

4. Results

4.1. Overview

In this chapter I present the results of the study of literacy practices of the three transnational families described in Chapter 3. I present the results by domain noting the salient features of each family, similarities and or differences between the families, and especially the practices' relation, if any, to migration. I do not mention nor analyze every literacy practice I heard about or observed, but rather, those, which I perceived as having the most relevance to the questions, I have posed in this study:

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

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the practices, which the families told me about, and those I observed are only those that they allowed me to see and know about. Thus, certain literacy practices that do not fit into what participants consider reading and writing may have been missed. Much of the writing done in the Tenahua Tlathui business, for example, they did not offer to show me. Rather, I asked to look at it, and they, a bit surprised, obliged me. As Farr (1991) mentioned, it took considerable time to

be able to see home literacy practices since they are so “inconspicuously interwoven” in daily life and “not foregrounded by participants themselves (p.12).” Guerra mentions transnational participants’ unwillingness to share personal writing with someone “who possessed significant differences in their eyes in terms of class and social status (p. 94).” Another possibility is that I did not ask questions that invited their elicitation. Again, Farr (1991) reminds us that families accommodate literacy materials so that they are “stored away, out of sight (p. 12).” Thus, it is likely that the literacy practices mentioned in this chapter are only a portion of those actually practiced by these participants.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that people’s lives do not naturally fall into segregated categories. Rather, our roles and activities as individuals, members of a family, and members of a community overlap and run together just as the literacy practices do. Farr (1994) observed, “many literacy activities serve multiple functions (p. 28).” Faulstich Orellana et al., (2003) also described the “overlap between functional domain categories ... [as] representing familial ties to complex social and institutional networks (p.20).” Furthermore, literacy practices are not static, but continue to change and take on different meanings. I hoped to diminish this overlap and these changes in meanings by categorizing literacy practices by domain rather than function. Categorizing is a useful, if fictional, analytical tool employed in qualitative science (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) to make scientific sense out of what participants consider common sense.

4.2 Results by Domain

The great majority of the literacy practices recorded for these transnational families fall within the educational domain, while familial-communicative, recreational and

commercial/financial cover the majority of the rest, with few observed in the religious domain. In the following sections, I present an analysis of each domain:

commercial/financial, educational, familial-communicative, recreational, and religious, and their corresponding sub-domains.

4.2.1. Literacy Practices in the Commercial/Financial Domain

4.2.1.1. Literacy practices in the home sub-domain of the commercial/financial domain

The one literacy practice, which the three families share, is a financial one, directly related to the collecting of remittances sent from the US. The wife receives a call from her husband who dictates “*un número largo* [a long number]” – thirteen digits on the one I had an opportunity to analyze. She only needs to present this number and her voter’s identification card, and to sign the receipt in order to collect the remittance. The transaction leaves her with cash and a receipt, as seen in *Figure 4.1*.

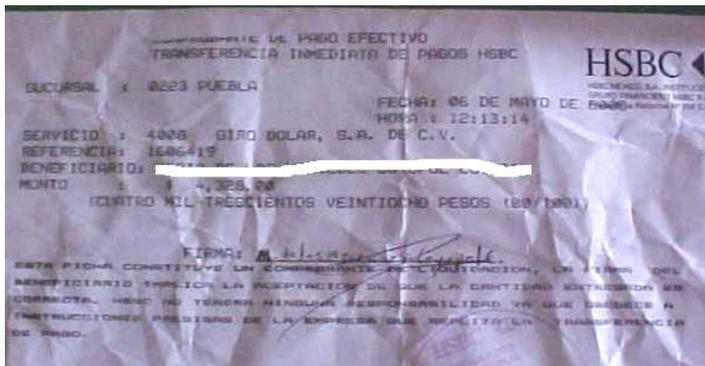


Figure 4.1. Remittance receipt

Literacy practices involved in shopping and paying bills are also included within this domain. Eight-year-old Giovani Salazar Oaxaca mentioned he reads the signs which say how much the food costs when he goes to market with his mother, but when I

followed up on this, giving examples of comparing prices or weight or quantity versus price, he said he does not do any calculations of any kind. Here, we see that while the signs are available to read, he has had no access to the different uses of them. It appears that he has not been invited to take part in making shopping decisions, and as a result, has not appropriated the possible literacy practices surrounding these texts.

Mariana, Giovanni's mother, said she typically remembers things like payments in her head. She said she tries to keep things practical in her life and she does not write them down. This is the first example of many in this chapter in which I draw attention to the participants' general dependence on memory for various tasks or in recalling specifics.

Families shared with me only one literacy practice involved in shopping or paying bills for the household. Licha Tlatehui showed me the contract she received when she purchased a set of books consisting of an encyclopedia, four craft books and a four-volume interactive encyclopedia/board game. Paying for the set in installments, she keeps the contract for this transaction, seen below in *Figure 4.2*, and the payment receipts, which they give her at the bank when she pays each fortnight, one which is seen in *Figure 4.3*. The last time I observed the contract, I noticed a handwritten tally of payments she had made toward the encyclopedia set, and the gradually decreasing amount owed. It was not the first time Licha had invested in reference books in order to aid the children in their studies. Four years ago she bought a one-volume encyclopedia, which she also paid in installments. The more recent acquisition she acquired just two months after Ernesto's migration, when the Alfonso Cano Elementary School allowed an editorial to hold a book fair at the school. Licha may have chosen this book set over a

less extensive set because of the remittances easing the family's economy, although she did not say this.

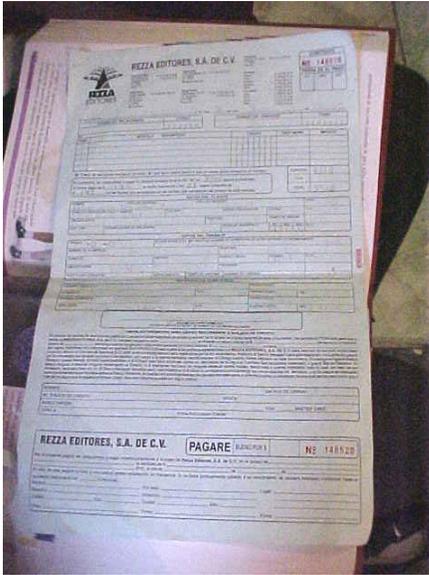


Figure 4.2. Contract for encyclopedia set.

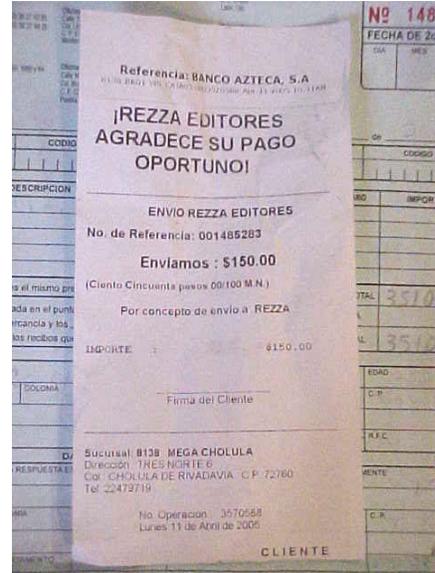


Figure 4.3. Payment receipt for encyclopedia set.

Paying in installments direct to the editorial is a common way of obtaining these resource books in this community. I have purchased resource books in this way for my children although at that time, the editorial sent a collector to receive the payments. In the course of the seven literacy inventories other families, including the Salazar Oaxaca family, showed me their encyclopedia sets purchased in this way as well. According to Mariana however, when she made her family's purchase three years ago, the sale was held in front of the school, while this year I observed that the school opened a room to the editorial for the sale to take place. Licha's was the only contract I observed, as she was still in the process of paying. Literacy practices involving the encyclopedias themselves, I discuss in the educational domain.

The last literacy practice that the three families shared in this domain was the display of wall calendars, already described in Chapter Two. While calendars are chosen

for their aesthetics, they also represent the families' commercial ties, since families only receive a calendar where they do business. Calendars also promote the business, since the business' name, logo, and address are made visible. All the calendars I observed at these homes were from local businesses.

Except for the dictating of the money order number, there seems to be little direct transnational influence on literacy practices in this domain. Although calendars are also a traditional business promotion/appreciation practice in the US, I did not see any American commercial/promotional literacy in the homes. The Nava Romero family did, however, have a calendar from a local cement company. That was the first clue I had that Monica had begun buying building material; thus, an indirectly related connection to remittances.

The findings presented above describe the commercial/financial literacy practices found in the three homes. I now present the literacy practices observed in the Tenahua Tlatehui family business.

4.2.1.1. Literacy practices in the business sub-domain of the commercial/financial domain



Figure 4.4. Belen and Licha tending the family business.

In Chapter 3, I described the brief history of the Tenahua Tlatehui family business, seen in *Figure 4.4*. Here I present the literacy practices involved in keeping the business running, that is, in the planning, purchasing, ordering, pricing and charging of goods.

In planning for a shopping trip, Licha explained that she generally writes a shopping list or has the children help write the list. According to Licha, they write down brand names, size, and quantity. Nevertheless, the day I actually observed a shopping list it did not contain such specifications, as can be seen in *Figure 4.5*. This occurred however, when Licha was sick and she had sent Jaime, 15 years old, to go on bike to buy a few things in her place. I cannot say if this is a typical list, but I am quite sure it was not specially produced for me.

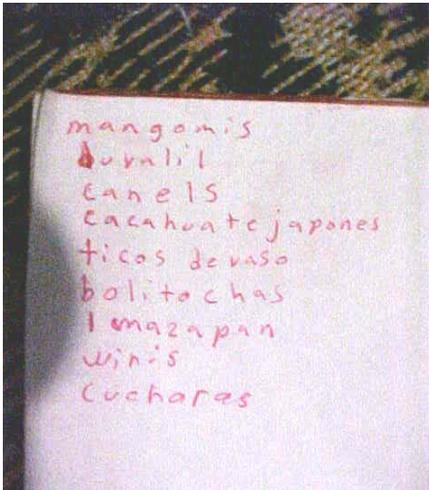


Figure 4.5 Store's shopping list

When purchasing for the store, Licha mentioned that when she buys wholesale, she reads the packaging to ensure the contents are those she wants and needs, but when she buys retail the packaging makes the contents obvious, that is, she does not need to read the labels. Other locally produced and commercial products are brought directly to the store by suppliers. The Kellogg's and the Coca Cola Company both supply the store with products. Also, a local milk company brings fresh milk and a baker brings fresh bread

daily. When I asked about formal contracts, she did not produce any and she gave the impression there were no written contracts. This is understandable, since the store is part of the informal economy.



Figure 4.6 Coca Cola orders.

With the Coca Cola Company, some products may be charged and others must be paid in cash, and they are two separate bills, as can be seen in *Figure 4.6*. The shorter order is what needs to be paid in cash; the longer order is what can be paid on credit.

There are times when Licha writes things down specifically for the benefit of anyone else who might be tending the store. For example, in *Figure 4.7* we can see a note she left by the Coca Cola order one day. She said if she were the only one tending the store, she would not need to write it down because she would remember it, but if someone else were there when the supplier came, she could not count on them remembering.

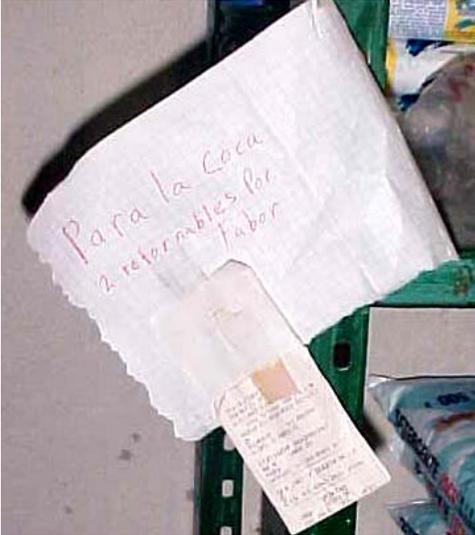


Figure 4.7. Reminders for a coke order.



Figure 4.8. Coca Cola price list.

Licha uses literacy to make tending the store as doubt-free as possible in other ways too. Whoever tends the store needs to charge accurately, taking the time to verify prices. For Coca Cola products, she keeps a list taped to the glass-pane countertop, as seen in *Figure 4.8*. Many prices she writes directly on the products with a marker. After shopping she reads the store receipt to compare if the prices have changed. By having the prices on each product, she feels more confident leaving the store in the hands of the children or her mother-in-law. One contradiction to the general practice of having written prices seemed to be with the fresh produce such as tomatoes, onions, and avocados. She shops for these weekly and their prices fluctuate; nevertheless, I did not find that she wrote a list of the prices. Rather, I heard the children ask her the price for a specific quantity each time and from memory she would calculate the sum.

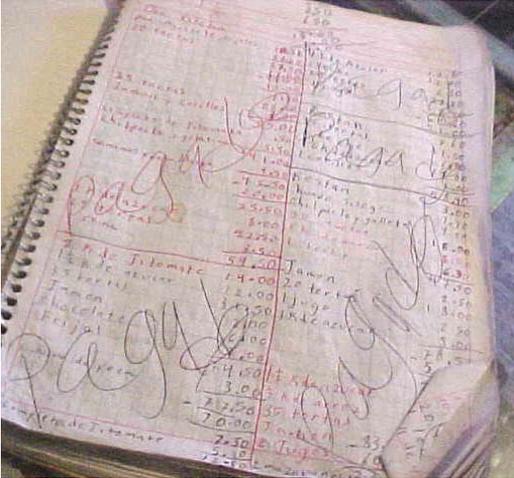


Figure 4.9. Accounts paid.

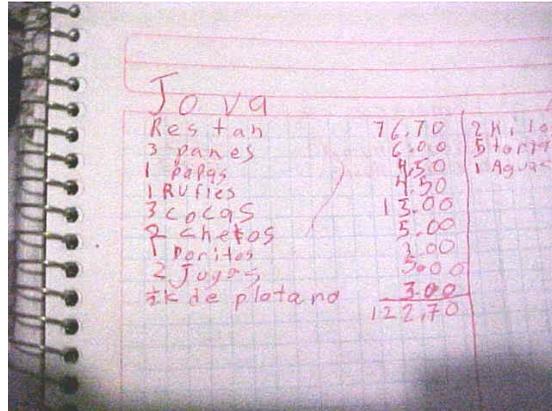


Figure 4.10 Account due.

In this community, many small stores hang a sign announcing that credit is not an option. To soften the news, they are often dubbed in humorous ways. However, the Tenahua Tlatchui's general store offers credit to their customers and many customers apparently enjoy the convenience. When a customer charges on his or her account, the storekeeper writes the product and the price under that person's name in a notebook specific for that purpose. *Figure 4.9* shows a page on which each account has been paid off. *Figure 4.10* shows a running account. I asked what "Restan" meant, which appears at the top of the list, and Belen showed me that was the balance carried over from the account on the previous page. Belen admitted sometimes being lazy about looking up a person's account to add new purchases. I heard Licha discuss most sales after Belen tended a customer, but especially when there was credit involved. Inevitably, Licha asked if she had written it down. The sales done for cash are not written in the booklet or registered in writing.

The Tenahua Tlatchui family also lends returnable bottles, which means the shoppers pay for the liquid, but borrow the full returnable bottles without exchanging them for empty ones. Supermarkets charge the customer for the bottle in this situation.

There is also an abundance of environmental print present in the Tenahua Tlathui business. The plastic sack of sugar identifies its origins as Veracruz. The Coke posters always offer something new. Each can, bag and bottle has something written on it. How much of this print they read, I cannot say, but Licha mentioned reading it to make sure she was purchasing the size she wanted and needed.

The store is also a place to exhibit locally produced texts. *Figures 4.12* and *4.13* show a community-produced poster inviting people to participate in an annual pilgrimage. Their neighbor in charge of the pilgrimage, asked Licha for permission to hang it in the store. It was placed center-stage so to speak, perhaps reflecting the importance of the text to both her and her neighbor.



Figure 4.12. Store entry.



Figure 4.13. Pilgrimage poster.

Licha thinks knowing how to write is very important and she offered an example from her own experience tending the store. Licha said mothers sometimes send their children with a list, which the child passes her to read. She recalled examples of what seemed to her like *trabalenguas* [tongue twisters]. Just remembering them and trying to

say them out loud made her laugh. The most recent ones were *juachinango*, *jatomates*, and *chalitas*, which she figured meant *huachinango* [jalapeño chili], *jítomates* [tomatoes], and *chilitos* [little chilis]. She said, “*Uno que sabe leer bien, pues, le entiende qué es lo que quiere, pero y si no, no va a saber ni que es lo que está pidiendo la señora* [The person who knows how to read well, well, understands what they want, but if you don’t, you’re not even going to know what it is the lady is asking for].” According to Licha, then, she has to read well in order to understand other people’s writing, misspellings and all.

On a typical business day, the family members have many texts to read and write. Literacy is embedded in the process of shopping, pricing the products, and recording customers’ charge accounts. Licha takes principal responsibility in the organization and running of the business, yet she also delegates responsibilities, overseeing that the others fulfill their responsibilities, often through conversation about texts. For the most part, it seems the three youngsters have appropriated the literacy practices needed for the smooth running of the store. With practice, Belen should be able to improve efficiency in these literacy practices.

The commercial literacy practices described above serve to keep the business running smoothly and efficiently, which in turn brings in money to the family. The store, as it takes on more business, also takes on more social significance in the community as a place to meet and to share and exchange information. One of Ernesto and Licha’s initial goals of migrating is to have the store grow as a business. It is reasonable to assume that the sooner they can increase profits enough to cover household expenses, the sooner Ernesto will be able to return to his family, home, and community.

4.2.2. Literacy Practices in the Educational Domain

This section covers the educational domain, the largest collection of literacy practices in this study. I coded these practices within the educational domain and into four sub-domains that I present in four sections. First, many of the literacy practices I was able to observe are directly related to school assignments, thus, a section on school-assigned literacy practices. Second, there were also the independently motivated educational literacy practices, usually supportive of schooling, thus, a section on family-motivated literacy practices. Third, a small but entertaining sub-domain is that of classmate-motivated literacy practices. The last section of this domain deals with participants' administrative literacy practices concerning the organizational and business side of education. After I present the literacy practices of these four sub-domains, I discuss their specific relationship with the transnational migrant circuit.

4.2.2.1. Literacy practices in the school-assigned sub-domain of the educational domain

School-assigned literacy practices are those associated with fulfilling scholastic requirements imposed by the school. This is the sub-domain in which I was able to collect most examples, probably because the reading and writing done in these kinds of literacy practices are the kinds that people think of first when they think of reading and writing. This is consistent with Vance's (2005) study of home literacy in the same community. Because my initial access to the families was through the school, perhaps that is how they continued to think of me, that is, in relation to school. I took advantage of this fact and requested a home visit in order to observe homework. The Tenahua Tlatehui and the Salazar Oaxaca families invited me for a homework session, an

experience that provided wonderful data with which to triangulate other data already collected.

Several of the literacy practices I observed in these sessions included student-produced texts, which have been described in classroom settings. Here, we have the opportunity to see how these texts are produced in the home environment. I describe in detail only the most representative practices.

At times throughout the data collection, I heard the terms *síntesis*, *cuadro sinóptico* and other times *resúmen* but I did not understand the difference. 15-year-old Figo Salazar Oaxaca explained that in a *síntesis* [synthesis], they use their own words writing what they understood. The student may be asked to synthesize texts from different sources – school textbooks, encyclopedias, or stories. Besides the encyclopedias which Licha and Mariana had bought, Licha has bought several other books precisely in order to aid in this type of assignment, as seen in *Figures 4.14 and 4.15*. Licha said the kids come home expecting her to be able to think up stories, and perhaps she knows one, but “if they need more than one, it’s better to have the collection.”

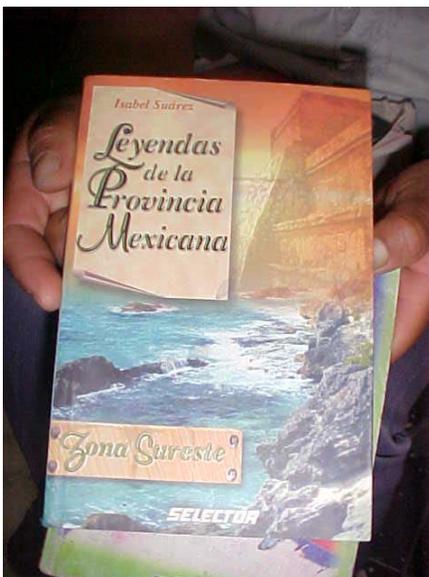


Figure 4.14. Collection of legends.

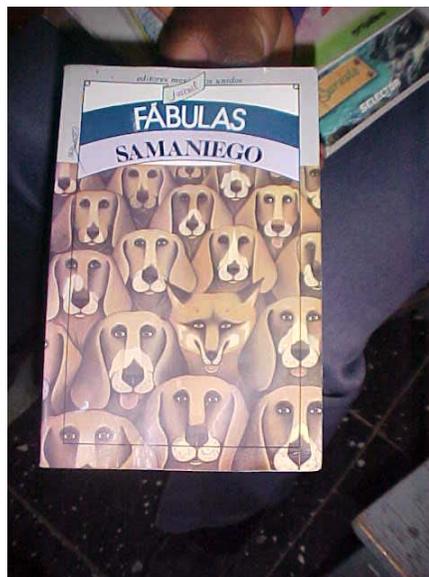


Figure 4.15. Collection of fables.

In a *resúmen*, Figo explained, they extract the principal ideas, writing the theme, the subtitles and the paragraphs' main ideas, and that a *cuadro sinóptico* is the same as a *resúmen* [summary]. The curriculum set up by the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) (1993) first mentions *resúmen* in the program for third grade primary, and each year thereafter. Paraphrasing and synthesis is not mentioned until sixth grade primary (SEP, 1993).

I observed Figo as he completed a *resúmen* for his chemistry class. As Figo read the theme through, he highlighted sentences and phrases and used his dictionary to look up a few words. He then copied what he had highlighted in the reading into his notebook, as seen in *Figure 4.16*. Of the two-page reading, he wrote a one-page handwritten *resumen* [summary]. 13-year-old Jesus Tenahua Tlatehui followed the same procedure and wrote a 2-page notebook summary from a 2-page reading in his chemistry book. A fragment of his summary can be seen in *Figure 4.17*. The figures he drew were very similar to figures shown in the textbook. The writing is not creative but intends to reinforce what they have learned at school.

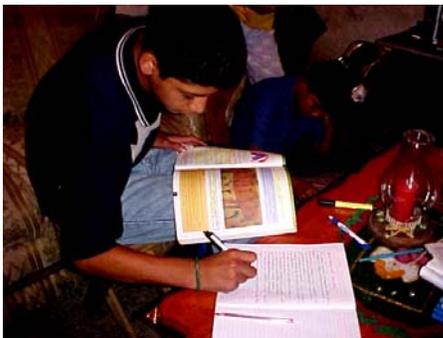


Figure 4.16. Figo writing a summary.

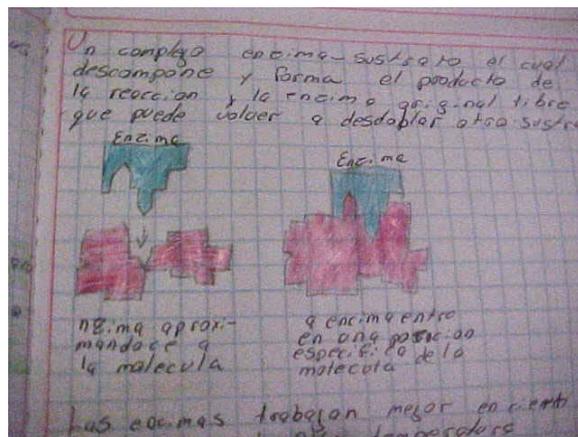


Figure 4.17. Jesus' chemistry summary, detail

The process I observed with Belen Tenahua Tlatehui, a fifth-grader, was quite a bit different. Her assignment was to summarize a 7-page history lesson from her school history book, *Civilizaciones del viejo mundo* [Civilizations of the Old World]. It began with Belen reading the theme and underlining what she considered the most important ideas. Her mother reviewed the text Belen had chosen and made modifications. Belen then sat at a table to copy the *resumen* into her notebook. With her nose about five inches from the book, she used black and red ink pens for writing and liquid paper for corrections. The red pen was used for writing capital letters and punctuation. Belen had an idea of how she wanted her summary to look when she was finished, and she had initiative to accomplish it. Teague (2004) , Ballesteros (2003), and Jiménez et al. (2003) mention that students in this community have incorporated in their literate *habitus* the use of black and red ink and a concern with the physical appearance for writing schoolwork.

Before Belen finished, I had other obligations to tend to, and I asked if I might return later. They said that would be fine. Two hours later, I found Belen in the bedroom with Licha, who was recovering from pneumonia. Belen was sitting on the end of the bed with her notebook on the dresser top, and Licha was holding the history book and dictating the *resumen*. They were on the section entitled *Las Técnicas* [The Techniques]. They worked together efficiently, limiting conversation and using few words. For example, I noted the following segments of discourse.

Licha: *Un invento notable fue la rueda.* [A notable invention was the wheel].

Belen: *¿invento . . .* [invention . . .]?

Licha: *Notable fue la rueda* [was the wheel]. (...) *Produjo cambios* [Produced changes].

Belen: *Produjo cambios. ¡Ya* [Produced changes. Ready!] (. . .)

Licha: *Los carros jalados por animales de tiro* [The carts pulled by draft animals].

Belen: Los *carros jalados por animales de tiro*, ¡ya [The carts pulled by draft animals. Ready]!

Licha offered hints or reminders as to the placement of accents – “*agregándole estaño [pausa] acento en la ga (...)* Los pueblos que vivían cerca del mar [pausa] *acento en la segunda i (...)* *destrucción, con doble c y acento en la o* [adding tin (pause) accent on the *ga* (...)]The towns that lived close to the sea (pause) accent on the second *i* (...) *destrucción, with double c and accent on the o*];” the spelling of certain words – “*mejorando la dureza [pausa] dureza con zeta (...)* *C de gallina (...)* *s de sopa(...)* *b de burro* [improving the hardness (pause) *hardness* with *z* (...) *c* from *hen* (...) *s* from *soup* (...) *b* from *donkey*];” and the writing of accepted abbreviations – “*en el año mil antes de Cristo. . .¿Ya te acuerdas como escribir antes de Cristo* [in the year one thousand before Christ. Now do you remember how to write *Before Christ*?” Licha also offered other remarks on punctuation, for example, “*Punto y aparte (...)* *Punto y seguido (...)* *Punto final* [Period and end of paragraph (...) Period and next sentence (...) Period and end of theme].” These oral reminders are much like the findings in Teague (2004). Teague’s observations, however, were made in a school environment. Here, we find Licha, Belen’s mother, guiding her daughter using virtually the same techniques in giving dictations as those used by teachers in the Teague (2004) study.

Likewise, Belen occasionally asked questions about similar points. “*¿Lujosos con j (...)* *Con doble r hierro (...)* *Hubo con v de vaca* [*Luxurious* with *j* (...) *With double r, iron* (...) *There was with v from cow*?”

Furthermore, throughout the process, Belen asked several times, “*¿Ya acabamos? Que cuando equivoco dos veces seguidos es que ya tengo sueño* [Have we finished yet? When I make a mistake twice in a row it’s because I’m sleepy]” Belen was getting tired

and this was affecting the appearance of the finished work. In all, Belen's summary of pages 31 to 37 of her history book took 7 ½ pages of her 6" X 8.5" notebook.

7 ½ pages of writing is a lot for a student like Belen, who receives therapy in order to develop her memory and attention span. She was tired by the end of the homework session, but she had finished. Her mother helped her through it, eliminating the need for Belen to focus her eyes on one paper and then the other. In her constant tone and rhythm, Licha read the summary for Belen - Belen relying on her memory and the tips Licha gave her for spellings and punctuation. Perhaps jumping the visual step made it easier for Belen to write faster. Belen seemed much more motivated working with Licha than by herself copying the summary. *Figure 4.18* shows the text from which Belen created the summary, a fragment, which is shown in *Figure 4.19*.

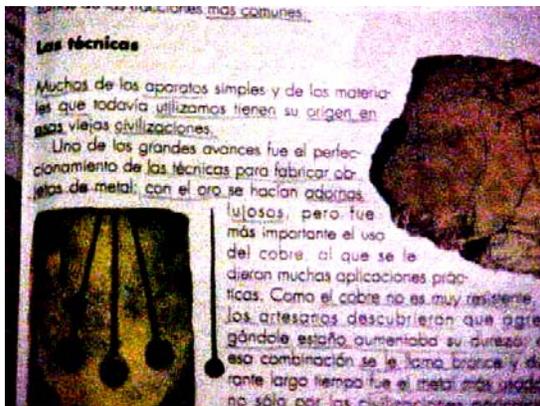


Figure 4.18. History lesson in the 5th grade SEP book; fragment.

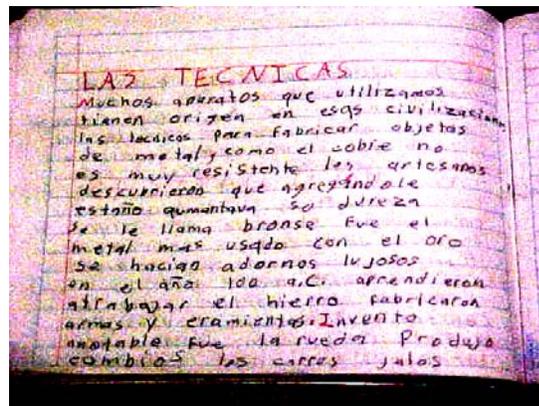


Figure 4.19. Belen's summary, fragment.

The process is one first of semantics and then of syntax. Belen and Licha underlined key words, leaving out those that add meaning. For example, the first complete sentence of the text book reads “*Muchos de los aparatos simples y de los materiales que todavía utilizamos tienen su origen en esas viejas civilizaciones* [Many of the simple instruments and materials which we still utilize have their origin in those old

civilizations].” The summarized version reads “*Muchos aparatos que utilizamos tienen origen en esas civilizaciones* [Many instruments that we utilize have origin in those civilizations].” Licha explained that sometimes Belen takes out words and then they make no sense when she reads them out, so she likes to check over Belen’s work. Sometimes, she told me, you have to add a few words in order to have the summary make sense. It seems Belen is developing the skills, which Figo, Jesus, and Licha have already appropriated. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to analyze the boys’ summaries to see whether there was actually synthesis of ideas as Licha accomplished or whether they copied the main and supporting ideas of paragraphs in complete sentences as they appeared in the text.

Lists are another common assignment. I observed Roberta, by then, a fifth-grader, as she produced two lists of words that could be used in compound words. She went to the bookcase behind her and took out a second-grade Spanish SEP book, but she did not find any helpful words. She took out a first-grade book and did not find any either. She leafed through her dictionary. She expressed some impatience with this exercise and her three brothers occasionally offered ideas for her list. Writing in a 6” x 8.5” notebook, and pacing with her notebook in hand, when she thought of, found, or was offered a compound word, she wrote down only the word for the first half of the compound word. Once she reached the bottom of the page, she sat to write a list of the second half of the words.

Licha mentioned writing a list of Nahuatl-based words for the children’s homework, and as I mention in Chapter 3, this is a typical assignment, assigned at least once a year throughout the primary school. Licha said they would call on an aunt to help out on these

assignments, but since this relative died, they have to *romper el coco* [crack their heads] to think of enough words for the list. Another time, Belen had to write a list of words which ended in *-oj* and the only one Licha could think of was *reloj* [clock]. In order to solve this *rompecabeza* [puzzle, although literally, head cracker or head breaker], Licha and Belen went to an Internet café. Besides paying for her time on the machine, about \$15 pesos (approximately \$1.50 USD) for an hour, Licha paid the attendant another \$10 – \$15 pesos to search for the words since she did not know how to use the computer. Licha said there were about ten words in total for the list, and she did not understand most of them; however, her daughter was able to take the completed assignment to school. They had also had their first direct interaction with the Internet.

The two mothers also report that in secondary school the children sometimes have to do *investigación* [research] and that the boys either use the encyclopedias at home or go to the cyber-café to access information over the internet. I did not see them work on these assignments, but Licha related that when the boys consult the encyclopedias at home to write a summary and do not understand the ideas in the text, they then consult her. Licha described how she invites them to imagine what the text means. First, they read it out loud. According to her, she may not fully understand the text either, but she can certainly guess at what it might mean. She offers a rendition of what the text means to her or what it could mean, and then she coaxes them to do the same. She then motivates them to write a mix of the two ideas. Although Licha has not studied secondary school, she has a lot of common sense and experience with the world, which she uses as knowledge. The youngsters know what they have been studying at school,

and perhaps they make connections there, too. In this way, Licha gives herself and the children the time and space required to co-construct meaning from a text.

As I mention earlier, when the children cannot find the information in the books they have, they go to the Internet café to access information on the web. Sometimes going to the Internet shop is not always a second or a last resort, but rather, it is a different, and perhaps more fun way, to complete an assignment. Other times it is in order to find the most recent information. The cyber café has the added benefit of being able to copy, paste, and print the text. In both families, it is the boys who initiate going to the cyber-café, and both mothers appear to accept this.

According to Licha, however, Ernesto would rather have his sons at home doing their homework than having them going elsewhere and paying money to access the resources they need to do their homework.

Su papá dice pus' si de eso que vas a pagar allá pues paga el servicio de Internet o de lo que se ocupe, dice investiga cómo es o cómo se paga eso y ps' mejor allá que lo ocupen ellos, le digo ps' estaría bien pero me dice perate' no mas' me compongo y ya te mando pa' que les compres la computadora y ya puedan hacer su tarea allá [Their father says, well, if they are going to be paying for the Internet service or whatever they are using, he says to investigate how it is or how it is paid and well, better there (at home) that they have it, he says, it would be fine but he says wait a bit while I get on my feet and I'll send you (money) so that you can buy the computer and they can do their homework there (at home)].

The older boys in both families like the idea of getting a computer for home (Belen would rather have a big screen T.V.). Based on the homework needs described above, they would probably also want a printer and an Internet connection. In this community, home access to an Internet connection can be costly. Luke (2003) contends that certain literacy forms are class-based, and I would classify digital literacy as an example although the Mexican public school system has tried to mitigate the digital divide by

incorporating computer classes in the curriculum at the secondary level and allowing controlled access to the hardware and software. Certainly, home access to a computer would improve the youngsters' appropriation of digital literacies.

In the Nava Romero family, eight-year-old Araceli is the eldest child. My home visits showed me no reference texts to aid in school assignments. Her mother, Monica described one occasion when Araceli received a low grade on a homework assignment in second grade. Monica was perplexed about why she should have gotten such a low grade; she thought the assignment was well done. Araceli then showed her how the words were supposed to be written. Monica said it is very disheartening that her daughter should get a low grade because she was not able to spell correctly. A dictionary might have solved Araceli's spelling doubt, but she had asked her mother and Monica thought she knew the answer.

Araceli is now in third grade, and a dictionary was on the school supply list for this school year. I wonder whether her school experiences offer enough opportunities for appropriation of literacy practices incorporating the use of a dictionary to occur (Rockwell, 1992; Farr, 1994; and Kalman, 2003), or perhaps, whether her school experiences *in combination with* her mother's limited literacy will be sufficient motivation.

In this section, I have presented several examples of school-assigned, participant-produced texts. The supportive atmosphere in these households is conducive to less experienced readers and writers accessing knowledge of more experienced readers and writers allowing for texts and meanings to be socially constructed.

4.2.2.2. Literacy practices in the family-motivated sub-domain of the educational domain.

Some home literacy practices observed within the educational domain are more informal than school-assigned literacy practices; they may be spontaneous, and either self-directed or directed by another member within the family household or in the community. Often, their purpose is to accomplish school-directed activities more effectively. In this section, I present a sampling of the educational, family-motivated literacy practices involving both public and private resources used to support educational literacy practices.

In the Nava Romero home, it is not within Monica's practice to throw out schoolbooks. She saved one of Araceli's books from kindergarten, seen in *Figure 4.20*, because there were still unused pages. She said she has the younger children complete the exercises. Another book, shown in *Figure 4.21*, Monica salvaged when she saw her sister ready to throw some books out, "Se los pedí regalada [I asked if she would give them to me]."

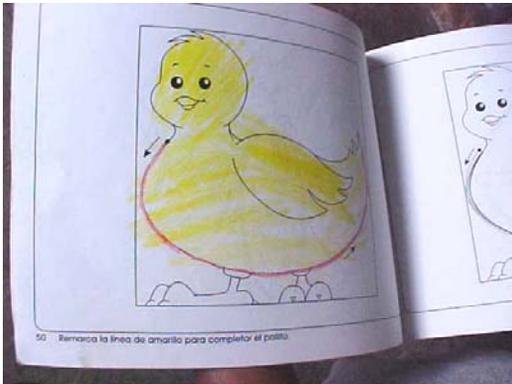


Figure 4.20. C for gallina [hen]?

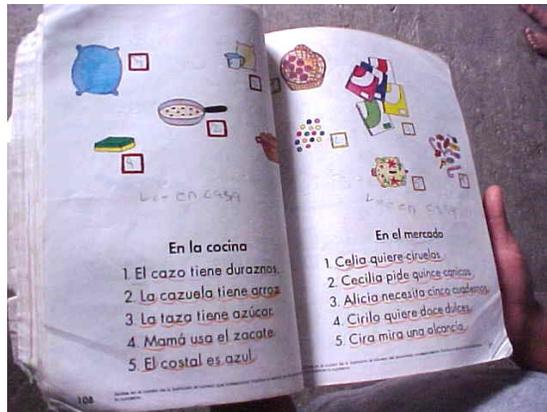


Figure 4.21. Multi-task exercise.

Figure 4.20 shows the same drawing on facing pages. Magdalena says the picture on the left is for the child to draw with one solid line, while on the facing page, the child

is to draw the line back and forth several times – “*trazo simple y trazo repetido.*” In *Figure 4.21*, we can see the multiple tasks done for each page – separating syllables and matching sentences with images.

The Salazar Oaxaca children mentioned another school-associated literacy practice. They had taken turns staying with their grandmother during the last days of summer vacation. They told me their grandmother invented mathematics exercises for them. She would write them down, and they would have to solve them so they would get back in shape a bit before going back to school.

During the school year, the two youngest were also getting free tutoring; a social service sponsored by the local private university and offered just around the corner from their home. Children from any school can go there to get tutoring. It has been a place for Roberta and Giovanni to meet new friends and to get together with cousins and other Alfonso Cano schoolmates. With Cesar in the US and Mariana working in the mornings and doing housework in the afternoons, the option of having the youngest children constructively and socially occupied outside and yet nearby the home suited Mariana perfectly. Students from the local private university in this community provide the tutoring service. Although the tutoring does not provide any new materials, they have more opportunities to interact with people other than their teachers, and family. Perhaps these interactions will bring new understanding to literacy practices.

Another literacy practice, which the four Salazar Oaxaca children mentioned, was going to the public library once or twice a month. They go more for fun than for studying though the younger kids like to read storybooks and the older ones like to look at the books about animals and other themes.

In the Tenahua Tlatcheui family both boys have taken afternoon or weekend English and computer classes in the past. Jaime seems to have luck in winning school raffles in which the prize having reduced or free registration or tuition to weekend English, computer, or tutoring classes at private businesses or schools. Licha told me he had won twice. Jesus continues to take computer classes twice a week through the DIF community family service.

Jaime and Jesus have also begun to look to their father as a resource for questions they come up with in English class. Jaime told me his teacher does not always explain well and she does not always answer the questions he has, or sometimes she just tells him to look it up in a dictionary. “But,” he told me, “it is not always as simple as all that [my translation].” There are expressions that are not explained in the dictionary, so he asks his father about these things. They are not necessarily in time to use for a homework assignment, but, with his interest piqued, he likes to find the answers to his questions. Jaime said his father can usually tell him what something means and more than that, his pronunciation is different from what Jaime or his teacher uses, so he can learn a different pronunciation. Jaime seems quite pleased with this situation.

Licha mentioned that before Ernesto migrated, she saw him studying the book, *Aprende Inglés Sin Maestro* [Learn English without a Teacher], by Isabel Baker, which she had bought a few years before. I asked Ernesto over the phone about English classes. He knew about them and also made the impression he had attended them, but because of his work, he found it impossible to arrive on time for class. The policy dictated that after three late entries, the student was no longer eligible to participate in the course. Ernesto also mentioned that he lives and works in circles, which do not require English. Both

availability and access to English seems limited for Ernesto under the circumstances, and as a result, one could question the extent of his appropriation of the English language. Nevertheless, Jaime is confident of his father's English proficiency and implies it may even be better than his teacher's.

FIGO and OSWALDO were much quieter about their English development, but GIOVANI and ROBERTA were enthusiastic as I mention in the family description in Chapter 3. They often greeted and said good-bye to me in English. Since they have not yet begun formal classes in English, they find few opportunities to interact with others in meaningful situations in order to apply what they might learn from their father.

When the Tenahua Tlatchui boys had to prepare for make-up exams because they had failed exams the first time round, they had the freedom to choose how to prepare for them. Jaime opted to study on his own while Jesus decided to attend tutoring sessions at the DIF. Both of them were successful in their endeavors, passing their exams and passing to the next grade. Before discussing in greater depth the purposes these practices serve in the family and the transnational migrant circuit, I present two more sub-domains. First, I discuss a literacy practice, which is traditional in this and surrounding communities, motivated by the children themselves.

4.2.2.3. Literacy practices in the classmate-motivated sub-domain of the educational domain.

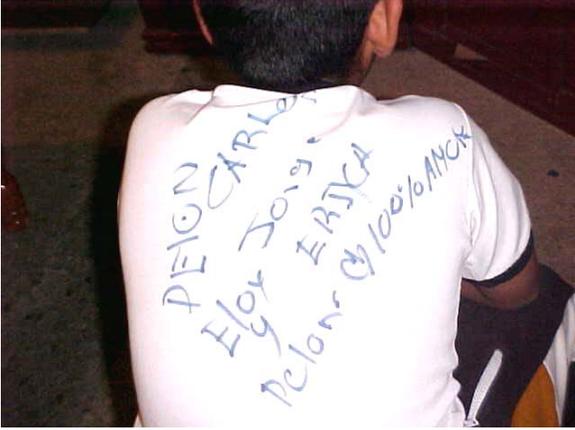


Figure 4.22. School shirt signed by classmates

With the Salazar Oaxaca family, I observed a literacy practice, which is typical in the local educational environment, although it has more to do with identity than with schooling. Oswaldo was in the sixth grade at Alfonso Cano Elementary School. Near the end of the school year, with only a week left of school, I found him wearing a school uniform shirt signed by his classmates, as seen in *Figure 4.22*. After graduating from Alfonso Cano Elementary School, he would not need his uniform any longer. As a mother of two in the neighboring community, I have seen that it is a custom in local schools for classmates to embellish their classmates' school shirts with their names, signatures and/or a message. The uniform gives the youth an identity and a place within a larger social group. The writing distinguishes the wearer as a member of the oldest, most experienced group of students within that school. At the end of previous grades, it was possible to wear the shirt again if it still fit the following year, or to hand it down to a sibling, but, in the final year, many students reserve at least one shirt for the ceremonial signing. This practice serves no purpose within the family or the transnational migrant circuit; rather, it is done to celebrate reaching a significant point in a young person's life.

The last type of literacy practice documented in this domain lies within the administration of education. In order for schools to run efficiently school and families need to work cooperatively and many times, literacy practices are embedded in these activities.

4.2.2.4. Literacy practices in the administrative sub-domain of the educational domain.

During my visits with the Tenahua Tlathui family, Licha related with great eloquence her family's history. I briefly mention three events, which included literacy practices within the educational domain dealing with administration. I also describe one literacy practice from the Nava Romero family, and two from the Salazar Oaxaca family.

The first literacy event exemplifies the power of the written word and concerns a group-composed and group-signed letter in which Licha and other parents at Alfonso Cano Elementary School complained about the assignation of a certain teacher to their children's home room the following year. I do not know the process by which it was written, but the petition was successful because their children were assigned a different teacher. From my knowledge of the community, it is typically quite difficult to organize such an activity. Precisely for this reason, I include it here. Parents choose their children's schools and this literacy event, I believe, exemplifies the level of cooperation and interest parents take in the administration of the school.

The second literacy practice is that of Licha's position as treasurer in the parent-school association for a school year. Fulfilling this role involved numerous writing tasks including writing reports, but this happened before the time of the study.

The third literacy event occurred as a result of Belen being ill. Licha went to Belen's school, taking the medical prescriptions with her. By showing them to Belen's

teacher, Belen's absences were justified, and thus not counted as absences. If parents are concerned about their children's absences, taking a medical prescription justifies the absences and they are not recorded on the student's school record.

In none of these situations was reading or writing the main focus for Licha, but rather, her children's school and schooling. Nevertheless, they exemplify the power reading and writing can wield. Furthermore, the Tenahua Tlatehui children are witness to their mother's interest, sense of responsibility and power. In the first example, Jesus' sixth grade homeroom teacher was changed and, according to his mother, he had a successful sixth grade year. Much of a child's school experience relates to the homeroom teacher. In the second example, being treasurer was a yearlong activity and one, which affected the household because, according to Licha, they would arrive home and oftentimes she would barely have gotten anything prepared for dinner. She hinted that it might have been a source of conflict with Ernesto. The third practice, of justifying absences with medical prescriptions, might have made less impact on the children; nevertheless, Belen was able to see how important it was for Licha. In the three examples, the children would have been able to observe their mother being a responsible, participating member of the school community, a role which often involves reading and writing.

Another activity in which parents have the responsibility to participate is that of parent-teacher meetings. Attending group school meetings is a source of stress for Monica. She told me that at these meetings, the teacher sometimes says,

anote esto y esto y esto- y se queda ahí uno –¿cómo lo voy a escribir si no lo sé escribir?... o por decir en el kinder, dejan tareas, yyy luego dice, la maestra dice –voy a repetir una sola vez, por favor apunten, - y apunta uno y dice y ¿cómo lo voy a escribir o con qué letra empieza? (...) y ahí son los

errores y se da uno cuenta de queee, ahorita dice uno –si yo hubiera seguido estudiando, supiera otras cosas [write down this and this and this- and a person sits there – how am I going to write if I don't know how to write it... or for example at the kindergarten, they leave homework assignments, and then the teacher says, – I'm going to repeat this only once, please write it down – and you write, and you ask yourself, how am I going to write it, or which letter does it begin with? (...) and those are the mistakes and you notice thaaat, you tell yourself – if I had continued studying I would know other things].

Monica feared not being able to fulfill some responsibility as a result of her limited literacy. In this excerpt she expressed dissatisfaction with the speed of her writing and her limited knowledge of orthography. She did not elaborate on how she had handled the situation. She did not say if Fidel used to attend those meetings, or if she had always attended them by herself.

In the Salazar Oaxaca family, eight-year-old Giovanni's opinion is that reading is very important to learn since, as an adult you have to read important papers. I asked him what important papers his mother has to read and he easily responded *la lista de útiles* [the school supplies list]. A typical literacy practice for the community, the school provides the family with a list of school supplies that the family must provide at the beginning of the school year. Some of the supplies are turned in to the teacher and the teacher regulates their usage. Others are for the students to keep and use as required. Indications must be followed closely. For example, it is typical for each notebook to be covered with a particular kind of paper with the name and course subject on a sticker and then covered with plastic as well. This is done for administrative and social reasons. The families spend considerable time and money on completing these lists, which may also include specifications on uniforms and dress code. The families must complete these lists in order to attend school, that is, to participate in this particular social group. In the

following section I turn to a discussion of how the literacy practices within the educational domain serve the family and the transnational migrant circuit.

4.2.2.5. Educational literacy practices, family, and transnationalism

The literacy practices in the educational domain help the families meet their goals of learning and doing well in school. All three families mentioned school success as part of the goals of migrating. In the following excerpt Licha explained how having the children learn to read and write was part of the “inheritance” she and Ernesto could give the children.

Les digo a mis hijos, siii (...) en esta vida tu papá y yo no les dejamos casas, terrenos, todos esas comodidades, pues, aunque sea, les vamos a dejar su estudio para que salgan rápido, le digo, porqueee uno, el que está bien preparado tiene mejor futuro para el mañana, y ora' con tantos problemas que vemos, queee el que no está preparado, no encuentra trabajo (...), porque no tiene papeles ni estudiooo, lo que era, y le cierran las puertas [I tell my kids, if (...) in this, life your pa and I don't leave you houses, land, all those conveniences, well, we are at least going to leave you your studies so that you can get ahead fast, I say, because a person, the one who is well prepared has a better future, and now, with all the problems we see, the one who isn't prepared, doesn't find work (...), because he doesn't have papers nor studies, and the doors close on him].

Licha makes a connection between schooling and work opportunities. When she mentions, “all the problems we see,” she may be making reference to unemployment and poor wages, suggesting these as reasons to better prepare her children. Licha feels confident that formal education will improve her children's futures. This is very similar to Mariana's thoughts on the value of education.

As Mariana said, “*Entre mejor estén preparados, mejor* [The better prepared, the better].” The youngsters in secondary school have computer classes in school and English, but, indeed, these youngsters do seem to want more. For these families, at this time, owning a computer has entered into the realm of the possible, or at least, of the

imaginable – perhaps a new goal. They are also interested in learning more English. Digital literacy and English are two assets for a person looking for work in the modern economy. The transnational aspect of their families allows venues for acquiring this knowledge. In this society, even with the addition of these classes in school, English and computers remain class-based literacy forms (Luke, 2003). Digital literacy is indirectly connected to transnationalism through the remittances. It gives them freedom to say, “I want to go to the cyber-café” and then to be able to do it. If their family did not have enough food in order to eat that evening or to buy the notebooks they need, they would not have that luxury. English is directly related to transnationalism through the migrant who has privileged knowledge of the subject (Malkin 1998). They have a personal, privileged connection with English, if they choose to take advantage of it. To use Licha’s metaphor optimistically, a solid education and these marketable skills *open doors* in the workplace. Realistically, it is not always so.

4.2.3. Literacy Practices in the Familial-Communicative Domain

Literacy practices within the familial-communicative domain are those associated with personal communication rather than business, education, legalities, or religion. The families present differences in their practices within this domain, and there are exceptions and inconsistencies. Because of these differences, I present the literacy practices concerning communication by family, with a final summary and conclusion responding to the questions of this study concerning the purpose these practices serve in the families and the transnational migrant circuit.

The mail service in Mexico is expensive and often inefficient. Perhaps that is why the first major statement Licha made about reading, writing and migration, is that Ernesto had instructed the family specifically “*que no manden cartas ni nada. Que no gasten en cartas* [not to send letters or anything. Not to spend money on letters].” In general, they have continued that policy. The kind of personal communication I found was oral, that is, by telephone. Even in relation to friends and other family, I observed no literacy used explicitly for personal communication in the Tenahua Tlatchui family.

An exception arose when I offered to send a package from within the US. Although I had given short notice and Licha’s mother was hospitalized that day, they got together a small package for me to take. Licha and Ernesto had spoken on the phone, and he requested they send a video he had already seen, but that his brother had not seen yet. It was a video of Belen as the *madrina*, [literally, *godmother*], for a festival celebrating the Virgin. Since I would be traveling by airplane and going through checkpoints in the airports, I had asked Licha not to wrap the contents in a package. She showed me the videocassette, a one-page handwritten note for Ernesto, and a few religious prayer cards. She also gave me a paper with the name, address, and telephone number of Santiago, her brother-in-law, and Ernesto’s complete name. At the post office in the US, I checked on the address, because the city was not indicated, but, with the information of the zip code and the help of a postal service worker, I was able to post the package, and through a telephone call to Santiago, I was able to verify he had received it.

Jesus mentioned another exception of familial communication. I asked him if he had noticed any changes in his father since his migration and he told me his father had longer hair now than when he lived here in Mexico. Jesus had seen his father in a video.

Although they did not explain the situation, it seems likely that although the Tenahua Tlatehui family has the general rule not to send letters or packages, others in the Tenahua family do communicate through videos, and perhaps letters. The same is also true for the Nava Romero family.

Monica informed me they do not write or send letters or packages to Fidel because they do not have a mailing address for him. In the in-depth interview, however, Araceli mentioned writing letters to her father and sending them together with candy and photographs, particularly of the dance she participated in at school this past June. She said they send the packages through a *casa de envío*. Monica had mentioned that her family, that is her parents and siblings, sometimes send packages to her brother; so perhaps Monica and the children had included a package within a package in case Fidel was able to visit his brother-in-law or his brother-in-law was able to send it on to him.

While other studies have stressed the importance of the flow of information through letters (Levitt, 2001; Guerra, 1998; Malkin, 1998), these two families seem not to depend on the exchange of information through writing. Ernesto pronounced his no-package policy early after migrating, perhaps before he had found a place to live more permanently. Fidel had reportedly moved away from the New York area at some point. Perhaps these migrants cannot count on stable housing contracts.

Meanwhile, the Salazar Oaxaca family appears to prepare and send packages to Cesar with great enthusiasm even though Mariana mentions that they do not write as often as they used to. In other words, it seems that the longer Cesar is there, the less frequently they write. I only saw a few postcards with scenes from Las Vegas that Cesar had sent the family. They had short notes written on the back as had the postcard seen in

Figures 4.23 and 4.24 had, but they had no address or postage. They told me Cesar had sent them inside a package or an envelope. The few that I saw, they kept in their box of photographs.

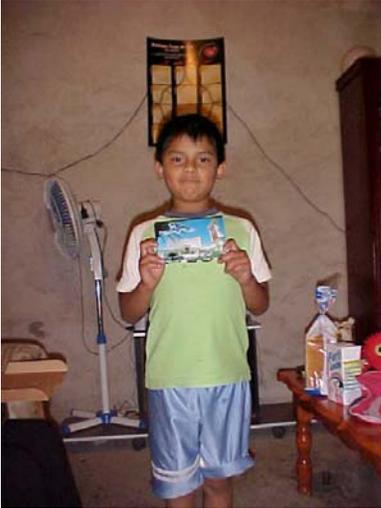


Figure 4.23. Giovanni with a postcard of a casino which his father sent from Las Vegas.

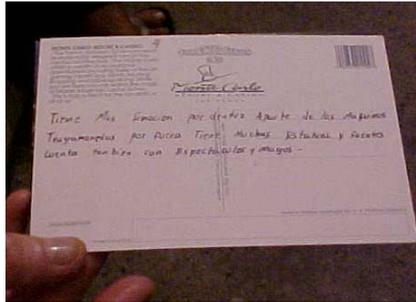


Figure 4.24 Postcard from Cesar. “Tiene mas emoción por dentro. Aparte de las máquinas tragamonedas, por fuera tiene (...) [It’s more exciting inside. Besides the slot machines, outside it has (...)].”

The family also sends Cesar letters and packages with pictures. Roberta writes her father letters and closes each one up making her own envelopes (see Figure 4.25) and when her mother sends a package, she puts them all in at once. Roberta told me she uses different types of paper – sometimes unlined, lined, or square-ruled, graph paper. She uses “pluma ... plumones, a veces, dibujo- hago dibujitos [pen ... markers, sometimes, I draw – I make little drawings].” She writes them in her room on her bed or “me vengo aquí en mi mesita y me siento en el banquito [I come here to my little table and I sit on my little stool].”



Figure 4.25. Letter for Roberta’s father, stuffed in homemade envelope; it will be put in a larger package and sent.

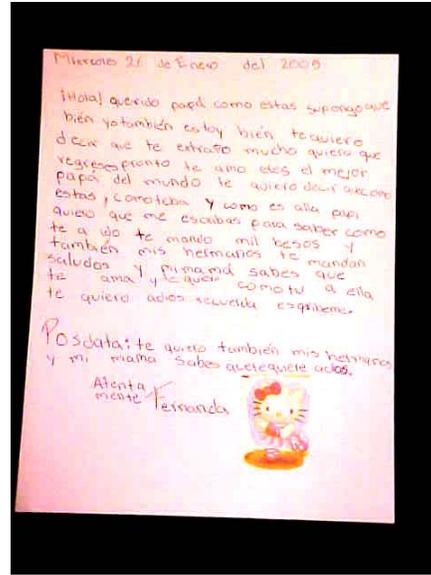


Figure 4.26. ¡Hola! Querido papá cómo estás [Hi! Dear pa how are you]

In discussing what she writes about when she writes her father, she told me she asks him “cómo le ha ido, que si está bien... que lo quiero mucho y que lo extraño [how it’s been going for him, if he’s been well ... that I love him a lot and that I miss him].” In effect, in the letter she wrote in the *Querida Abuelita* exercise, seen in Figure 4.26, she wrote (being faithful to accents, capitalization, punctuation (all marked in red), and spelling):

¡Hola! querido papá como estas supongo que bién yo también estoy bién te quiero decir que te extraño mucho quiero que regreses pronto te amo eres el mejor papá del mundo te quiero decir que como estas, como te ba y como es alla papi quiero que me escribas para saber como te a ido te mando mil besos y también mis hermano te mandan saludos y mi mamá sabes que te ama y te quiere como tu a ella te quiero adios recuerda esqribeme. Posdata: te quiero también mis hermanos y mi mama sabes que te quiere adios. Atentamente Roberta [Hi! Dear pa, how are you? I suppose, fine. I’m also fine. I want to tell you that I miss you a lot. I want you to come back soon. I love you. You are the best pa in the world. I want to tell you how are you, how is it going and what is it like there. Papi, I want you to write to know how it’s been going for you. I send you a thousand kisses and my brothers send you greetings too and my ma. Know that she loves like you do her. I love you. Good-bye. Remember to write me. P.S. I love you and my

brothers do too and my ma. Know that she loves you. Good-bye. Sincerely yours, Roberta]

Throughout the letter she affirms her love and admiration for her father and also the love her brothers and mother have for him. She expresses her wish for him to return soon and that she misses him. She also inquires as to his well being and what it is like where he lives. I believe the *Querida Abuelita* exercise may have influenced this last question, a suspicion that was supported in a later conversation.

I already knew that the family and Cesar speak several times a week by telephone. So, I wondered how writing might differ from talking on the phone. Guerra (1998) spent years with members of a transnational migrant circuit before he was given insight into the actual contents of letters. Levitt (2001) mentions news about health, infidelity, visas, and community events as information that is shared through writing in transnational communities.

In discussing the differences between writing and calling, Roberta said, “*por teléfono puedo decir te quiero; puedo hacer preguntas y me contesta sí o no. Escribir, puedo preguntarlo aunque no esté aquí. No tiene que estar aquí* [by telephone, I can say I love him; I can ask him questions and he answers me yes or no. Writing, I can ask him even if he’s not here. He doesn’t have to be here].” Oswaldo, the middle son, said, “*por teléfono, uno va a saber que está bien mientras por carta, no sabe uno* [by telephone, one’s going to know that he’s fine, while by letter, one doesn’t know].”

Giovani, the youngest, described to me how he expresses affection in writing. “*Por teléfono te contesta y por carta, hay un lugar de expresar cuanto lo quiero (...)[Le digo] que lo quiero mucho, que estoy bien y que lo cuide la Virgencita ... se lo mandé y mi*

mamá lo- los pone y se van para allá y los lee [By telephone, he answers you and by letter, there's a place to express how much I love him (...) [I tell him] that I love him a lot, that I'm fine and may the dear Virgin take care of him ... I sent it to him and my mom she, she sends them and they go there and he reads them].” The children mentioned asking their father questions about life “*allá*” when they spoke on the phone, never mentioning “Las Vegas.”

Giovani incorporates a religious aspect to express his sentimentality for his father in writing. For these three children, letter writing seems to serve as a vehicle for expressing emotion. They apparently include no news of the extended family or community.

Mariana also spoke about how she coordinates the mailing.

Mando todas juntas y luego, este - mamá, le hice esto a mi papá, - sí, lo voy a guardar, este, cuando, en cuanto tenga yo algo, fotos, no sé, algo, este, mandamos todo, yyy de repente hasta un dibujo quie- quieren que mande yo, entonces lo que es, vamos a juntar un poquito más de cosas y mandar todas, y así [I send them all together and then, ‘Ma, I made this for my pa.’ ‘Yes, I am going to put it away until I have some photos or something; we’ll send it all,’ and then even a drawing they want me to send, and so, what we do is get a few more things together for him and we send it all together like that].

It appears that they each prepare correspondence separately for Cesar and then they pool it for sending. The letters are strictly personal, one-to-one.

Araceli also mentioned writing letters to her teachers and to her friends because “*a veces me acuerdo de ellos, de sus consejos* [sometimes I think of them and their advice].”

She said she writes “*que los quiero, que los extraño, que cuándo me pueden ver* [that I love them, that I miss them, that, when can they see me].” She said she writes letters “*el día que estoy triste, el día que los extraño, el día que no los veo* [the day I feel sad, the day I miss them, the day I can’t see them].” She says this writing is quite different from the writing she does at school because she can write about her feelings and, besides,

“*ellos ya me dicen que están bien* [they tell me that they’re fine].” Like the Salazar Oaxaca children, Araceli’s letter writing fulfills an emotional purpose.

In the transnational migrant circuit, letter writing and package sending seem to serve an affective purpose for people on both sides of the border, strengthening affective ties between members of the family. The messages the migrants receive also include news of the family’s religious participation in the barrio, for example, the video of Belen as *madrina*. This reminds the migrant who they are socially in the community, where they come from and what is important in life according to this Mexican community’s values. Perhaps, as Malkin (1998) suggests, “While Mexico becomes the site of ‘life,’ The United States is a space for work (p.2).”

This concludes the section on literacy practices in the familial-communicative domain for these three transnational families. In the following section, I present the literacy practices embedded in the activities of these families which I categorize under recreational, the other private domain.

4.2.4. Literacy Practices in the Recreational Domain

The fourth domain I deal with in this paper covers the literacy practices I encountered which fall into the private (versus the public) realm. Literacy practices in this domain are those associated with activities done for fun, relaxation or entertainment. In this domain, I was told about or observed a variety of ways of having fun and relaxing, many in which reading and writing were embedded, especially for the Salazar Oaxaca and the Nava Romero families, the two families whose fathers had previously been the main providers of fun and exercise. In this section, I present examples of literacy

practices from these households connected with movies, music, storybooks, magazines, other books, poetry, and other writing.

The Salazar Oaxaca family often watches movies in English, reading the subtitles in Spanish. They enjoy American-made movies. The other two families do not have video or DVD players or cable or satellite television in their homes. The national and local television typically televises programs in Spanish only, so there are no subtitles used in television viewing.

The Salazar Oaxaca family also plays games such as *Basta* [Stop!], *Quién Lee Mejor* [Who Reads Better] and *Turista* [Tourist]. Figo explained to me in detail how they play the first two games. His explanation for *Basta* was that each person has a notebook. One person says the alphabet to him/herself and another person says “*basta.*” At that moment, the person silently saying the alphabet says the letter, which she/he had last named. Then, everybody has to write down a name, a last name, a city, a thing and an animal all of which start with that letter. You receive 100 points for each item and if more than one person wrote the same word, you have to divide the value (100) between the people who wrote that word. The game is a variation of what Vance (2005) reports. It is a common game with families, with each household having their own rules.

For *Quién Lee Mejor*, the siblings choose a book and their mother chooses the lesson or page, then the siblings take turns reading aloud and Mariana decides who reads best. The game *Turista* is a commercially produced board game similar to other board games in which you sometimes have to pick up cards and follow the instructions. None of the three games seem to have any connection to migration.

Meanwhile, the Tenahua Tlatchui family acquired an interactive encyclopedia-based, question-answer board game shortly after Ernesto's migration. During the literacy inventory I found writing on several pages of that set – answers to the questions written in. Licha says she has each read from one of the books for half an hour and then they play the game. As mentioned above, it seems likely the acquisition was made as a result of a stable income sufficient to ensure the long-term commitment of biweekly payments. The combined income from remittances and the store most likely gave Licha the freedom to opt for this collection in particular, one that included a game such as this one.

Literacy is also embedded in the families' music appreciation. Figo was proud to show me that the majority of compact discs in their family collection were originals. Illegal sales of unauthorized copies of CDs are common in the community. As shown in *Figure 4.27*, a case approximately ten centimeters thick holds the CDs and original covers which display the names of all the songs, most of which are in Spanish. Figo said his father brought nearly all of them from the US. At the Nava Romero home, I asked Araceli if she ever listened to CDs on their stereo. Araceli showed me how she locates her favorite songs on the jackets and puts them on the stereo by herself after getting permission. Her favorites are shown in *Figure 4.28*. All of the music selections in her collection were also in Spanish.

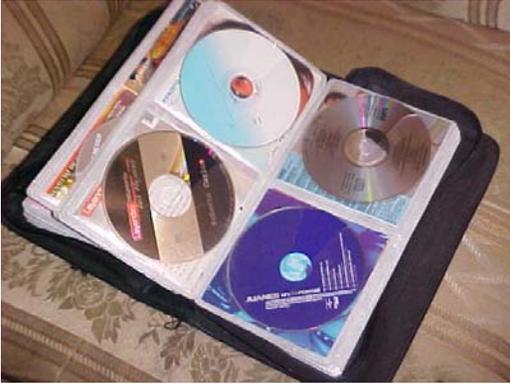


Figure 4.27. Salazar Oaxaca CD collection.



Figure 4.28. Part of the Nava Romero CD collection.

All three families expressed enjoyment in reading storybooks. The Nava Romero family said they sometimes read storybooks together on weekends and that Fidel used to read to them too. Araceli told me she reads *“cuando me pone mi mamá y a veces yo les leo un cuento a mis hermanitos porque luego no se duermen, (...) [leo] porque me dicen mis hermanos, porque me gusta leer los libros y porque me pone mi mamá [When my mother tells me to and sometimes I read a story to my little brothers and sisters because they don’t fall asleep (...) [I read] because my brothers and sisters tell me to, because I like to read books and because my ma makes me].”* It seems either Araceli’s mother or her siblings often ask her to read the books to the little ones, sometimes to entertain and sometimes to calm them at bedtime.

The Nava Romero family showed me a few storybooks. One of the books they had brought home from the kindergarten for the weekend because the kindergarten was trying to get the parents to read to their children. It was made with very good quality paper and pages that folded out to discover more of the story. Another book was a commercially produced book sold with an accompanying cassette. They went to their cousins’ house to retrieve this book. Alma told me her cousins also have another book about *“cabritos y el*

lobo y otros [the kid goats and the wolf and others].” Farr (1994) and Kalman (2004) mention the custom of freely lending books among the members of the extended families. This family also shares this practice.

In the Salazar Oaxaca family, the children have not brought home any storybooks from their schools, but they go to the town library to read. Roberta mentioned reading storybooks there, and Figo mentioned books about animals and fiction. Roberta showed me her favorite book from home, which her aunt gave her, seen in *Figure 4.28*. It is a collection of small stories, and her favorite story is about a pig. The story is read by substituting words for certain symbols or drawings.



Figure 4.28. Roberta’s favorite story.

In the Tenahua Tlatcheui family, Licha also mentioned that Belen reads storybooks, and that she sometimes borrows books from her cousins, but Belen never showed me any or mentioned reading them. At another time, Licha commented, “*De hecho, casi, o sea, no somos muy afectos a la lectura* [Actually, we’re not really much for reading].” The one text Licha knew that her sons found entertaining was a magazine their grandfather had given them about fighting cocks. She said the boys talk to her excitedly about what they have read, especially intrigued with the idea of winning a lot of money in fights and making up to three thousand pesos for the sale of a single gamecock.

Mariana also mentioned paging through magazines and books, but that “*no lo leo como se debe* [I don’t read it like you should].” She explained, she looks at the index, and if there is something which interests her, “*me pego* [I stick with it].”

Monica said she sometimes reads after the children are asleep. It is her opinion that she does not read very much or very well, a fact that she attributes to having studied only until the third grade. Still, from underneath the mattress, a safe place from children’s hands, Monica took out a magazine and a booklet, both on baby care. She received both of them at the clinic when she gave birth to one of her children. She said they contain very interesting articles. From under the mattress, she also took out *El Libro del Buen Amor* [The Book of Good Love], which her sister was lending her. These texts provide interesting reading for Monica.

Monica also showed me cooking magazines. She said she likes to look at the ideas for food preparation. Monica explained she does not read the recipe herself. Rather, she and Araceli look through the magazine together and they pick out one, which they think looks delicious to make for a meal. Then, she has Araceli read her the ingredients aloud. Araceli gave me a demonstration of one they had done together with the recipe shown in *Figure 4. 29*. With a little bit of trouble, Araceli read the ingredients section without reading the quantities. Part of the trouble may have been that a few of the ingredients were given in Castilian Spanish rather than Mexican Spanish, for example, *lenguado*, a kind of fish not found in Mexico, *calabacín* instead of *calabazita*, and *judías tiernas* instead of *ejotes*.. Araceli mentioned she does not need to read the segment on the preparation instructions because her mother usually knows how to make it, and then they go to buy the ingredients they need. This is an example of *language brokering*, as

described by Kalman (1999). Monica relies on Araceli to read the ingredients because “she does not read.”



Figure 4.29. *Pescado con Salsa de Jerez* [Fish in Sherry Sauce].

Licha mentioned that she sets aside articles from magazines or newspapers, which she thinks, might be interesting and later asks the children to read to her when her hands and eyes are busy with housework or sewing. This is another example of language brokering. The families have other magazines in the home, which they read for enjoyment. None of these texts, however, are produced in the U.S. or include any English, or seem to have any connection to transnationalism.

In the interview with Ernesto, he mentioned he sometimes buys magazines or books. They come with the English above and the Spanish below, but he reads in Spanish. He sometimes passes the time with a question-answer type of reading. “*Vienen a veces los libros esos que viene con una pregunta, una respuesta pues, ahí mas o menos le busco, y ahí mas o menos me entretengo también, o sea, buscando la pregunta, y, y ya me pongo a contestarlas* [Sometimes the books come with a question, an answer, then more or less I

look for the answer, and there I am passing the time, or really, looking for the question, and, and then I set down to answer them].” I was not able to discern more about this practice or about his reading habits before migrating.

Writing was also mentioned in a few leisure activities, besides in the games mentioned above. Monica mentioned the children sometimes play school, and then, they draw or write letters or messages. In the in-depth interview, Araceli mentioned writing poetry. When I inquired further into her poetry writing, she explained that she chooses the poem from a book of poems by reading them, and if she judges one as pretty, she copies it onto a paper. Although she didn't have one copied, she had a cousin bring her the book, which was at her cousin's house, to show me – *Poemas con Sol y Son: Poesía de América Latina para Niños* [Poems with Sun and Sound: Poetry from Latin America for Children] (2002). It comes from the public education reserve of books meant for promoting reading for pleasure (*Programa Nacional de Lectura; los Libros de Rincón*). Thus, for Araceli, *writing* poetry is copying a poem onto a paper. She read one for me that she said she had read many times, called *El Zumbador*, by Lidia Vecens. She read this one fluently but did not feel prepared enough to read another aloud. Since *zumbador* is a word, which I was not familiar with, and because poems are intentionally left for interpretation, I ask Araceli what a *zumbador* is, and she informed me it is the song of a bird. Through Araceli's enthusiasm, it is clear she takes genuine pleasure in this poetry activity. Because she is interpreting the poem and doing what she enjoys with it, I would say Araceli has appropriated this literacy practice. She did not give any indication of where or how she might have gotten the idea to initiate this practice.

Monica said she does not have time to write. Mariana told me that when she cannot sleep, she sometimes writes down the words to songs, or she writes questions to herself and answers them.

A last example of writing for recreation Giovanni showed me when I asked him about the last time he had written in his Spanish notebook. He turned to a page quite apart from his schoolwork. In the middle of a page, all by itself, he had written, “*Espelusnante objeto espantoso* [Creepy awful object].” It was not part of a school exercise; he had written this of his own volition. Mentioning it to his mother, she said he picks up on words and expressions he hears others say and then he uses them spontaneously later. I suspect he has a capacity for memory that may not be sufficiently challenged at school, thus, leading to his lack of enthusiasm with school, as I described in Chapter Three.

The examples of reading and writing that are carried out in the recreational domain are thus many and varied. With their fathers not home, the families may find they have more time for these kinds of home-based activities, rather than more outings or sports-related activities. The extra responsibilities that these women assume in their husbands’ absence may allow them less time to participate in these leisure activities, leaving the children to play by themselves, without the adult present, or, as in Araceli’s case, having the eldest sibling assume the role of the adult and reading to her siblings at story time. Also interesting to note is Mariana’s assumption that reading *should* be done in a certain way, for example, reading a book cover to cover, so she does not count what she does as reading. The last domain I present is that of the public and private religious domain.

4.2.5. Literacy Practices in the Religious Domain

Literacy practices found within the religious domain include those associated with teaching or practicing religious faith, either publicly or privately. Belen was the only participant taking catechism during the study and she enthusiastically about showed me her catechism notebook. In this section, I show a few examples of Belen's writing and another literacy practice I found in the Salazar Oaxaca home and which is typical in the community.

While many religious texts could be seen in the homes, I did not observe the family members reading or writing religious texts while I was there. As Licha mentioned, she and the children know most prayers by heart. However, there is much more to religion than reciting prayers and, as Murillo (2005) points out, reading and writing are also embedded in these practices. Although the Tenahua Tlatehui and the Nava Romero families invited me to join them for religious gatherings, I did not accept, except for one meal at the Tlatehui home place after a religious celebration. In this respect, I limited the study to the literacy practices within the confines of the home.

The care that I saw Belen take with her history notes and notebook was different from the care I saw in her catechism work. First of all, the appearance of the catechism notebook was less formal. The cardboard cover was covered with pink gift-wrapping paper and Mattel "Barbie" stickers and it had separated from its pages. She teased her mother about the division of responsibility, as though it were Licha's fault Belen's notebook was falling apart. "*Te dije que debes forrar mi libreta* [I told you that you should cover my notebook!]" Licha just smiled without saying anything.

Belen also believes that what she does in catechism is different from schoolwork because the subject is different. She showed me several pages, many which were dictation exercises. She was able to repeat many ideas from the notes, and she could explain or defend some of them, but not all. She was less clear about the main ideas in the more personalized activity shown in *Figure 4.31* and which Belen explains here.

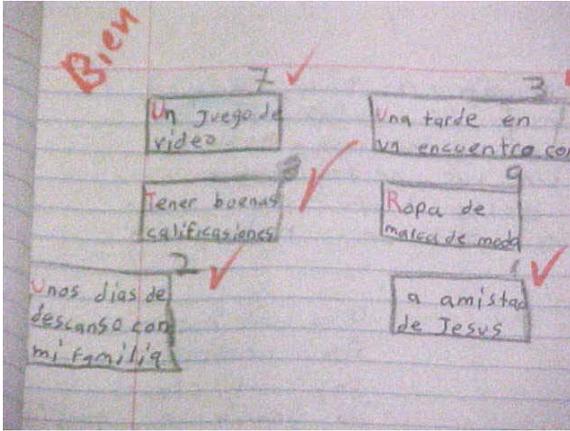


Figure 4.31. Preference exercise.

Tere: *¿y este por qué tiene cajitas alrededor de las palabras?* [and why does this have boxes around the words?]

Belen: *... aquí tenemos que poner el número sobre de este, así... [Se trata] sobre las cosas buenas y sobre las cosas malas ... amistad de Jesús, unos días... de descanso con mi familia... un encuentro con Jesús, mi amigo, [cinco] un trabajo en equipo bien hecho... [seis] poder ayudar a mi amigo... [siete] un juego de video... [ocho] tener buenas calificaciones, nueve, ropa de marca de moda [Here we have to put the number on this like this... It's about the good things and the bad things... friendship with Jesus, some days...on break with my family... a meeting with Jesus, my friend, a team job well done... [five] to be able to help a friend [six] [seven] a video game, [eight] have good grades, nine, designer clothes].*

Tere: *¿y alguna vez tuuu maestro en la escuela te ha pedido algún trabajo así?* [And has your teacher at school ever asked you to do some work like this?]

Belen: no...

Tere: *...hoy en día ¿los pondrías en el mismo orden?* [Today, would you put them in the same order?]

Belen: *no sé* [I don't know.].

In this assignment, she had to put the given experiences in order of her preference, but in this conversation she oversimplifies the subject of the exercise by explaining it is

about “the good things and the bad things.” Social activities with family or friends, she rates much more important than good grades which she rates next to last. She also says she has never been asked to do an exercise like this in school.

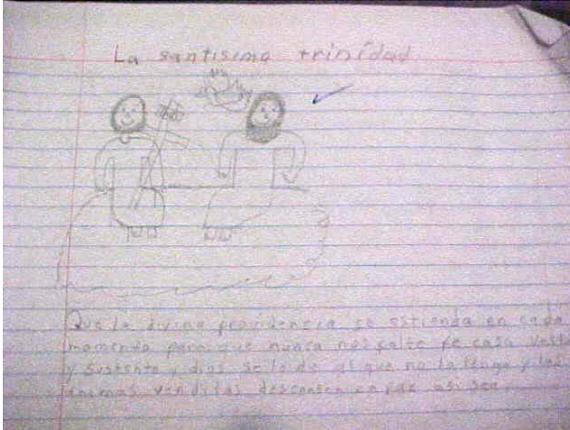


Figure 4.32. *La Santísima Trinidad* [The Holy Trinity].

Another catechism assignment was to find and copy a prayer to *La Santísima Trinidad* [the Holy Trinity] and to draw a picture for it. *Figure 4.32* shows her results. She did not have to memorize the prayer, and they did not compare the prayers in the next class, but she remembers that not everyone had the same prayer. For another assignment, Belen said she had to cut letters and words out and paste them together forming “*la primera estrofa del Credo* [the first lines of the Creed]”, as can be seen in *Figures 4.33* and *4.34*. Because she had forgotten about this catechism assignment, she prepared it together with her mother in order to finish faster. For other assignments she told me she has had to look up some theme, and then she uses a book called *Complemento de la Biblia*, [Complement to the Bible], a hard cover, cloth-bound book. When she does not understand what she reads, she asks her mom for help. Then she has to write a *resumen* [summary].



Figure 4.33. *El Credo* [The Creed] part one. Figure 4.34. *El Credo* [The Creed] part two.

Many of these assignments and written activities done in Belen's catechism classes are similar task-wise to assignments and written activities in Belen's educational domain. Like Belen's literacy practices in the educational domain, there is an emphasis, and perhaps even a dependence on accomplishing the task cooperatively in the religious domain. Belen treats them differently, however. It seems she is more genuinely enthusiastic toward the subjects dealt with in catechism than her school subjects, and she deals with the writing she does in catechism more informally, for example, by not noting the date of her work on pages and by using pencil rather than ink to write.

In this community, catechism is given in preparation for specific religious events. Belen began preparing for her first communion after her father gave her permission. He agreed as long as she would wait for his return to celebrate the event. Thus, Belen's literacy practices in the religious domain are indirectly related to her father's migration.

Catechism is part of the teaching of religious faith. In the practice of religious faith, the traditions are many in this community. In the home of the Salazar Oaxaca family, they collect and display keepsakes from family religious celebrations such as, baptisms, weddings, and three-year celebrations. A tradition similar to the 'ritual exchange'

described by Mlade (2001), all the keepsakes indicate the date of the celebration and a name or, at the very least, the initials of the celebrated individual(s). They are made with a variety of materials, and the more unique the presentation, the better to remember the significant event. One is given to each guest or family at the celebration, depending on the economic or time investment in making the keepsake. The keepsake in *Figure 4.35*, a decorative corked bottle of oil, actually functioned as the wedding invitation for Mariana's sister's wedding. *Figure 4.36* shows a talavera (a ceramic style typical of the area) bell from the same wedding. The initials of the couple and the date of the celebration are glazed onto the inside of the bell, a pricey investment. *Figure 4.37* shows a candle, also from the same wedding, a less expensive keepsake. *Figure 4.38* shows the same candle with the names of the couple and date of the celebration indicated on a paper glued to the underside. These were all made by members of Mariana's family.

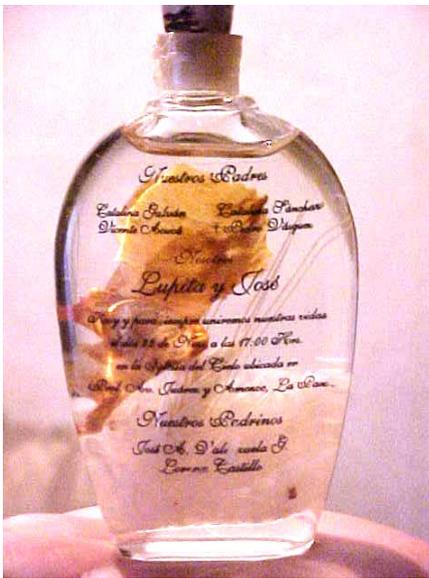


Figure 4.35. Wedding invitation



Figure 4.36. Glazed bell.



Figure 4.37. Keepsake candle.



Figure 4.38. Keepsake candle, underside.

4.2.6. Summary of Results of Literacy Practices

The literacy practices found in the homes of these transnational families are diverse and abundant especially in the recreational domain for the Nava Romero and the Salazar Oaxaca families, in the educational domain in the Salazar Oaxaca and the Tenahua Tlatchui families, and in the business subdomain of the commercial domain in the Tenahua Tlatchui family. The literacy practices are less diverse and abundant for the three families in the home sub-domain of the financial domain and the familial-communicative and the religious domains. They involve texts, which are commercially produced and sold, given to them, or borrowed. They also involve texts, which they themselves produce. The Mesoamerican family structure, as described by Robichaux (2002) and found in these families, affects the movement of these texts. Like Kalman (2004) and Farr (1994) found, texts are openly borrowed and lent among members of the extended family living in homes contiguous to these transnational homes.

The participants talked about writing for personal communication, for leisure, and for participation in the administrative educational domain, but most of these kinds of texts they did not actually show me. For example, the only letter they shared with me, one that Roberta brought out, was already folded and sealed. In the *Querida Abuelita* exercise, however, Roberta wrote a letter to her father, which gives a fair example of what might be in a typical letter. Nevertheless, I have no reason to doubt the texts' existence. In some cases they did not show them to me because for the moment, they did not have any, but others, I believe, because they are of a personal nature. In fact, I suspect that some texts were so personal, that they did not even mention them, for example, an address or telephone book. It also may be the case that they did not see some of these as valuable examples of writing, for example, writing lyrics to songs. They seemed to be more willing to share with me the commercial texts in their homes, although the Tenahua Tlatehui family allowed me to see the texts they produced in the family business. Many of these texts in the familial-communicative and recreational domains were individually produced.

Meanwhile, the families showed me many participant-produced, school-assigned texts. The texts I present in this chapter are school-assigned and produced at home, in contrast to those presented by Ballesteros (2003) and Teague (2004), which dealt with student-produced texts in the school. Participation in courses such as catechism also implies forms of writing, many of which are similar to school-assigned texts. The typical assignment of summarizing, common at both the primary and secondary levels consists of various alternating phases of reading and writing. Lists and summaries are not specifically mentioned in the school-produced texts in Teague (2004) or Ballesteros

(2003). Vance (2005) mentions home, participant-produced lists used in the familial-communicative domain, e.g. “List of chores (p. 131)” and in the home commercial/financial domain, e.g. shopping lists, whereas in this study, uses of lists were only found in relation to the Tenahua Tlatchui family business. The participants mentioned depending more on their memory than on lists. Texts produced in the educational school-assigned and business/commercial business texts were often co-constructed with the amount of involvement depending much on the participants’ confidence and ability with the texts.

The supportive atmosphere of the homes allowed for the social construction of texts and meanings, and for participation in language brokering, as Kalman (1999) refers to it. The children asked each other and their mothers for help, and help was freely given. Both Monica and Licha mentioned asking the children to read things for them. In Monica’s case, she asked Araceli to broker for her since her literacy is limited, and in Licha’s case, she mentioned asking the youngsters to read for her because her hands and eyes were busy with housework or business.

The literacy practices I report here serve to further the children’s education. Licha may not realize it, but the role she plays in supporting her children, may also be strengthening her own knowledge and skill with literacy as well. The practices also serve to bring the family together, physically, and sentimentally. The games are a source of shared entertainment. The letters serve as vehicles of sentimental expression. The business literacy practices serve to keep the business running smoothly which gives the family another source of income. The business literacy practices also serve to have the children learn about responsibility toward the family.

The family unity resulting from these literacy practices, then may serve to attract the migrant back home. If they relate these family experiences to their fathers and husbands, it may induce in these migrants' feelings of wanting to be included in their children's expression of "we."

With this study's research questions having been answered, in Chapter 5, I bring the focus back to larger questions involved in literacy and migration. What significance might these case studies have in the broader picture, that is, in the questions of literacy and migration? I present how the data fit well with certain propositions and how they seem to contradict others. I discuss how these data might be interpreted and converted into recommendations informing language professionals and language policy.