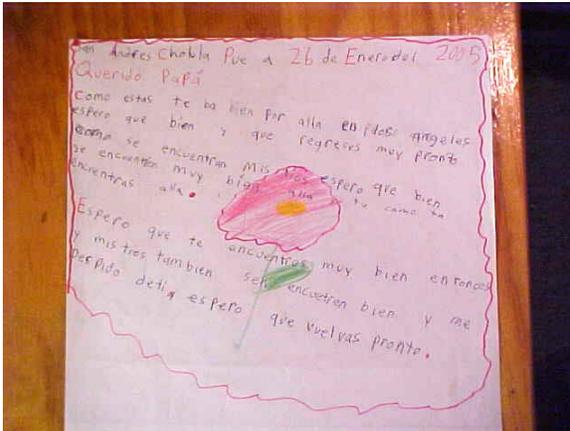


Figure 2.3. *Querido Papá* [Dear Pa]



Figure 2.4. *Ese día fue el más de los divertidos juegos* [That day was the most fun].

In the first part of the activity, I introduced the theme of migration, established the idea of communicating through letters, read selected letters from the book and invited the students to comment. The second part of the activity called for the children to write, or write and draw, letters to a migrant, or someone who lived “far away.” This gave me a first collection of child-produced documents to analyze. *Figures 2.3* and *2.4* show letters produced by fourth- and second-graders, respectively, who were later selected as participants. COSOLEM members videotaped the activity and thus I was able to view the videotapes with the teachers afterwards and hear their perspective of the children’s participation. Triangulating data from the tape analysis, the letters, and the teachers’ knowledge of the family guided my decisions in making a list of possible families to work with.

My first direct contact with transnational parents occurred at a meeting, which the director called on my behalf. Based on the results from the *Querida Abuelita* exercise, I

had requested the attendance of fifteen families with migrant connections. At the meeting, the director of the school introduced me to the families, and I presented them with a letter signed by the director of Alfonso Cano, the director of the COSOLEM project, and me, in which the objectives of the study were described. The letter (Appendix D) explained the purpose of the study and the data collection plan of three home inquiry-based visits. I made it clear that participation was voluntary, results would be anonymous, and that, depending on the results of each stage, families might be invited to participate in the next. I also asked the parents in attendance to fill out a contact information sheet (Appendix E), including home address, telephone number, and indications such as house color and neighboring landmarks, which would help me find their home. This last bit of information was important because many homes in the community do not have house numbers visibly marked.

Since participation in the project was voluntary, parents were given the opportunity to indicate whether they were or were not interested in participating or whether they wanted more information before deciding. Of these fifteen families, two indicated they “preferred not to participate,” and one added his own response to “*no participa*,” and placed an X before it. Twelve families indicated they either wanted more information or were willing to participate, so my next step was to meet individually with each of these families.

#### 2.4. Data Collection in the Households

Of the twelve families who either requested more information or indicated that they were willing to participate in the study, I conducted nine initial interviews. One family I

was never able to make contact with. Another family was never at home at the times they suggested meeting. The third family decided it was in their best interest not to participate. Two families preferred to have the initial interview at the school, and each time the administration found a place for me to conduct the interview.

As a result of this first round of visits, I made contact with two more families with children at Alfonso Cano School. One student was from Fide's second grade group and a first cousin of one of the original nine children. It was through Fide that I obtained the initial interview with this family. The other student was also a first cousin of one of the nine children but from a different second-grade group. Her second-grade teacher helped to arrange a first meeting by having the mother fill out a contact data sheet. Thus, I was able to conduct a total of eleven initial interviews with families who had an immediate or extended family member residing outside Mexico, with at least one child either in first, second, or fourth grade (one family had a child in second and fourth), and who voluntarily consented to participate in the project. Table 2.1 shows the general characteristics and the nature of the participation of each of the eleven families.

Table 2.1:  
*Family Participation*

Families, their characteristics and participation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	total
Migrant, Immediate family member					x	x		x	x		x	5
Extended family member	x	x	x	x			x			x		6
Grade in school, First	x											1
Second		x	x	x				x	x		x	6
Fourth					x	x	x	x		x		5
<i>Querida Abuelita</i> letter	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-	10
Family social history form	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11
Literacy inventory	-	x	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	x	x	7
Interview	-	-	-	-	x	-	-	x	-	-	x	3

#### 2.4.1. First Home Visit: Family Social History

The purpose of the initial home visits was to collect data concerning the make-up of the family, including family history concerning education, work, their transnational experience, their experience with indigenous language, and family interests and activities, including those involving literacy. Researchers in the COSOLEM project had previously developed the Family Social History Form (Appendix F). I piloted the form with a family from the school who was not taking part in the study, and found it to be very helpful in giving the families a sense that my visit was professionally objective and delimited, and thus contributed to an initial sense of trust in me. The form covered a wide range of pertinent information, allowing me a sufficiently in-depth introduction to the families. The children of the family were usually present during these initial visits and they participated in the informal interview. I usually took the letter the child had written in the *Querida Abuelita* class and used this text to help open discussion on migration. During the first visit, I always requested a second visit and asked how the family would feel if I were to take a camera to visually document the reading and writing of their home. In order to impress on them the importance of taking photographs, I also showed them photographs I had taken in the school, as shown in Figures 2.1 and 2.2 and those I had taken in their classrooms. As an expression of reciprocity, I left the families with a copy of a photograph in which their child appeared.

#### 2.4.2. Second Home Visit: Literacy Inventory

Following the eleven initial interviews, I completed a second home inquiry-based visit with seven of the families. The purpose of the second visit was to describe and

record the texts found in the home, and to elicit talk about those texts. I came to see the visit itself as one very big multi-literacy event. Using a digital camera, aside from myself, occasionally the participants themselves photographed the print examples, which the families shared with me. Another student researcher and I developed a literacy inventory (Appendix G); to record the kinds of text available in the homes, and to describe the access different members of the family have to these texts. We piloted the literacy inventory in several homes, attempting to use local terms for texts in an attempt to eliminate any form-meaning discrepancies. The recording of the presence and use of texts is important because it is only through availability and access to texts that people encounter opportunities to interact with reading and writing, and that “appropriation,” as defined by Rockwell (1996), may occur (Kalman, 2003). The inventory offered a space to record the availability – access information simply, as well as information on who participated with certain texts and for what purposes. I found it only of limited help as a guide for the family visits, but, by adding to it after each visit I kept it up to date, and it was actually of more help in the data analysis stage of the study.

When participants shared a text – an instance of written language, whether handwritten or machine printed – I asked them to tell me about it. For example, I wanted to know what they called each text. If it had been produced in the home, I wanted to know who, how and why they had produced it; how they used it; and where they kept it, if they did. If the text had been produced elsewhere and brought into the home, I asked how it had arrived to the house, who had brought it, why they had brought it, and how they used it. I hoped these questions about texts would lead me to identify the literacy

practices of the family, to understand the function(s) they served, and to discern their possible relationship with the transnational migrant circuit.

Most often, the children became actively involved in the second visit by finding print examples and oftentimes getting out their favorite texts or their most recent writing activity. Several children were inquisitive and outgoing enough to want to learn how the digital camera worked, and we would look back on the pictures we had taken. A few of the children participated by taking the pictures themselves. Of the three case study families participating in this study, I was able to take photographs on four occasions with one family, on two occasions with another family, and only once with the other family.

In general, I sensed a feeling of excitement from most families during these visits and perhaps a bit of nervousness. Five out of the seven families had a calendar hanging in the sitting room, where most families began the visit, and I found these calendars to be a non-threatening starting point. I also liked to begin with the calendars because reading a calendar does not necessarily fit with what people might traditionally think of as reading.

Before we took the picture of the calendar, I would often ask one of the children if they could find *today* on it, telling them, if they could find it, we could take a picture of it. Sometimes, if there were siblings, an older sibling would help the younger one find the date. Thus, it became a literacy event involving a socially constructed meaning of a text. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes describing the calendar during the literacy inventory at the Salazar Oaxaca home. The images can be appreciated in *Figures 2.5 and 2.6*.

*\*...Pregunto a Giovanni si puede encontrar el día de hoy en el calendario. See [Calendario\\_Malu\\_Giovani.JPG](#). Dice que no, pero lo baja y hago preguntas a Oswaldo para guiarlo al día....*

*Le pregunto que día de la semana es pero no sabe. Le pregunto porque están los números rojos abajo del D, y no sabe. Le digo que pregunte a su hermano y dice que es por días festivos... [...I ask Giovani if he can find the day on the calendar. See .... He says no, but he takes it down [off the wall] and I ask Oswaldo questions to guide him to the day.... I ask him what day of the week it is but he does not know. I ask him why there are red numbers under the D, and he does not know. I tell him to ask his brother and he says that it is for holidays...].*

*\*Más tarde, Mariana me dice que entre el 24 y el 31 de diciembre, cuando uno hace las compras en los lugares de costumbre, les obsequia o un calendario o un toper, o algo que piensen que puede ser útil. Ella los ha recibido en la recaudería, la tiendita, la dulcería, o la zapatería. [Later, Mariana tells me that between the December 24 and 31, when you shop at your usual stores, they give you a gift or a calendar or a plastic recipient, or something that they think might be useful. She has received [gifts] in the fresh produce shop, the miscellaneous store, the candy store, or the shoe store.]*

*\*Pregunto a Mariana del otro calendario; see [Calendario\\_CopaOro\\_Giovani.JPG](#), que es de Copa de Oro y lo había traído de su trabajo.... Pido a Giovani que busque el día en ese calendario y no se tarda en encontrarla. [I ask Mariana about the other calendar; see ..., which is from Copa de Oro and she had brought it from work.... I ask Giovani to look for today on this calendar and he does not take long in finding it.]*



Figure 2.5: Malu calendar



Figure 2.6: Copa de Oro calendar

As the fieldnotes describe, I was able to learn where the calendar texts came from and how the family came to have them. This also informed me about certain business practices in the community. I also found out to some extent what some of the members knew about the text.

With some of the seven families, the literacy inventory was limited to one. Other families took me to different places in the home, including their shop or store. The literacy inventory results do not pretend to reflect a complete picture of the literacy available in the households, but the event does allow the participants to tell me what they do with literacy and how and why. In the next section, I discuss the subsequent in-depth interview that allowed further understanding of their literacy practices.

#### 2.4.3. Third Home Visit: In-Depth Interview

The third home visit consisted of in-depth interviews. In order for the interview data to be useful for the larger COSOLEM project, I followed the interview protocol other researchers had developed, adding new questions relevant to transnational families. (See Appendix H.) Throughout the in-depth interviews, my purpose was to invite the participants, both adults and children, including any siblings who wished to participate (no members of the extended family participated), to discuss their ideas on and personal experiences with reading and writing. I also invited them to talk about their experiences with transnationalism, how it affected them, and what they thought about it. I explicitly asked about reading or writing practices and forms, which resulted from the family's transnationalism. I hoped to come to a fuller understanding of these issues from the participants' perspective, and thus to gain insight into the underlying ideologies involved.

Of the seven families who participated in the literacy inventory, four had immediate family members living abroad at the time, and these were the families, which most interested me in my research. Three agreed to being interviewed. In total, ten members of the three case study families participated to some extent in the interviews, which I

audio-recorded with their permission. Table 2.2 shows a summary of details of the contact I had had as I conducted the in-depth interview with the participants. The number of family visits reflects the number of opportunities I had to observe the families' interactions and practices and to listen to what they had to say. These observations guided my interviewing. During Belen's interview, she brought out writing she had been doing and we looked through it and discussed it, much like what we had done in the literacy inventory. The interview with Ernesto Tenahua I conducted by telephone, approximately six months after the first home inquiry-based visit. He is the only migrant I was able to interview, and it was a week short of a year since his leave-taking. With COSOLEM funds, I was able to purchase a telephone card in the U.S. and mail it to him. Through his wife, Licha, we were able to coordinate a time and day convenient for the call. I used a telephone with an intercom option to record the conversation. On the recording, traffic can heard behind him because he had made the call from a public telephone. It was a successful event and one we both enjoyed.

Table 2.2

*Profile of Researcher's Contact with Participants at Time of In-depth Interview*

Family member**	Date* of first visit	Date of interview	# of family visit at interview	length of interview in minutes
Licha Tlatehui	April 4	August 24	7 <sup>th</sup>	80
Belen Tenahua Tlatehui	April 4	August 30	9 <sup>th</sup>	55
Ernesto Tenahua	April 4	October 9	12 <sup>th</sup>	80
Roberta Salazar Oaxaca	June 9	September 2	4 <sup>th</sup>	20
Giovani Salazar Oaxaca	June 9	September 2	4 <sup>th</sup>	10
Mariana Oaxaca, Figo & Oswaldo Salazar Oaxaca	June 9	September 2	4 <sup>th</sup>	40
Monica Romero	July 14	September 2	3 <sup>rd</sup>	30
Araceli Nava Romero	July 14	September 2	3 <sup>rd</sup>	30

\*All dates are of the year 2005.

\*\*Pseudonyms.

#### 2.4.4. Transcription Procedures

After recording the interviews, I wrote accompanying field notes to contextualize what was heard in the cassette. I supplied information on who was being interviewed, where, and when to the transcriber provided by COSOLEM, a native Mexican business school Spanish and computer teacher from the neighboring community. I checked the transcripts with the actual recordings, making changes on the transcriptions as needed. The transcriptions include very little punctuation while explanatory contextual comments, such as noises, indistinct voices or, interruptions were interspersed in brackets. For the purpose of using quotes from these transcriptions in this paper, I added minimal punctuation in order to aid comprehension. Because of the poor audio quality in the telephone interview, for that transcription, I included the interview protocol, rearranged as we dealt with it in conversation, wrote detailed impressions, and transcribed parts of our conversation in order to facilitate the transcriber's job

#### 2.4.5. Teacher Interviews

I interviewed three teachers from the primary school, two who were home room teachers for three of the case study children. I conducted the interviews with the teachers near the end of June, 2005. By then, I had been working with the second-grade teacher, Fide, for sixteen months and with the first- and fourth-grade teachers, for seven months. I had carried out the *Querida Abuelita* project in their classrooms with their cooperation. They had been given me valuable feedback on the videotaped lesson, including providing background information on the families. They had also been helpful in arranging my initial contact with the families I wished to work with.

The three teachers arranged to be interviewed at the school during school hours while the children played or worked in their school books. At the time of these interviews, in late June, the children were already finished with final exams and seemed happy to have free time to socialize with their friends and classmates. Teachers at this school are free to make administrative judgments concerning their classroom activities, and it is not uncommon for groups to remain in classrooms without teacher supervision. Each interview lasted just over an hour.

Besides questions about their teaching experiences, practice, and philosophy, I asked them questions about their knowledge of the community, their own experience with migration/transnationalism and their perceptions of the effect migration may have in their classrooms. All three teachers reported personal experiences with migration. The fourth-grade teacher, Alejo, had twice before gone to the U.S. to work, once with working papers and once without. Fide and the first-grade teacher reported having brothers and cousins in the U.S.

Fide and Alejo were the homeroom teachers for three of the participants in this study. All three teachers were well informed and sympathetic to the community's cultural activities. Fide is originally from a nearby community and Alejo has also made his home in the same nearby community, having married a woman from there. The first-grade teacher was born and lives in the nearby state capital city. I also asked questions on the case study students' academic performance and socialization. Parent-teacher contact is an explicit part of school policy, and I found the teachers were well aware of the students' home environments and informed about the families' situations. This knowledge was helpful in triangulating data.

## 2.4.6. Fieldnotes

Table 2.3.

*Profile of Number of Fieldnotes by Domains and Activities*

Fieldnote domains	111	Activity	
School visits	59	Ceremonies and general environment	7
		Conversation with administration	8
		Linguistic Census	7
		Consultations with teachers	15
		Classroom observation	16
		Teacher interviews	3
		Parent meeting	1
		Family interviews	2
		Home visits	37
Literacy inventory (2 <sup>nd</sup> Home Inquiry)	7		
Interviews (3 <sup>rd</sup> Home Inquiry)	3		
Subsequent visits with 3 case study families	16		
Town visits and home stop-ins	9	Observations in zocalo, church, programming visits, confirming visits	9
Telephone calls	6	Confirming visits, chatting	6

Table 2.3 shows the breakdown of fieldnotes by domain and activity that I recorded between February 2004 and December 2005, a total of 111. As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2003), after each instance of contact with the school, families, and the community, I wrote detailed fieldnotes of what I heard, saw, experienced and thought during these encounters. Initially, my observations took place mainly at the school; between February 2004 and June 2005 I stopped in at the school on at least 59 separate visits. I observed Fide's classroom three times in a period of a month when the children were in first grade, and seven times over a period of two months when the children were in second grade. In the first and fourth grade classrooms I did two observations each, once before and once after doing the *Querida Abuelita* classes. The fifteen teacher

consultations included such activities as reviewing the *Querida Abuelita* video, scheduling the activity, and sending and receiving notifications to and from the families.

The eight school administration visits included informing the director of my progress or my plans for the next stages. As the gatekeeper of my access to the school, it was important for me to obtain and keep the support of the director. The Secretary of Public Education (SEP) declared a literacy campaign for the 2004-2005 school year. The director enthusiastically supported, several literacy-promoting activities, including student-acted plays based on scenes from an adaptation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and other storybooks. He did not offer any comments on transnational migration, but he was interested in the results from the Sociolinguistic Census and this study.

While interviews helped me understand the participants' attitudes and experiences with migration and literacy, the fieldnotes written after home visits provided the bulk of the data for the families' actual ways of dealing with migration and literacy. Above, in the section discussing the literacy inventory used in the second home visit, I include a sample of the after I conducted the literacy inventory at the home of the Tenahua Tlatehui family.

\*\*TMS-058. Wednesday, April 20, 2005. 5:00 p.m. La casa de la familia de Belen Tenahua Tlatehui. San Andrés Cholula.

...\*From the desk area, Licha explains she has bought books for reference, to help, especially once they get to secondary school, with the homework. She says, "Lo leemos juntos. Luego le pregunto- ¿Lo entendiste? - No. y ¿Tú? - Yo lo entendí así. Tú, ¿qué entendistes? - Pues, así. - Entonces ponga algo de los dos. Ya que no estudié más que la primaria y hace tantos años, lo hacemos así. [We read it together. Then I ask him- Did you understand? - No, and you? - I understood it like this. What did you understand? - Well, like this. - Then put something between the two [versions]. Since I didn't study anything past primary and so many years ago, we do it like this.]" ...

\*Licha says that she bought them [the collection of books which include encyclopedias, craft books, and a table game

with a book on facts] at the school when they went and offered books. She bought a package. The company offered a payment plan, beginning in December, she agreed to pay 23 payments of \$145 [pesos] each fortnight (quincena). She goes to the bank and deposits to an account. The total price was \$3510. See images [Contract\\_](#), [Receipt\\_of\\_payment\\_](#), and [Receipt\\_of\\_payment\\_2\\_package\\_Chilindrina\\_Belen\\_hogar\\_abr20.2005.JPG](#)

\*She says her father-in-law scolds her saying, "¿Porqué endrogarnos con libros? [Why go into debt with books?]" Licha explains, "A mí me sirven. Él no está aquí cuando están haciendo tarea los jóvenes. A mí me ha servido mucho. Él dice que el cuñado no usa la suya (que tiene un enciclopedia que compró). Pero porque andan (sus hijos) todavía en la primaria y kinder. ¿Hasta dónde tendría que ir para conseguir la información? Como si tuviéramos algún lugar o lleváramos todo lo que se necesita saber en la cabeza. [They work for me. He isn't here when the kids are doing homework. They've helped me out a lot. He says that my brother-in-law doesn't use his (that he has an encyclopedia which he bought). But because his children are still in primary and kindergarten. Where would we have to go in order to get the information? As though we had someplace or we carried everything we need to know in our head.]" I mention that there is a library in the zocalo. Licha says that her kids often don't start the homework until later at night, much later than the library hours, and that they would have to go all the way there and back. It's very convenient to have the reference books on hand at home. Other nephews have even stopped over to consult them.

As this example illustrates, I wrote fieldnotes in English or Spanish, and sometimes both. When taking notes would not interrupt the flow of conversation, that is, when the participant would keep speaking whether or not I kept eye contact possible, I took notes during the actual conversations in order to include participants' actual words. I later included translations between brackets for the purposes of this report. The conversation to which Licha referred in this example concerned a set of books she had purchased, and which caused some friction in the extended family. I was able to confirm much of what Licha said through subsequent observations as well as later conversations with Licha's husband and father-in-law.

By enumerating each field note entry, I was able to refer quickly back to them. I incorporated references to texts I had photographed and filed separately in JPG format. The images themselves served to jog my memory on several points that were mentioned in the conversations and literacy events, which I observed, and therefore helped to make for much richer fieldnotes. I used photographs to record visual copies of text to accompany the fieldnotes which gave a description but also the uses and conversation surrounding the text. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest “rich data” are “well-endowed with good description and dialogue relevant to what occurs at the setting and its meaning for the participants (p. 114).” The visual also aided in doing further document analyses of the texts.

I also wrote fieldnotes when I observed texts or practices I thought might be relevant to understanding the community better. Because, some families did not have telephones, or if they did, and I had not been able to make contact with them, I sometimes stopped at their homes if I was in the neighborhood. In this way I was able to schedule several home visits.

I also wrote fieldnotes following telephone calls with participants because they were often sources of valuable information. For example, I might call before leaving for an appointment with a family, and they would sometimes ask to reschedule a visit. Whether for health, extended family obligations or other reasons, documenting the conversation was important for understanding families better. Sometimes I found children to be especially chatty on the telephone; although the mother might be busy or the family not ready to receive me, the children were sometimes willing conversationalists.

#### 2.4.7. Documents

Literacy practices concern texts produced or used by the participants. The first texts I collected were the letters written by the children in the *Querida Abuelita* classes. Most other texts I collected in PGF format using a digital camera. I was most comfortable using this technique because I felt it was less intrusive than asking permission to take the documents away to photocopy or scan. It was also a “fun” factor for the participants, because they had not had a digital camera in their homes previously. For the three families, I was able to collect a total of 191 images: 35 for the Nava Romero family, 108 for the Tenahua Tlathui family, and 48 for the Salazar Oaxaca family. There were not 191 different texts; rather, these images often show the same document with a different focus or lighting, or open to different pages. I also photographed the home environment in which the family keeps or uses the text, as well as the participants themselves. The children also wanted to take photographs, and sometimes urged me to take photographs of people or of favorite objects of theirs. One participant found it entertaining to photograph herself at arm’s distance or much closer, as seen in *Figure 2.7*. I kept most of these compositions because, like the drawings in Kendrick & McKay’s (2002) study, these compositions reflect the children’s perspective of the world they live in, a key objective of my study.



*Figure 2.7.* Belen's self-portrait.

I also attempted to capture the participants' views by letting them choose what to show me. Because of the embedded nature of literacy in our lives I sometimes had to help the family see the literacy in their lives – for example, the calendars, described in section 2.4.2. I did not always have the camera with me, so some documents are only described in the fieldnotes and registered in the literacy inventory.

These documents were focal points for participants to talk about their literacy practices. I was able to print black and white contact sheets of the pictures and when I wanted to discuss the text with the participants at some later date, I was able to actually show them a picture to help jog their memory.

## 2.5. Data Analysis

As I observed and talked with the participants, I came to see how literacy was embedded in the daily activities of each family. I began noting many similarities with the home literacy practices of other published studies. Since one of the techniques for categorizing is to use strategies, which other researchers have used (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), I took a closer look at the literature.

In comparing previous studies on literacy practices in homes, I distinguished between two main approaches to categorizing. One approach categorized literacy practices according to function (e.g. Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; and Barton & Hamilton, 1998, as cited in Mercado, 2005), according to the uses the readers and writers gave to their literacy practices. The other approach categorized literacy practices within domains of use, that is, the domain in which the reading and writing occur (Faulstich Orellana et al., 2003; Farr, 1991 & 1994). According to Farr (1994),

Domains allow a more social, rather than individual, perspective, inasmuch as they allow one to situate literacy practice in the social relationships that exist within domains, as well as to situate the literacy practices more concretely within the larger view of daily life (p. 28).

Given the sociocultural nature of this study, I attempted categorizing the literacy practices which I documented within the five domains Farr (1994) used for categorizing home literacy practices of *mexicano* families in Chicago: religious, commercial, state or legal, educational, and family or recreational. In Table 2.4, I outline the basic description of the five domains as extracted from Farr (1994) and on which I based the categorizing of literacy practices found in this study.

Table 2.4:

*Domains and Descriptions of Family Literacy Practices, Based on Farr (1994).*

Domain	Description
Commercial/financial	literacy practices on the job, in entrepreneurial business activities, while shopping, and when paying bills
Educational	literacy practices associated with educationally-related public and private institutions as well as personal, informal endeavors
Familial/recreational	literacy practices lying solely within the private (versus the public) realm
Legal/state	literacy practices associated with governmental and legal transactions
Religious	literacy practices, both public and private, associated with the teaching or practicing of religious faith

I found the bulk of the data from this study lie within the first three domains. After analyzing the data further, and especially by noting the views of the participants, I separated the familial domain from the recreational and arrived at subcategories of the first two domains that fit within these three domains and which can be appreciated in Table 2.5. These domains and sub-domains facilitated the analysis of the literacy practices, especially in noting similarities and differences for participants across age and sex. I found the legal/state domain superfluous, since the families did not share any literacy practices I considered as falling within this domain.

Table 2.5:  
*Domains and Sub-Domains of Family Literacy Practices Used in the Analysis of Literacy Practices Found in the Homes of Three Transnational Families.*

Domain	Sub-Domain
Commercial/financial	Home Business
Educational	School-assigned Family-motivated Classmate-motivated Administrative
Familial/Communicative	
Recreational	
Religious	

A major concern of this study was to situate literacy practices I documented within the transnational migrant circuit. In COSOLEM meetings, we discussed possible categories for coding transnationalism and found the task complex, to say the least. Fitzgerald (2002), Levitt (2001), and Portes (1999) discuss the many levels and sectors at/in which transnationalism has been and can be analyzed, but much of their concern is with the wider economic, political and sociocultural sectors at highly developed and institutionalized levels. This present study focused on literacy practices within the homes of relatively incipient transnationals whose practices do not yet involve other sectors or institutions. For the purposes of this study, I found that literacy practices could be

divided into four categories: those directly or indirectly related to the migrant or to the remittances.

For example, the literacy practice of writing down a thirteen-digit money order number is directly connected to remittances. The literacy practice of purchasing an encyclopedia is indirectly related to remittances. In this case, the family has other income and it is not clear if the family is using the actual money coming from the remittances to pay for the encyclopedia or if they have decided to invest in this text because they have extra money as a result of the remittances. A literacy practice, such as a child talking on the telephone to his migrant father in order to resolve a doubt, is directly related to the migrant – the migrant is involved in the literacy practice. A literacy practice of a mother helping her child with homework because she does not have to tend to her husband's needs (as indeed one mother reported) is an example of a literacy practice indirectly connected to the migrant.

Throughout the process of attempting to categorize the data, as Bogdan & Biklen (2003) suggest, I frequently reviewed my data, alone and also with other COSOLEM researchers. Input from colleagues helped me make decisions on the focus of my study, the methods I was using and the questions I was asking. I was able to triangulate the data, which I had gathered from several sources. My field notes described my observations and perceptions of the family visits, including what they said and what I actually saw them do, and descriptions of the documents they shared with me. The photographs of the documents allowed further analysis of the texts. The transcripts of the interviews with the teachers and family members allowed me to closer analyze the participants' viewpoints. Looking back at the literacy inventory, I was able to quickly identify literacy

events, which I had actually observed, rather than being told about or only observing the texts. These were the literacy events that provided the richest data for understanding the sociocultural construction of readers and writers in these families.

By triangulating data, I was able to get a more rounded, balanced picture of the context in which the literacy practices take place and to better understand the ideologies grounding these practices. It also helped sharpen my research questions. Simultaneously, I began interpreting these results by situating them into the broader questions of literacy and migration. Throughout this methodological process, I had contact with many people and had to pass through many gatekeepers negotiating entry into their professional and personal environments. In the following section, I review the forms of reciprocity offered at various stages.

## 2.6. Reciprocity

Gaining access to the school and to the families' homes was one of the principal challenges to this study. The mother of one family asked me if it would help their children. Having already done a few home visits, I was able to reassure her that although I was not going to be explicitly teaching the children reading or writing, each of the children I had been visiting seemed to take on a more enthusiastic approach to reading and writing both in the school and at home. This apparently convinced her. As part of the COSOLEM study, I also offered participants actions of goodwill in appreciation of their time and sincerity.

COSOLEM researchers offered a teachers' workshop at the primary school in February of 2004, and in which I took part. I gave the interested teachers copies of the

published papers in which they had been participants. I left with the participating teachers large color prints taken from the *Querida Abuelita* book (Meza Keane, 1997, illustrated by Enrique O. Sánchez). I also plan to offer a conference or workshop at the school, one for teachers and another for parents. Furthermore, as I already mentioned, the results of the Sociolinguistic Census were given to the director of the school in both hard copy and on diskette. This information was anonymous, being a summary of participating families.

I was able to give the families printouts of selected literacy inventory photographs, including family portraits. I also offered to help with academic advising and study sessions, particularly in English. To date, they have not taken me up on the offer, but I may yet be able to offer something more in the future.

The data presented in this study is the data as seen through my own particular filters. I believe the results of this study are a faithful rendering of the literacy practices I observed in the three transnational families, but I cannot believe they are the only interpretations possible. In the following chapter, I describe the participants in this study – the three families and the community in which they live. I also offer a description of myself, an active participant throughout the study.