

5. Discussion

5.1. Overview

With the results presented in Chapter Four, in Chapter Five I first offer a discussion of the findings as they fit into questions related to literacy and migration. Second, I present my thoughts on the limitations of this study. As this was a sociocultural study, I found the need to develop socioculturally relevant methods for data collection; thus, in the third section of this chapter, I discuss the instruments developed *in situ*. I then offer a discussion on the implications these findings may have for educational practices, educational policies, and future research.

5.2. Discussion of the Findings.

As a guide in this discussion, I return to the assumptions made at the beginning of this study and presented in Chapter One. One assumption I made was based on the fact that these migrants were also fathers of school-aged children. As long as the transnational migrants in this study continue to play parental roles, I assumed the transnational experience should have an impact on the literacy attitudes and practices of children of transnational families. Results suggest migration does make an impact on children's attitudes and practices toward literacy.

While the initial impact takes a toll emotionally and scholastically on the children, the presence of a supportive network including family, friends, classmates and teachers, can help the children to overcome the initial shock of the separation from the migrants, in these cases, their fathers. In exchange for the migrant's "sacrifice," parents expect the children to do well in school, and the children accept this responsibility, once they pass

the initial trauma of separation. In the three families, I observed a genuine interest on the part of the children in doing well in school.

Perhaps the drama of the father figure leaving, surviving risks, and “making it” in the US, creates a bond in the family, because the family members seem to exude an air of concern and consideration toward each other while having fun and working hard. The atmosphere lends itself to school-supportive literacy practices in which members socially construct texts and arrive at socially constructed meanings of texts.

The older children and one of the mothers have begun to incorporate digital literacy into their practices. This may or may not have a connection to transnationalism. So far, they have not begun to use it as a means of communication or entertainment but only as a source of information for school assignments. Perhaps the most realistic connection to transnationalism is the economic security in which they find themselves as a result of remittances, allowing them the option of buying time at the cyber cafés.

The transnational experience may be the motor behind a piqued interest in English for several of the children. The younger children, eight and ten years old, inquisitively ask their father to teach them English over the phone. They find it fun, and it probably serves as a bonding for the father-child relationship. The older children, 12 and 15 years old, who talk with their fathers over the phone about English, have questions, which go beyond what their schoolteachers offer them. The act of these older children looking to their fathers for knowledge may also strengthen bonds in the father-child relationship, providing the fathers with an opportunity to give their children something more than money.

In these families, the roles fathers played in the lives of the children before the migration made the impact on literacy practices either positive, which was the case for the Tenahua Tlathui and the Salazar Oaxaca children, or negative, which was generally the case for the Nava Romero children. If the migrant played a restricting role in literacy practices relating to homework before his departure, as did Ernesto Tenahua, his migration then made a positive impact, allowing the family space and time to develop literacy practices which are helpful in school work. When the migrant played a large role in the children's daily leisure activities, generally, the effect was also positive, as was the case for the Salazar Oaxaca family. The family sought substitutes to the types of leisure activities they once enjoyed with their father. These substitutes were often inexpensive, close to home, and embedded with literacy. This was also the case for the Nava Romero family. Fidel had played an important role in the family's leisure activities. After migration, in part, the children looked to their eldest sister, Araceli, for storybook reading, and she assumed the role of reader. This family, however, had not yet found a way to fill Fidel's role as provider of knowledge, and this had a negative impact on the Nava Romero family in terms of school-assigned literacy practices.

I also assumed that homes experiencing transnational migration would incorporate literacy practices particular to the experience of transnational migration and that these can be used as resources for relating to novel literacy practices. This was not found to be the case for these three families. I observed few literacy practices particular to migration. No commercially produced texts originating in the U.S. or Canada were found and the participants wrote few letters. Guerra (1998) notes that the installation of a telephone changed the frequency of letter writing in the transnational migrant community of his

study, and yet, he found the art of personal letter writing had not disappeared because of the expense and the continuing unavailability of private telephones. Since then, however, the cost of calling from the United States to Mexico has been reduced considerably (Domínguez Ríos, 2005) and, as we see in this study, the incorporation of a telephone in the home increased the frequency and the length of calls.

The letters that were documented during this study were used to maintain personal relations. They were not written to discuss economic conditions, to exchange goods and gifts, or to communicate news as was found by Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001), Faulstich Orellana et al. (2001), Guerra (1998), and Malkin (1998). Rather, the three families in this study appear to stay in communication with the migrant on these matters solely through the use of the telephone. In this study, telephone calls serve to inform the migrant of happenings in the family and community. They also offered the migrant a medium to continue his parental role, giving advice, admonition, and affection. Furthermore, they offered the couple a medium to negotiate financial, social, and family concerns. On this point, communication between the couples might even have improved since migration. Licha and Ernesto, who were having disagreements before migration, now discuss and agree upon many family matters. Mariana relates having differences of opinions with Cesar, and discussing them over the phone. She admits they do not always come to an agreement. I suspect the distance has allowed Mariana to voice her opinions. This may be quite different from when Cesar was physically in the household.

I also assumed that analysis of literacy practices specific to transnationalism might shed light on the roles of different family members in the migration process, as well as on the role of literacy in the migration process itself. With the telephone having apparently

overtaken the role print literacy once played, I offer here a bit of analysis of telephone use in the migration process of these families. These conclusions come from conversations I held with the participants of this study.

As Levitt (2001) and Portes et al. (1999) suggest, the telephone is a time- and space- reducing technology. New migrants are able to promptly call their families announcing their safe arrival. Their frequent calls assuage the fears that arise from their fathers' and husbands' unsettled circumstances. Once the migrant is settled, calls allow the migrant to continue in a decision-making role within the family, making an impact even on daily events. Furthermore, communication via telephone allows the family to discuss and solve problems as they arise.

One of the purposes of this study was to help reach a better understanding between the local and the global (Street, 2005; Guarnizo, 2005; Portes et al., 1998) in order to inform educators on literacy practices in the homes in Mexico, a need mentioned by Teague et al. (2006) and Kalman (2003). The *deep* Mexican (Bonfil Batalla, 1987/1996) profile of the community in which this study takes place is especially pertinent in understanding the literacy practices in these transnational families. Murillo (2005) has cited families in this community reaffirming their *deep* Mexican identity in their literacy practices. For example, planning and organizing traditional, religious festivities and pilgrimages, an integral part of *México Profundo*, involves bookkeeping and communication with the community through written announcements, like the poster hung in the Tenahua Tlatchui family store. Transnationals need to take extra care in affirming their *deep* Mexican identity if they wish to maintain their status in the community.

Malkin (1998) suggests migrants' status has to be continually negotiated with the community. In this study, religion plays a significant role in these transnational migrant circuits. Mlade (2001) suggests religious cargos are a vehicle for achieving this. It would seem that through Cesar's accepting a religious cargo and his return, he was able to fulfill community obligations, both religious and social, and with this gain status and prestige in the community. If this is true, then status and prestige might also be sought by providing children with religious preparation. Both Belen and Araceli await their fathers' return to celebrate their first communions. We find literacy practices embedded in the preparation for this celebration.

At another level, alcoholism may have been a cause for some loss of status for Ernesto in the community before his migration, since for a time; he was not able to provide for his family. As Malkin (1998) points out, "work and providing is the moral discourse of men... [and] migration is one of the practices through which masculinity is constructed (p.2)," and, I might add, in Ernesto's case, *re*-constructed. Migration has allowed Ernesto to once again provide for his family. His family, in turn, actively participates in the community, with Jaime beginning to accept new responsibilities, which also earns prestige for the family.

With Mariana and Cesar's differences of opinions in gender roles, I sensed changes in the family rhythm are bound to occur with his return, even if it is for a visit. Malkin (1998) suggests,

The reality of the migrant life subjects them [migrants] to a female role in many of its practices and social interactions. A feminization that occurs...as they are obliged to adopt several practices that are usually associated with the construction of femininity (p.4).

It may be that upon return, migrants exaggerate the differences in gender roles in order to compensate for a self-perceived resulting loss of masculinity. If this happens, changes in household routines and responsibilities will make the children aware of alternatives that exist and more conscious of choices.

The Mesoamerican family structure as described by Robichaux (2002) influences the daily interactions found in these three families. The interaction that the families share depends largely on proximity and in part on the mother's relationship with her in-laws, especially in the absence of her husband. Following the traditional virilocal pattern may add to the families' status in the community. Ernesto and Licha have the advantage of being from the same *barrio* and following the virilocal custom. In the Salazar Oaxaca family, although they have followed the virilocal pattern, Mariana is not from the same *barrio* and her family does not have their origins in the community. According to Mlade (2001), the community will not expect Mariana to carry out Cesar's obligations, although, according to Malkin (1998) she is the keeper of his status in his absence. Furthermore, since it is through Mariana's family that Cesar has made the connection to migrate, the community may be especially critical toward Mariana. As such, it seems Mariana stays on the margins of community life while her children take more initiative. It may be easier for Fidel and Monica to negotiate status in her *barrio*, the *barrio* in which they live, than in Fidel's *barrio* of origin. Through the extended families' proximity to these transnational families, I observed values of *México Profundo* in the families' generosity in cooperative learning and in their sharing of texts.

Living in a community in the throes of accelerated globalization, these families do not count on agriculture as a means of living, although (except for Mariana) that is how

their families of origin made their living. The families' concern with education may, in part, be due to recognizing their need to compete in a globalized economy.

Orality is a larger part of folk Mesoamerican tradition than print literacy. Guerra (1998) cites memory and story telling as highly prized in the transnational *Mexicano* culture. Indeed, in this study I documented few family-produced texts used as memory aids. For Mariana, writing *tal dinero para tal fecha* [so much money for such and such a day], would be an exception because she normally remembers those things in her head. Similarly, the texts produced and used in the Tenahua Tlathui family store may serve as memory aids, but mainly they allow various people to participate in the running of the business – quite a different function. These findings suggest that the literacy practice of letter-writing served a function in the transnational migrant circuits in the past – that of keeping in touch with family members in order to maintain personal and community relations and to solve practical matters – but that telephones fit the needs of these transnational migrant circuits much more naturally, that is, *traditionally*, in the full sense of the word. Before I consider the implications these findings may have in school practices and language policies, I present the limitations particular of this study.

5.3. Limitations of the Study.

In this section, I present a discussion of methodological limitations I see in this study concerning participant profile and data collection as well as two personal limitations. The first limitation concerns the point at which these families find themselves in the migration cycle. All three families are part of relatively new transnational migrant circuits. Had they been part of a more established transnational

migrant circuit, we might see a greater presence of commercially produced texts from the U.S. or Canada or of texts concerning life and culture of the U.S. or Canada. Moreover, we might find families who are still dependent on letter writing or those who have incorporated electronic communication into the migrant circuit. As Levitt (2001) and Portes et al. (1999) suggest, space- and time-compressing technology are a necessary precondition to the proliferation of transnational practices. I discuss this further in the implications for future research.

Another methodological limitation to this study, but one concerning data collection, and also mentioned by Vance (2005), is that the texts which the families brought to my attention and included in the literacy inventory, for the most part, were texts which they valued or which fit their idea of what reading and writing is. I tried to overcome this by opening up the literacy inventory with the calendar and by inviting the children to show me “anything that had writing on.” As a result, I believe they found and shared with me many examples, which they might not otherwise have thought of as texts for reading or writing. I also asked to see the account books in the Tenahua Tlatehui’s store – they did not think of showing me those texts as examples of reading and writing. For the most part, the participants were not necessarily motivated enough to take out examples of their own writing. For example, I spoke to Mariana Oaxaca about my concern that I did not have examples of her reading and writing. She then related to me several situations in which she reads and writes, but still she did not bring out any to show me. This brings me to another methodological limitation concerning data collection.

As Vance (2005) found, many of the literacy practices mentioned in this study were described to me rather than observed as they actually occur between the participants.

During the literacy inventory, Monica Romero had her children show me how they use some of the texts, for example, choosing a recipe and reading the ingredients, and this provided rich data. Mariana and Licha each agreed to an observation of a homework session and these visits also provided rich data. I do not presume that the families do their homework or carry out these literacy practices in these ways everyday or each time, but the children's interactions gave me clues as to how they handle certain literacy events cooperatively and how they co-construct meaning socio-culturally. Considering the time available to carry out this study, and the mothers' heavy workloads, it was not possible to join families as a regular observer of naturally unfolding literacy practices embedded in daily activities. I tried to compensate for this through triangulation of data.

A final methodological limitation is one of context. Given my interest in home and family literacy practices, I purposely constrained data collection primarily to the home. However, considering the powerful influence extended family and community have on individuals and families in this research community, a more complete view of non-school-based literacy practices would have included participants' literacy practices carried out with the extended family and within the community. I refer to the limitations of context and data collection once again in the section dealing with implications for future research.

Two limitations to this study are of a more personal nature. The first is the result of my being a member of the neighboring community. In many ways, of course, this was an asset, in that I was able to chat about past or occurring events and to foresee certain upcoming events. The limitations arose when I found myself assuming I knew the reasons why participants did things or how they did them, and thus, not asking enough

questions. Sometimes, the opportunity to clarify a point had passed. Other times, I asked questions during subsequent visits. If the questions concerned texts, which I had photographed, it was helpful to take along a contact copy of the reduced images.

Another personal limitation in this study was my fear for these families' futures, that is, of the migrant not returning. While attending an international conference on migration I heard several comments that migrants establish new families in the U.S. while still having families in their homeland. In reviewing my data, I realized I had avoided questions concerning, for example, plans for the future, especially in terms of work. I wondered how the migrant saw his future or what he imagined for his life when he returned, especially work-wise. I could not envision them willingly returning to the salaries they had been making here before leaving. Realizing this, I was glad to have the opportunity to interview Ernesto, who envisions himself and his family running their own businesses from their home place. I did not have this luxury with the other migrants. Because parents' goals can influence the home environment and the goals children form for themselves, I consider not having this information may have limited my ability to understand the families' underlying ideologies toward literacy practices

5.4. Discussion Concerning Instruments Created *In Situ*

Methodologically, it should be worthwhile to review the instruments developed *in situ* and to analyze their effectiveness and efficiency for collecting different types of data. Part of qualitative research data methodology draws on previously tried and used methods and instruments and part on adapting methods and instruments or creating new,

socioculturally relevant methods and instruments (Spindler & Spindler (1987). Three such instruments were developed in the course of this study.

The first of these was the Teacher / Migration Questionnaire (Appendix B) which asked classroom teachers to identify the names of the students who have relatives living abroad. I learned that ten of thirteen classrooms had children with at least one migrant parent, and that all of the classrooms had children whose counted emigrants among their relatives. While some classrooms appeared to have only five students with some connection to transnationalism, others appeared to have up to 22 students who had some connection to transnationalism. The teachers also wrote the last names of the children, and so I was able to cross reference siblings and those who were apparently cousins. While some children are too young to know whether an uncle is in the US or a distant city in Mexico, my interest was not to obtain an exact number, but rather a general profile of each group in order to choose three with which to work.

The second question aimed to collect data on national migration. The teachers obtained this information from the children's birth certificates, which they had in their possession at the time, recording only the names of those born in other states. I learned that only six students (of 529) had been born in other states of Mexico.

The third question dealt with the teachers' attitudes and willingness to work with me. I learned that six of the thirteen teachers had no interest in participating in the study, since they left that section of the questionnaire blank. The process of collecting the surveys furthered my perceptions on this point. Initially they were handed out and another person within the school collected several. Since not all of them were ready, I was then given permission to request them directly from the teachers in their classrooms.

Thus, I was able to match names with faces and dispositions. This later served as useful information when families spoke of their experiences with different teachers. The data I gathered with this instrument allowed me to choose transnational migration rather than national migration as the focus of this study and to select three classrooms with which to work. It was a helpful instrument, which might be used to estimate the extent of transnationalism at any school.

The *Querida Abuelita* classroom exercise (Appendix C) proved to be effective in eliciting more precise data on the closeness with which these children experience transnationalism. It proved to be a literacy event, which allowed the children to think about the subject of migration and then for them to express their views on it. *Querida Abuelita* was an insightful exercise and from it we learned there is perhaps as much national, trans-state migration going on in this community as transnational migration, with the national destinations of Mexico City and Cancun, being most frequently mentioned. It also reinforced the fact that migration is a phenomenon in flux. Three months had passed since collecting the information from the teacher/migration questionnaire and in that period one child's father had returned, and another child's father had gone. I might also mention the fact that, while children were open about communicating their experiences with transnationalism in this literacy exercise, some adults were more reticent about discussing it. In one family interview, a mother denied her family's transnationalism – she insisted her husband was only in Mexico City. I was able to triangulate the information with other data in order to deduce that in effect, this wife's husband was living and working abroad. The apparent reticence to disclose participation in transnational migrant circuits did not surprise me since I recognize the

precariousness of a migrant's position. This exercise also sensitized me to the emotional toll migration effects on children. Furthermore, it gave me an understanding of the support, which the fellow students and teachers of this school community offer to these children.

The activity was also effective for getting to know the students and for them to get to know me. It also served to have something in common to draw on during my first home visit. The letters and drawings the children produced had much to say in and by themselves. While the preparation was time-consuming, I believe it was an excellent vehicle to approach and draw young students' interest into the theme of migration.

I found the literacy inventory to be an efficient tool for organizing and collecting data. The L/E (*lectura/escritura* [reading/writing]) distinction gave a quick, easy way to overview the practices in generalities. It was also helpful especially in quickly distinguishing between different uses of texts, for example, in noting the mere presence of a text versus the reading or the writing of a text. I did not use the frequency/period column but twice, and that was in recording the remittance receipt. There is a space to record the date of the initial literacy inventory. Dating any later additions or comments proved to be helpful in tracking details with fieldnotes. Out of respect to the families, I did not begin to fill out the literacy inventory until the second visit because ethically, they should be willing participants and have full knowledge of what was being asked of them. I also found the space for "purpose" and "additional comments" helpful. The underlying idea of the literacy inventory motivated several ideas for implications in school classrooms, which I discuss in the next section.

In summary, I found these three instruments developed *in situ* to be efficient and effective in collecting data in the school and home contexts for which they were developed. I propose them as a contribution to the already existing methodological instruments used for collecting data in qualitative studies.

5.5. Implications for School Practices and Policies.

The *Querida Abuelita* classroom exercise, described in Chapter 2, was based on the Vygotskyan theory (1978) of “spontaneous concept development” and a Vygotskyan framework (1988) that assumes that transmission and acquisition of cultural knowledge, such as literacy, takes place interpersonally before it is internalized on an intrapersonal level (Kendrick & McKay, 2002). Similar to Kendrick & McKay’s (2002) study, the *Querida Abuelita* classroom exercise proved to be a literacy event, which allowed children to think about and express their views on the subject of migration. While preparation of these materials took considerable time, I believe it is an excellent vehicle to introduce and draw young students’ interest in topics of relevance to transnational children’s lives and which teachers might use as the basis for initiating children’s literacy tasks. Topics might include cultural traditions or linguistic diversity.¹ One of the time-consuming stages was the preparation of the book in a format, which could be appreciated by a whole classroom simultaneously. As I mention above, the interpersonal sharing of cultural ideas resulting from group reading and discussion is what is needed before children can be expected to internalize the information. “Big Book” or digitals of

¹ Another book, which could be used, is *La Llamam América / America is her Name*, written by Luis J. Rodríguez (1997) and illustrated by Carlos Vázquez. In Smith’s (2003) review of this book he succinctly relates how this book deals with “migration, the importance of the family, unemployment and economic security, alcoholism and violence in the streets (my translation, p. 137,).” These are also socioculturally relevant subjects, which teachers might use as a base for children’s literacy tasks.

these books would allow teachers to skip the costly and time-consuming preparation of a faithful big book copy.

It is the task of the teacher today to provide students with meaningful, culturally relevant literacy tasks, since it is by relating subject matter to what the students know, do and value, that learning takes place (CREDE, in González et al., 2005). This is the base for what has been termed teaching with *funds of knowledge* (Greenberg, 1989; Vélez Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992 as cited in González et al, 1993). However, one of the drawbacks mentioned in literature about teaching with *funds of knowledge* is the time-consuming nature of collecting data on the knowledge that exists in the students' households (González et al., 2005). One response has been to publish case studies that have brought new understandings to larger numbers of interested practitioners. I suggest that another option might be for the students themselves to collect the information, perhaps as homework, and to share it with the teacher. During my second home visit, in the course of conducting the literacy inventory, children enthusiastically located sources of print in their homes. They were proud to show me their favorite storybooks, their families' collections of encyclopedias, sacred images, clothes with messages, music collections, and family keepsakes. To jot these items down in the form of a list in order to share it with classmates and teacher would be an added challenge. Teachers could benefit from knowing what kinds of texts exist in students' homes, and teachers could then expand on the use of this list by asking children to choose a text from their list and to explain, perhaps in writing, who uses the text, and what they use it for, perhaps where they use it and when. The children would thus be writing about the world they know and informing the teacher on their families' own *funds of linguistic knowledge* (Smith, 2001).

List making is one genre I observed in school assignments for young children, but it is doubtful that they are later used in class as a source of cultural information (Castillo Rojas, 2004; Ballesteros, 2003). Asking students to write a list of, for example, “skills their family members can do,” or “tools their family members use in their work” would be culturally relevant and meaningful. Work-related vocabulary can be very specialized, and so this kind of list building would challenge writers to elaborate their vocabulary. A second step could be to examine the spelling of the words in their lists. If the vocabulary involves words which do not appear in the dictionary, as it may well not, for example in the case where there are borrowings from an indigenous language, then, the students can compare ideas and decide on one spelling or agree to acceptable variations of spellings. A third step might be to compose a theme on the relationship between related words, perhaps describing a process. For example, Belen might write, “I place the onions on the scale and slide the weight over until the balance lines up with the middle mark.” Sharing this information in class would enrich classmates’ knowledge and appreciation of the community in which they live. Carried out in this way, list making could be a first step for teachers interested in incorporating available *funds of knowledge*. Furthermore, these kinds of writing assignments involve the students in producing contextualized writing that is meaningful to them, which is a stated aim of the SEP 1993 program (Castillo Rojas, 2004). If teachers present writing tasks involving subjects that students know and care about learning should take place (CREDE, in González et al., 2005).

With guidance from teachers, older students might be able to develop literacy inventories, similar to the one used in this study, and carry them out in their homes, with their extended families, and in the community. Preparing an inventory involves having

the objectives clearly in mind, finding the vocabulary to express these ideas clearly, and defining the words being used. Then, the ideas need to be organized and put into a format that allows the data to be easily recordable. Preparation of inventories could be done in class and data collection as homework. Analysis of the data gathered would be an important part of the project and, of course, a discussion on what the results mean to the children, that is, what they think the results mean in relation to their families and their community could prove to be enlightening for the teacher. Teachers could possibly use this as a base for action research

Teachers might also look to resources offered by families participating in transnational migrant circuits. Knowledge of other places could be helpful in geography, natural science, or history classes. Map literacy could be made more meaningful if explicitly related to the lives of people the students know. In Mexico, geography of the continent is typically taught in fifth- or sixth-grade. A map could be used as an inventory tool asking students to interview their extended families and write on the map the names or relationships of people who have lived in different places, finding those places on the map. The students might learn about their extended families and geography while the teacher would learn about the students' families. I had the youngest children in this study do this exercise, and later learned they had not studied the continent yet, but perhaps the experience will serve them in the future.

Print literacy is also used in the running of a business as we have seen in the Tenahua Tlatehui family shop where lists were used to record names, merchandise, dates, etc. Older children might be able to visit different family-run stores and businesses to take note of the various ways store and shopkeepers record their business transactions.

To observe and understand how business transactions are handled; to find the words to describe and explain them is quite another. Teague (2004) suggests teachers should provide writing activities, which are related to “professional contexts in which learners might one day find themselves (p.141).” Much of the economic growth in this community can be attributed to family-motivated entrepreneurial business endeavors. A writing activity involving the community’s already existing businesses opens the door for children to imagine themselves in these same activities or to imagine themselves developing new enterprises in the community. Classroom analysis of workplace literacies would allow a time and space for students to begin to evaluate their own professional future in relation to their community. These are some ideas for teachers to consider for classroom instruction and homework.

I continue with other considerations for teachers concerning communication with transnational families. School policies need to promote family-teacher communication, especially in respect to transnational families. The first months after a parent migrates are especially trying for children. As mentioned earlier, the parent-child separation takes a toll emotionally and scholastically on the child. It is important for families to let the teachers know about disruptions in the family in order for the teachers to provide support for them as they did at Alfonso Cano Elementary School. Teachers should allow students a period for adjustment, if possible, by offering the students extra attention. I observed, and teachers and parents commented on, the ease with which children cry at the mention of their fathers soon after the migration occurs. Teachers may need to sensitize classmates to this situation and create an environment in which students can play a supportive role in their classmates’ adjustment to the new family order.

The three teachers I worked with at Alfonso Cano Elementary School already had a good understanding of the issues facing transnational families. By understanding the roles once filled by the migrant, a teacher might be able to foresee and diminish the possible negative effects foresee effects on the family. Since the parent who is left behind is often overburdened with new responsibilities, the teacher should not add to the parent's workload. Rather, the teacher might work more closely with the student helping the student to achieve his or her potential. The child may also have added responsibilities at home and the teacher should not automatically suggest outside courses or tutoring for the student, since young students need to be accompanied to and from these activities. Directors of schools with transnational populations should prepare their teachers for these circumstances and allow policies which are flexible enough to accommodate transition periods. Furthermore, if the student body is in secondary school or higher, the director might also prepare teachers to discuss the risks involved in crossing borders and living in a country without a visa.

Carrying out the literacy inventory and finding examples of language brokering (as described by Kalman, 2004) in the homes gave me ideas that could be shared in a parents' workshop. Through this study, I found parents concerned with how to help their children when they saw a drop in their children's enthusiasm toward school or a drop in their children's grades. Content could follow the basic ideas of availability, access and appropriation as related by Kalman (2003), Farr (1994) and Rockwell (1992). For example:

1. Introduce the idea that not all reading and writing appears in books and in beautifully shaped letters. Using visual aids, show the parents examples of print found in the home and community environment.
2. Boost the parents' self-confidence as readers by:

- a. Exemplifying how much one can know from context and experience, the sum of their knowledge.
 - b. Exemplifying how reading is interpretation and one can “imagine” the meanings
3. Present parents with easy ways to get children reading through tasks in the home
- a. Ask their children to read to them texts that are meaningful or genuinely interesting to the parent or texts which the parent believes might interest the child. They could then comment on the content, much as we do when we listen to the radio.
 - b. Browse through a magazine with illustrated recipes, and choose one that sounds as appetizing ask the child to read the ingredients. Together, decide as to the feasibility of making such a dish.
 - c. Asking the child to read the captions of the pictures of a magazine article.
 - d. Writing a list of the names of all the pets they have had.
 - e. Looking at the calendar to see when the next vacation is or what day of the week the next birthday falls.
4. Invite parents to share their ideas
5. Explain the bases of the sociocultural theory of learning to read and write:
- a. Inviting the children to read and write
 - b. Achieving it together

Parents should leave the workshop motivated they have many opportunities within their reach to guide and motivate their children to do meaningful reading and writing.

5.6. Implications for Research

The findings of this study lead to new questions. In this section, I present several questions followed by suggestions of how future research could attempt to respond to them.

As reported in section 5.3 on limitations, many data were reported rather than observed. Also, participants tended to share only the texts they value. How might we overcome these limitations? An obvious solution is to spend more time with the participants; literacy practices are embedded in naturally occurring events. Another suggestion is to ask the participants to collect samples of their writing themselves. The

novelty of digitally photographing home texts seemed to motivate participants to bring out more examples. Giving the participants disposable cameras might motivate them to document texts they might otherwise not consider examples of “writing.” By leaving a video camera with them, they could video tape themselves when they are reading or writing together.

Payant (2005) collected data by asking her participant to keep a literacy logbook, while Faulstich Orellana et al. (2003) asked their participants to keep literacy journals in order to mitigate the observation time factor. Researchers could ask participants to record the date, where they were, whom they were with, what text they read or wrote, a description of the event, and how they felt about it. In these ways, researchers could collect literacy practices, which are not directly observed and gain insight into participants’ points of view. Furthermore, participants might record literacy practices, which they would otherwise not have thought of. Whereas, realistically, it might be doubtful that the mothers of these families would appreciate such a writing chore, the younger participants might enjoy it, if only for a day or two for the youngest participants, or a week with adolescent participants.

One of the domains in which I encountered many literacy practices was the business sub-domain of the commercial-financial domain – those embedded in the running of the general store. What literacy practices might be found in transnational families involved in other workplace literacies? Workplace literacy practices may be brought into the homes and affect the types of literacy practices with which children come into contact. This leads me to ask the following questions.

What literacy practices do members of these transnational migrant circuits carry out in their lives in the U.S. and Canada? As Levitt (2001) reminds us, much of a migrant's life in the receiving community revolves around work. How do these literacy practices affect transnational families? A study based on social networking would be valuable in studying transnational migrant circuits and would ultimately lead to a multi-site study. Transnationalism concerns not only place but also time, as the following questions imply.

This study of incipient transnationalism raises the question of what differences there might be in the role literacy plays in an incipient versus a longer-established transnational migrant circuit. Might literacy practices be more varied in these families, perhaps involving more U.S.-produced literature, more guidance in English, digital literacy used for communication? A study involving the members of a longer established transnational migrant circuit could analyze the role they have given to digital literacies in their lives.

The time factor also raises the following question. Does literacy play a role in the proliferation of transnational migrant circuits? The results of this study suggest that the role is minimal. A comparative study involving incipient and longer established transnational migrant circuits might yield an answer to this question more rapidly than a single or longitudinal study.

Time is also a factor in children's literacy development. How does transnationalism affect children's literacy development? A longitudinal study following these families might give us some answers to this question. We might be able to identify the short-term and long-term effects of transnationalism on literacy development of children. By continuing to follow the families of this study, we might find answers to the following questions. Will the transnational experience affect their literacy practices over

time? The two oldest boys in each family have interests in digital literacy. Will this play a role in their transnational experiences? The two eldest boys also have differing views on migration. Jaime is interested in migrating while Figo believes there are not enough men remaining in Mexico to do the work that Mexico needs done. Will these attitudes deepen or change in relation to their transnational experience, and how will they affect these young men's choices in education and work in the future? The next two boys, Jesus and Oswaldo, are also about the same age, and the two girls, Belen and Roberta, are classmates, while the two youngest children, Araceli and Giovanni, are also the same age and in the same grade at school. With these combinations, it could make for a very interesting study, perhaps comparing and contrasting literacy practices in relation to age. The two youngest boys expressed enthusiasm in writing to their fathers while the older boys did not comment on letter writing. Will the younger boys' enthusiasm continue? These are all questions, which could be addressed through a longitudinal study.

Researchers, in the meantime, can continue asking relevant questions and documenting their findings in order to understand the forces underlying the changes in our increasingly globalized world.

5.7. Concluding Remarks

Shortly after I began this study, I heard a teacher refer to a transnational child as "*pobrecito* [poor one]." I had not realized until then that this comment closely reflected my own thoughts about of these children. Later, I came upon D'Aubeterre's discussion of her choice of the term *transnational migrant circuit* as one that:

recognizes the actors as taking active roles in the reconstruction of their life conditions.... In diverse areas of social life, the actors carry out a set of

practices which are shaped from historic conditions and which in turn contribute to modifications in these areas through negotiation of differing and not always compatible interests (my translation, 2000, p. 65).

This perspective allowed me to see how each member of each family made choices along the way. As a result, my respect and admiration for members of transnational migrant circuits grew and I stopped pitying them.

As I pointed out in Chapter 1, Portes, et al, (1999) remind us that although transnational activities evolve in reaction to government and commercial policies, it is the individual who actually initiates and conducts them. In the case of the transnational families participating in this study, the initial impulse to migrate was economic. National and international institutions, public and private, need to develop economic, social and political policies which are more just and humane and which seek to develop work opportunities which use the human and natural resources available, and which offer just and humane salaries and benefits in return. An economy dependent on remittances sent by migrants who risk their lives to cross a border, like the economy we find in Mexico, is not just and it is not humane. These parents would rather not see their sons and daughters taking these risks in the future. They would rather have them making a fair living here in their community of origin.

Most importantly, this study has shown how these three families responsibly and creatively uses the resources they have to create opportunities for a brighter future. Meanwhile, transnational children anxiously wait for the day they can be reunited as a family. In Belen's letter from the *Querida Abuelita* exercise (seen in *Figure 2.3*), she signed off with these words for her father. "*Espero que encuentres muy bien entonces y mis tíos también se encuentren bien y me despido de ti y espero que vuelvas pronto* [I

hope you are very well and my uncles are also well and I say good bye to you and I hope you come back soon].” The brightest future still holds a family united in space and not only time.