

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

1.1.1. Theories of Literacy

The social activity of literacy involves “common patterns in using reading and writing in ... particular situations” (Barton, 1994, p. 37) and these “common patterns” “are associated with different domains” (Barton, p. 39). This means that the literacies practiced in the home and in school can be very different. Many studies have shown that the process of learning to read and write begins in the home well before children start school. Ferreiro (1982, p.128) says that “The actual writing evolves within the child through ways of organizing which the school does not recognize [my translation].” If educators are aware of the literacy practices which go on in the home, they can integrate what their students already know into the classroom. Gregory (2002, p. 3) emphasizes that “home and community” literacy practices and ways of learning are learned at home before a child starts formal education. She continues that it is important to “uncover the language and literacy knowledge held by people, ways of learning in their communities, and to become clear about how these may either contradict or complement those which count in school” (2002, p. 4).

This is important because community and school practices can differ significantly (Smith, Jiménez, & Martínez-León 2003). Smith, Jiménez, and Martínez (2003) draw attention to the characteristics of community texts, which differ significantly from school texts in the area in central Mexico where they conducted their study. Goodman (1997) stresses that becoming literate is part of everyday life and that schools usually don't take

advantage of these avenues of learning. Pérez (1998a, p. 27) points out that home literacy practices “may be not only different but oftentimes at odds with” practices associated with school learning.

This present study looked at literacy practices in Mexican homes with emphasis on the fathers’ role in their children’s learning of reading and writing. As will be shown the fathers that participated in this study do play a role in their children’s literacy development. Although most studies of family literacy have focused on the effect mothers have on their children’s literacy, Karther (2002, p.184) summarizes several studies conducted in the U.S. that have shown that the father also influences how well his children learn to read and write. Karther concludes that “early childhood teachers should not exclude or underestimate fathers” (p. 191). Ortiz (2004, p.15) observes that fathers have a role in the “early literacy experiences” of their children “although much of the research has focused on” the mother’s role. Puchner (1997) posits “that educators ... ought to expand the vision of family literacy beyond the literate-mother-to-literate-child focus.” The present study tended to confirm these findings, that is, that fathers in San Andrés also play an important role in their children’s literacy development.

This study treated literacy as a social construction. Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon, and Green (2001, p. 356) point out that “to conceptualize literacy as socially constructed is to understand that literacy is both a product of and a cultural tool for, a social group.” “What counts is ...the actions members take, what they orient to, what they hold each other accountable for, what they accept or reject as preferred responses of others, and how they engage with, interpret, and construct text” (Castanheira et al, p. 354). To look at literacy in this light is to take into consideration all the ways that literacy is used and

learned, not only in school, but also in the community and in the home. If what's taught in school is disconnected from what's observed and taught in the home and community, students, while in school, may not be able to build on the knowledge that they've already taken in and continue to take in through their home and community. Also, students have more motivation to learn literacy when what they are learning is connected to their community, home and daily lives (Hensley 1997, p.138, González & Moll 2002, p. 627)

Another concept that this study was based on is the concept of "funds of knowledge." Moll and González (1994, p. 443) define funds of knowledge "as those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being." Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992, p. 218) stress that "literacy instruction must maximize its use of the available literacy and skills with the home as a means to tap the vast funds of knowledge that parents have, but are seldom given the opportunity to share and express." Moll and González (1994) have documented the "extensive" funds of knowledge that Latino parents and students in the Tucson, Arizona and nearby communities possess and which is often not utilized in schools. Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (p. 207) say that schools often ignore the resources that the families of their students possess. Smith (2001, p. 7) "extended the concept of funds of knowledge to focus specifically on knowledge of a language," or "Linguistic funds of knowledge." This concept includes the conscious and unconscious knowledge people have about their language along with how it is acquired and utilized.

1.1.2. Objectives of Study.

As will be explained more fully in the second chapter, this qualitative study was part of a larger research project conducted at a major university in Mexico. I was part of the team of researchers studying literacy practices in the home, school, and community of a specific locality in central Mexico. “The general objective” of the larger ongoing project is “to understand the processes and ideologies that contribute to the formation of readers and writers in three primary schools in México” (Smith, Martínez-León, & Jiménez, 2002). One of the premises of this study was that the home, community and school are the primary places where children learn to read and write.

As a research assistant on this project, I interviewed eight families whose first grade child had been chosen by Teague (2004) to be case study students as will explained in the second chapter of this thesis. All families expressed agreement to take part in this study after reading a letter which explained the purpose of the study (see Appendix A). These families represent lower- and middle-class social economic levels. The educational levels of the parents range from two years of primary school to a master’s degree, with most having finished middle or high school. As the study progressed I conducted in-depth interviews with the eight case-study families. More details concerning the participants will be presented in the methods section.

1.1.3. Motivation for Research

Since the family is typically where children first encounter literacy practices, (Darling & Lee, 2003; Karther 2002) it is important to understand these home literacy practices in order to connect them to learning that goes on in school. Bennett, Weigel

and Martin (2002, pp. 16, 17) point out that “parents often direct the types of learning opportunities their children engage in, as well as when and how these opportunities take place” and that “future research should ... explore how literacy constructs, including parental education, parental reading habits, parental reading beliefs, and parental writing skills, affect young children’s language and literacy outcomes.” Thus, a major aim of this study was to see how parents’ education, habits, and beliefs affect their children’s acquisition of literacy.

Most of the research that has been conducted on family literacy has been conducted in the United States, Great Britain and Australia. This research has included studies of Mexican-American families, but the results of these studies cannot necessarily be applied to families living in Mexico, because of important differences in socio-political and economic systems, culture, language, literacy practices, and gender roles.

Nutbrown and Hannon (2003, p. 141) report that “relatively little is known about fathers’ roles in their children’s preschool literacy.” Ortiz (2004, p. 15) asserts that “fathers from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds do contribute ... although to what extent has yet to be determined.” There is even less information about Mexican fathers’ influence on their children’s literacy development. This study tried to provide a data-based examination of this topic. This will be useful to inform educators in Mexico. The need for this information is highlighted by Cairney and Ashton (2002, p. 332) who studied the literacy practices of three dissimilar families. One was a lower-class single mother with two children, the second was an upper middle-class family with two children, and the third was a middle-class family with four children. Cairney and Ashton (2002) came to the following conclusions: “There is a need to question any claims that

specific pedagogical practices are able to meet the needs of all children ... There is a need for further research that explores the impact that varied discourse practices of the type described have for children of varying class, cultural and language backgrounds.” Thus they emphasize the need for teaching practices that students can relate to, which in turn points to the importance of studying the home and community literacy practices of their students. As Cairney (2002, p. 160) explains: “families construct particular views of literacy, and what it means to be literate;” this in turn affects how they practice literacy in the home. As previously stated, home literacy practices “may be not only different but oftentimes at odds with” practices associated with school learning (Pérez 1998a, p. 27) and this can hinder the learning process.

Another motivation for conducting this study was to contribute toward the improvement of literacy education of Mexican children in the United States. Moll (1992) posits that “many minority students experience curricula that are not responsive to their funds of knowledge (defined on page three of this study) or specific needs.” Understanding more of the literacy cultural roots of Mexican children will help educators to incorporate the funds of knowledge that their students already possess into the learning process. In fact, there are so many Mexican immigrants in the United States who are from the community where this study was conducted, that the area is called an “explosion zone.” (Cortés, 2001, as cited by Jiménez, Smith & Martínez-León, 2003, p. 494). Interestingly, many Mexicans from other parts of the country move into the research site, mainly people of indigenous heritage (Jiménez, Smith & Martínez-León, 2003). It also includes people moving from rural areas of Mexico looking for work. Also, some of the case-study families have family living in the United States and there exists the possibility

that certain members of these families may spend time in the United States. Delgado-Gaitan (1992, p. 513) stresses that “it is necessary to continue examining the family learning environments of children from ethnically different groups to help educators better understand and interpret the discrete circumstances of children’s home life.” Studies done by Chall & Snow (1982) and Heath (1983) which investigated an extensive array of family literacy practices of different social classes show that the more the child’s home literacy practices are similar to the school’s literacy practices the more likely the child will be successful in school (as cited by Auerbach 1989, p.167). Pennycook (1991) suggests that an understanding of literacy practices of minority groups, in this case Mexican children in the United States, can be a means for improving their political status. Educators who understand minorities’ literacy practices are in a better position to help them be successful in their educational pursuits, and that education increases the possibilities of being involved in the political process.

1.1.4. Research Questions

This study gave attention to the following two research questions, established as part of a larger project (Smith, Martínez-León, & Jiménez, 2002):

1. What is the ecology of the written language and the literacy practices in this community?
2. What ideologies underlie the literacy practices in this community?

The following questions reflect the particular focus of this study within the larger project.

1. In the context of the study do Mexican fathers' literacy experiences tend to influence their view of their children's literacy?
2. Do fathers' literacy practices and views of literacy influence their children's literacy practices and development?
3. To what extent do Mexican fathers in this context tend to engage in literacy practices with their children?
4. How do fathers' views of literacy tend to differ from mothers' views?

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. The Socio-Cultural Nature of Literacy.

It is important to be aware of home and community literacy practices and ways of learning. It is also important to be cognizant that they are taken from home to school (Gregory, 2002, p. 5) and from school to home. Fathers' roles in the children's education are framed in part by school attitudes and practices. What fathers think they should and shouldn't do about children's literacy is impacted by schooled beliefs. Gregory continues by saying that taking a socio-cultural approach to education is to "uncover the language and literacy knowledge held by people, ways of learning in their communities, and to become clear about how these may either contradict or complement those which count in school (Gregory, p. 4)." As Luke (2003, p. 138) says: "We need a rigorous understanding of the places and spaces; ... the zones of sociocultural and political power where language and literacy are acquired and used, gained and lost outside of schools." Ortiz (2004 p. 14) emphasizes that "family literacy should be viewed as an activity continually in flux—being changed and modified by a number of economic, social, political, and personal factors to fit the needs of the family."

As already noted, Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon, and Green (2001, p. 354) say that the literacy of any group is seen through their dealings, their orientation, and the things they “hold each other accountable for.” Literacy, a cultural tool for the social group, is repeatedly being formed and reformed by new members of social groups (p.356). Therefore, beliefs and ideologies about literacy are formed in the home (Cairney 2002, p. 160) and when a child starts school she has to learn new beliefs and ideologies about literacy. If home and school literacy beliefs are greatly disconnected, the child probably will experience a significant disadvantage in learning to read and write. Nagle (1999, pp. 174,175) conducted a qualitative study of twenty working-class youths and found that those who were not introduced to “school literacy practices” at home before starting school had a harder “time accessing school literacy,” and as a result had less success in learning to read and write. Some of the participants in the Nagle study were disadvantaged because their parents had not learned to read and write well and therefore could not help their children. Also, some participants engaged in home literacy practices such as writing a “comic newsletter,” writing poetry, and reading romance novels, and these were not valued in school. Since the literacy practices in the home of middle-class students more closely resemble those of school, middle-class students have more access to school literacy practices. This actually acts as a way to keep those of different social classes in their respective positions (p. 182, 183), although it may be unintentional. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) express it: “The educational mortality rate can only increase as one moves towards the classes most distant from scholarly language.” Luke (2004, p. 334) expresses it this way:

Ethnographies of literacy must bridge not just home and school, but the local and global, and the micro and macro political-economic domains. From an educational

perspective, we need to ask – as Cavalcanti does here – fundamental questions about which languages and literacies, sanctioned by which state education systems and globalized institutions, have which kinds of material consequences in peoples' lives.

Pérez (1998b, p. 259) argues that teachers of children need to know what their students know and do not know about “print in all dimensions,” because learning has to start “from the learner’s primary discourse.” For instruction to make sense to the learner it has to start from her viewpoint. As Ben-Yosef (2003, p.82) expresses it, “Building bridges between home and school literacies ensures a meaningful educational experience for all students.”

In an article in which they analyzed the data from two research projects, Duke and Purcell-Gates (2003, p. 35) compared the literacy genres which exist in the home of students from lower-class families with those of the school. One study looked at children from 4 to 6 years old and the other looked at first graders. Both studies were conducted in the “Greater Boston metropolitan area.” Although they found similarities between home and schools literacy genres, they also found a number of differences. They posit that it is important that the school be aware of home literacy genres and incorporate them into the learning process, so that the students see “the connection between home and school literacies,” because this augments the learning process. As they say: teachers “must find out what kinds of print are familiar to children and build on those.” Along the same lines, Williams (2003, p. 22) reports that a study of three socio-economic areas of London found that there was very little difference in the literacy practices between the homes of middle-class families and those of the school, while there was considerable difference between those of economically disadvantaged families and the school. One of the differences Williams notes is that parents of middle-class children “spent a good deal

of time reinforcing what was being taught in school with reading books, spelling tests, writing exercise and educational computer programs,” while “none of the project (economically disadvantaged) parents bought their children instructional literacy books on a regular basis.”

Jiménez (2001, p. 2) contends that the reason for low academic success among Latino students in the United States is not because they lack incentive or because of their cultural background, but that it is because teachers do not have “information concerning who students are and what they want and need to accomplish through literacy,” and one might add that teachers may not have knowledge of parents’, particularly fathers’, contributions to their children’s acquisition of literacy. Jiménez says the students’ needs and the pedagogical methods used to teach them are “often inadvertently alienating,” and that one reason for this is the “disconnection” between home and school literacy practices. Cairney (2002, p. 169) posits that to be responsive to the needs of children who have difficulty learning to read and write, we need to understand the differences between home and school literacy. Freire and Macedo (1989, p. 152) assert that educators need to develop radical ways of teaching that give students the opportunity to “use their own reality as a basis for literacy learning [my translation].”

Barton (1994, p. 34) argues that “literacy is a social activity and can best be described in terms of the literacy practices which people draw upon in literacy events,” which he defines as “particular activities where literacy has a role” (p.35). He also says that each person has “different literacies” and these are “associated with different domains of life” and that these “literacy practices are situated in broader social relations” (p. 39). This makes it necessary to study the “social settings” of literacy domains, such as

the home, in order to understand how these events are (or can be) connected to other literacy domains, such as the school.

Auerbach (1989, p. 166) says that “if educators define family literacy ... to include a range of activities and practices that are integrated into the fabric of daily life, *the social context* [italics added] becomes a rich resource that can inform rather than impede learning.... Doing formal schoolwork and developing literacy are not necessarily synonymous.... In this view, the teacher’s role is to connect what happens inside the classroom to what happens outside so that literacy can become a meaningful tool for addressing the issues in students’ lives.” When one looks at the home as a domain where literacy is learned and experienced, the home is a “rich resource” to complement the learning that goes on in the school. González and Moll (2002, p. 624) talk about bridges that can join “parents and teachers, school and community.” These bridges can be connections “between practical, out-of-school, experiential knowledge and academic, abstract knowledge.” When literacy is looked at as a social construction the need for these bridges becomes apparent.

Vygotsky describes learning as this way: “Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow in the intellectual life of those among them” (as cited by Pérez, 1998a, p. 26). Using Vygotsky to support her argument, Pérez (1998a, p. 26) asserts that “the skills, concepts, and ways of thinking that an individual develops reflect the uses and approaches that permeate the community or social group of which that person is a member.” Therefore, minority students are at a disadvantage if they cannot draw on prior learning from their homes and communities when they are in school. This happens when the pedagogical practices of the school are based solely on

the “uses and approaches” of the dominant community. This can happen when the dominant community and the school are unaware of or otherwise devalue the literacy practices of minority families. Also, the minority families may themselves devalue their own literacy practices and not be willing to share them with the school and dominant community.

Bhola (as cited by Brown (1998, p. 1)) reminds us that families are part of community networks and that there is continual communication between the facets of these networks, between families, schools, and the workplace, etc. As Brown (1998, p.1) points out these communications have a social aspect and if literacy curriculum is to be effective it must “focus on the family unit as a whole,” using the culture and knowledge that the families possess as a basis for instruction.

Pennycook (2001) says that “the effects of learning a language ... can only be understood within a broader context of social and cultural relations. *So too with literacy* [italics added].” He says that instead of viewing literacy as “a monolithic entity” it is better to view it as “a set of contextualized social practices.” Again the more the “contextualized social practices” relate or are related to one another the greater the opportunity for the student to have success in learning to read and write.

A review of the literature shows the importance of the teacher being aware of the Socio-cultural nature of literacy. Since it is a “cultural tool,” teachers need to be aware of how their students and their students’ families use literacy in their everyday lives in order to teach effectively.

1.2.2. Development of First Language Literacy.

Goodman (1986, p. 107) reminds us that in literate societies first language literacy typically starts long before a child enters school. When forms of literacy are an “integral” part of their lives, children learn early that written language is one of the most important ways of representing literacy. Through observing and participating in literacy events very young children learn that “written language is one expression of language,” and that it is the main way that literacy is characterized. Children form “insights” into how written language works and discern that it is systematic (Goodman). They also learn “about the various systems of language use in literacy.” They “develop insights about the graphophonic, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic systems” of reading and writing. Before they start formal schooling they understand that “reading and writing represent ideas, knowledge, and thoughts as well as representing some aspects of oral language (Goodman).” Ferreiro (1982, p. 128) emphasizes this point when she says that “the actual writing evolves within the child through ways of organizing which the school does not recognize [my translation].”

Bloome, Katz, Wilson-Keenan and Solsken (2000, p.2) assert that parents teach their “children how to use written language in ways consistent with their community cultural practices.” Laosa (1982, p. 824) makes the argument, based on a series of studies conducted in the United States, that an effective way to lessen the gap between home and school would be to make schools “more like the home” and to help parents to “better prepare children for school.” These were empirical studies of Chicano families which showed “a strong connection” between how much education parents have and how they “interact with their children.” They looked at the connection between parental schooling

and teaching strategies, whether schooling affected the type of literacy activities parents engaged in with their children, and whether parental education impacted their children's "development of specific cognitive skills" among other factors (p.823). Cairney (2000, p.172), in an article on home and school literacy in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia, makes this important observation:

The increased interest in the relationship between home and school is one of the most positive educational developments of the last decade. While this interest is not new, recent initiatives have increasingly begun to move beyond simply transmitting knowledge from schools to parents and their children. Instead, there has been a growing desire to move towards genuine partnership between home and school and a search for processes to facilitate the reaching of mutual consensus between parents and teachers.

In spite of the progress made in this area, he also says that "schools have done better at acknowledging than at responding" to this need. He says that if schools and parents form a partnership there is a "potential for schooling to be adjusted to meet the needs of families."

From another perspective, Barton (1994, p. 178) says that school literacy "has become the accepted literacy" and that it marginalizes other literacies. He says that "school attitudes and values influence society generally," so that "the general public view of reading and writing is influenced to some extent by schooling and images of what goes on in schools." Schools have rules which are different from the general community (p. 179). "Official teaching has its own set of practices" (p. 180). Nagle (1999, p. 183) reports that the working-class participants in her study were often frustrated because their literacy practices had little connection with the middle-class literacy practices which were valued by their schools. By marginalizing community and homes literacy practices,

schools actually make learning to read and write unnecessarily difficult and children learn to view school literacy as disconnected from what they care deeply about.

This section has highlighted the importance of recognizing the role the family plays in first language literacy learning. It has also shown the importance of not marginalizing home and community literacies, because children learn better when schools build on the forms of literacy they already possess when they start school.

1.2.3. Home Literacy and Funds of Linguistic Knowledge.

Leichter (1997, p. 20) argues that we can further “our knowledge of education in general” by studying the “richly diversified educational encounters” that are a part of family life. She continues that one must view the family as a domain where learning consistently occurs and that this will ideally “enlighten and extend our fundamental theory of educational encounters.” In an article in which she describes the many literacy events that occur in the home, Goodman (1997) makes the following statements:

Those who speak to families and communities about literacy development, who plan literacy curriculum for schools, or who publish literacy materials must be knowledgeable about the literacy events that occur in a wide range of households. As the variety of literacy experiences in different homes are acknowledged and respected, families come to believe that the literacy events they experience in their homes are legitimate roads to literacy learning.

She further explains that it’s important that parents know that the “cultural literacy events” that occur in their home scaffold their children’s literacy learning. Lacasa, Reina and Albuquerque (2002, p. 61) found that when parents help their children with homework “school tasks acquire new meaning.” In other words, by working with their children on their homework parents help their child see a connection between school and

home literacy. However, Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman and Hemphill (1991, p. 127) found that the parents in their study tended to believe it was their responsibility to see that their children's homework was completed, rather than viewing the doing of homework as a time to teach their children. This shows the need of educating parents as to their "supplementary teaching" role.

Potts and Paull (1995, p. 168) support what Goodman asserts by saying "most children who succeed in school learned early," most likely from their parents, "that reading and learning are important and that educational goals are attainable." They say that "in some families" this doesn't happen. This underscores the importance of parents being aware that literacy events in the home not only support their child's learning, but also that their attitudes toward home and school literacy affect the attainment of their children's long-term educational goals. They say that "educating children might not have long-term effects if the messages in the home do not support their learning (Potts & Paull)."

Senechal and LeFevre (2001, p. 50) also show the importance of parents being involved in their children's literacy development. They conducted a five-year longitudinal study of 111 middle-class children in Ottawa, Canada, which demonstrated "that storybook reading may have a long-term impact on the acquisition of reading through its relation to the development of vocabulary," but their "results also suggest the children who are exposed to a variety of home" literacy activities have the highest probability of being successful in literacy acquisition.

Research has shown that the amount of reading material in the home and the parents example play a crucial role in their children literacy development (Millard, Taylor

& Watson, 2000; Teale & Sulzby (as cited by Sénéchel, LeFevre, Thamas and Daley, 1998); Webster and Failer, 1998). Britto and Brooks-Gunn (2001, p. 76) found that if parents view reading “as a source of entertainment” their children will have a “more positive attitude” and have “better reading skills.” Along the same lines, Baker and Scher (2002, p. 265) report that “parents who believe that reading is pleasurable convey a perspective that is appropriated by their children.” They found that this view of reading by the parents not only influenced their children’s “developing reading skills,” but also their “choice of leisure activities.” That is they tended to choose reading as a leisure activity more often than other children.

Baker and Scher (2002) studied sixty-five six-year-olds and their mothers from four different socio-cultural backgrounds, which included low income African Americans, low income European Americans, middle income African Americans and middle income European Americans. They found that “parental beliefs and home experiences contribute” to the motivation their children have to learn reading and writing. They also found that “motivation levels” were substantially the same in the four socio-cultural groupings that they studied. They say that “what parents say and do” does more to promote constructive incentives than does socioeconomic status (p. 261). In a study of 137 first-graders in Lima, Peru, Castro, Lubker, Bryant, and Skinner (2002, p. 343) found that “parental expectations appeared to be strongly associated with ... children’s ... reading skills.” Again showing the importance of parents being conscious of their pivotal role in their children’s literacy development.

Another way of looking at home literacy is the concept of funds of knowledge. As previously stated, Moll and González (1994, p. 443) define funds of knowledge “as

those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being.” They say that family households have vast funds of knowledge that are connected to the family’s origins and to work and activities that take place in the home. They say that exploiting these funds of knowledge “allows both teachers and students to continually challenge the status quo, especially in terms of how the students are using literacy as a tool for inquiry and thinking, and to refurbish their learning with new topics, activities, and questions (p. 451).” When teachers take advantage of these funds of knowledge the learning experience of all students in the classroom are greatly enhanced. As Moll (1992, p. 22) argues: “These ... funds of knowledge represent a *potential* major social and intellectual resource for the schools.” In the study’s research context the father of the family is often more apt to work outside the home than the mother is. The knowledge that fathers gain through their jobs is an important segment of these funds of knowledge that the school could take advantage of.

Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992, p. 218) further emphasize the importance of incorporating funds of knowledge into pedagogical practices. They say that it’s important to give teachers the “opportunities to learn how to incorporate the funds of knowledge from their students’ households into learning modules that approximate the total reality of the population.” Vélez-Ibáñez (1996, p. 275) conducted a study in which this was done. Parents shared their knowledge with the schools, and teachers researched and organized “home resources for classroom use.” One of the outcomes of the study was that the parents “no longer considered their knowledge superfluous to school

knowledge.” Teachers came to view “households as repositories of strategic information” (Vélez-Ibáñez).

Although there has been little study of home literacy in Mexico and specifically of the role of fathers, Rockwell (1997) studied eight diverse schools in Mexico, both state and federal. She did 50 observations of classes from third to sixth grade. Based on these observations she “posits that children are less likely to become literate in school, where instruction focuses primarily on skill acquisition, than through a variety of experiences that she refers to as ‘extra-instructional activities.’” These include magazines traditionally discouraged by the school (such as TVNOTAS, a popular in publication México similar to the National Enquirer in the United States), posters and other announcements in the school directed toward adults, letters written by adults to other adults and other instances of literacy that they find in the school, home and community. She provides evidence “that children appropriate reading and writing processes for themselves, in spite of instruction” (as cited by Seda-Santana, 2000, p. 8). Similarly, Jiménez, Smith, and Martínez-León (2003) found that Mexican schools in the region of their study tended to emphasize the mechanics of writing over the expression of ideas. Apparently children have to learn to express ideas in writing in other places, such as the home, as Rockwell posits. In accordance with this, the Secretaria de Educación Pública (2001, p. 49) in Mexico did point to the need for giving more attention to learning to think and express oneself, both orally and in writing.

Research has shown that parents play an important role in their children’s acquisition of literacy. Parents need to be cognizant of the critical role they play and teachers must be careful not to discount the importance of the literacy practices that take

place in the home and community, so that they can build on what their students already know as they start school.

1.2.4. Fathers' Role in Home Literacy.

Most study of fathers' role in home literacy has been conducted in the United States. Ortiz (2004, p. 15), who has studied Mexican-American fathers, says "that fathers from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds do contribute to their children's early reading and writing development has been suggested in the literature, although to what extent has yet to be determined." Ortiz (2000) conducted a study of 26 Mexican-American fathers in Southern California. Of the 26 fathers 21 were 2nd and 3rd generation Americans. (He defines 2nd generation fathers as those whose parents were emigrants from Mexico.) He found evidence that Hispanic fathers do contribute to their children's early reading and writing development (p. 8). He says that the "literacy materials used" in the home "were not always at the child's reading or cognitive level." In spite of this, he says that these literacy activities are beneficial because they promote bonding between the child and father and because the father comes to know his child's literacy preferences. Ortiz say (2004, p. 16) that Hispanic "fathers participated in early literacy activities because they viewed it as important, interesting and necessary not only to themselves but also to their families." Since the studies that Ortiz has done all investigated fathers who were born in the U.S., the results are probably not directly applicable to the Mexican context. Such things as bilingualism, emphasis on English, and amount of education (all the fathers in the 2000 study were bilingual and educated) affect the results of Ortiz's study.

In another study, Ortiz (1996) reports that all fathers who participated in his study reported engaging in some literacy activities with their children. However, his study found evidence “that fathers who share child care duties with their spouses read and write more often with their children than parents who divide these tasks.”

Karther (2002, p. 191) studied two fathers whose families were involved in a federal literacy program in West Virginia. Even though both fathers were described as having “low literacy,” the study found that they were interested in their children’s literacy development and that they initiated literacy activities with them, even the father who could not read. Karther concludes that “early childhood teachers should not exclude or underestimate fathers.”

Although research on the father’s part in the development of their children’s literacy is limited, there is sufficient evidence that shows they play an important role, although this isn’t always recognized by the schools. This underlines the need to continue studying how fathers may influence their children’s literacy development.

1.2.5 Being a Man in San Andrés

Because this thesis focuses on the fathers’ role in the literacy acquisition of his children, this section describes some of the cultural characteristics of men in the research context. Undoubtedly the Cholulan society, like the rest of Mexico, is a society where male opinions and decisions tend to dominate at many levels. In their demographic description of the research community Álvarez, Corro and Lorandi (1992, p. 74) affirm that the father is the head of the family and that his relationship with the family is somewhat distant. The mother is the one who establishes the communication and

intimacy with the children, but with the support of the father. This is more evident in a rural context where education, mass media, such as television and the internet, and influences from other cultures have not affected cultural norms as much as in an urban society, but is still evident in San Pedro and San Andrés.

Robichaux (2003, p. 136) reports that, traditionally, when a couple marries the husband takes his wife to live in the father's house, and then builds his own house on his father's property near his father's family. He says that the exception is the youngest son who continues to live with his parents in order to care for them and when they die he inherits the family home. If the husband goes to live with the wife's family one hears sarcastic comments such as "Se fué de nuero." The role of the man and father is provider and protector of the family. In many cases this is only an ideal because of diverse factors such as alcoholism and unemployment. In fact, unemployment is the main reason many Mexicans from this community, especially men, migrate to the United States in search of work in order to provide for their families materially. Many men leave confident of their wives' fidelity, leaving her to take care of their children. Many who emigrate to the United States for a time believe, upon returning to Mexico, that they have bettered themselves economically (Malkin, 1998). Others say they return in worse conditions. Others prefer not to return to Mexico to live, although many do return to visit when they can. Given that it is a society with wide economic differences, there are those who because of education, family inheritance or because of connections have been able to acquire wealth without leaving the country (Malkin, 1998).

In her study of gender roles in San Andrés and San Pedro Mlade (2001, p. 36) explains that "the wife has the right to complain if her husband is not meeting his

responsibility as provider, likewise the children can complain if their father is not supporting them correctly.” Mendoza (2005) tells us, in an article in a popular Mexican magazine, that in return many Mexican men expect obedience and, at times, submission from their wives, and children. From his wife he expects fidelity, although infidelity on his part is considered a sign of virility and masculinity, especially if he fathers many children with his wife and his mistresses (Mendoza, 2005). Even so, it is not considered manly for a man to be seen carrying his young children in his arms. These concepts are currently in the process of changing, since, in many young couples, it is more common to see one, two, three children, at most, instead of the larger families that were common previously. It is also now more common to see young fathers carry their young children in the arms, and it appears to me that fathers are more apt to worry about their children’s well-being and future. One of the participant families in the current study reflect this trend. The mother finished only the second grade because she had to stay home and take care of her younger brothers and sisters while her parents worked, so she and her husband do not want their children to have part-time jobs so that they have sufficient time to attend school and do their homework. Also, all the participant fathers say they want their children to attend university although most of them didn’t attend university themselves. It has been suggested that these trends are due to various factors that are changing old customs, such as education, television, the internet, and influences from other cultures, which can be observed in those who return from the United States and bring the American culture with them (Mendoza, 2005).

The literacy rates for men and women in the two communities still reflect the fact that previously women weren’t encouraged to finish primary school (Mlade, 2001, p. 39,

40). While the overall literacy for persons 15 years and older in San Andrés is 92.3 percent, 94.7 percent of the men are literate, and only 90.1 percent of the women according to the 2000 census. The same trend holds true in San Pedro; the overall literacy rate is 93.8 with 94.7 percent of the men and 90.1 of the women being literate (2001 tabulation based on 2000 census, INEGI). More women were economically active in 2000 than in 1990 in San Andrés according to INEGI, 16 percent in 1990 versus 28 percent in 2000. This is compared to 67 percent of the men in 1990 and 74 percent in 2000 (2000 census, 1990 census), possibly showing that women are becoming less economically dependent on men. However, educational opportunities do not seem to have increased substantially for men or women. In 1990, 42 percent of the females in San Andrés aged 15 to 19 were attending school, whereas in 2000 the percentage had only increased to 43 percent. During the same period the percentage of men attending school increased from 40 percent to 45 percent. By way of comparison the percentage of persons in this age group attending school in the United States was 82 percent in 2000 (US Census Bureau, 2000).

1.2.6. Methodological Precedents

This study followed the qualitative procedures as outlined by Bogdan & Biklen (2003) and Neuman (2000). I chose qualitative procedures because they are an ideal means to identify and analyze the practices of a certain community. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand “behavior from the subject’s own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 2). As Taylor (1983, p. 89) explains: “The importance of qualitative research is not the discovery of some particular manipulation, but the

questions it raises in developing new understandings of the local and distinctive meanings and uses of literacy in the *lives of people* [italics added], we may come a little closer to appreciating some of the assumptions ... that form the basis of our present pedagogy.”

As will be explained more fully in the third chapter of this thesis, I collected the data through interviews, observations, and analysis of school and home literacy documents. Collection was over a period of eight months during which I visited homes of each participant from seven to eight times, allowing for “sustained contact with people in settings where subjects normally spend their time” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 2). I used constant comparative method as described in the third chapter of this thesis so that analysis would be ongoing and would affect the nature of the interviews conducted.

The methods that I used in this study were based on methods used previously in four projects. The first was an ethnographic study conducted by Karther (2002), in which she used semi-structured interviews in accordance with qualitative procedures. She spoke in-depth with two fathers whose families were involved in a federal family literacy program in West Virginia. She interviewed them regarding their own experiences in trying to learn to read and write. Both are described as having low literacy and had “been in special education programs and had problems with reading in school” (p.191). She wanted to find out how “they view literacy experiences for their children,” and if “they engage in literacy activities with them as readily as other fathers” (p.184). Karther says that she used the phenomenological approach outlined by Hycner in which “statements were segmented, categorized, and then grouped according to similar and related meanings. Common themes and groupings were examined to determine similarities and differences” (p.185). A similar approach was used for the present study.

The second study that I used as a methodological model was that conducted by Taylor (1983). She used ethnographic procedures to describe six middle-class families who lived in suburban communities within fifty miles of New York City and “the diverse ways in which” they “use literacy daily in their daily lives” (Taylor, p. viii). She collected examples of the families’ writing and says that “the discussion which the artifacts stimulated proved an invaluable source of information” (Taylor, p. 26). The current study used the same data collection technique to stimulate conversation about the families’ literacy activities and their views thereof.

I also used as a model for my study a study conducted by Auerbach (1989). In the Auerbach study the researchers used a “social-contextual mode of family literacy” to study how parents’ ways of understanding literacy could be used to make school curriculum more meaningful to students. In this study they “listened, read, and talked with students about literacy in their lives.” They observed what these students “said, did and showed in the course of day-to-day classroom interaction” (Auerbach, p. 167). This same method was used when visiting the homes of the participant families.

The last study I used as a model was conducted by González & Moll (2002) and is an ethnographic study with household visits which sought to discover families’ funds of knowledge. They say the investigators entered the homes “as learners ... with a theoretical perspective that seeks to understand the ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives” (p. 625). They used a “mix of guided conversation and interviews” whose purpose was to draw out information to “foster a relationship of trust” so that families would be able to tell about their way of life and their experiences. The teachers were from a variety of backgrounds and were not necessarily of the same culture as the

families they visited. They say that the interview became “an exchange of views, information, and stories,” and that the families and the researcher became acquainted on a personal level (p. 625). The current study endeavored to use these same interviewing techniques.

1.3. Research Strategy

1.3.1. Assumptions

The current study sought to understand how fathers’ own literacy experiences influence their views toward their children’s literacy and how these influence their children’s views about literacy. It also sought to find to what extent Mexican fathers in the research context engage in literacy practices with their children. In order to investigate these questions I visited the homes of selected case study families in order to document the experiences, attitudes and activities of the individual members.

The first assumption I made is that the families in this Mexican context may participate in different literacy practices than families in others contexts such as in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia where other home literacy studies have been conducted. This assumption is made because the history, culture, and languages of the research context are different from the above mentioned contexts. Also, the role of the father may be different (see section 1.2.5 of this thesis). At the same time one would expect to see some similarities between the literacy practices of those of Mexican origin living in the U.S. and the participants of the study. However, by not being unduly influenced by research conducted in other contexts I entered the investigation with an

open mind and was able to come to conclusions that were relevant to this particular research context.

The second assumption was that the participants have lived in the research site for a considerable period of time. This is important because if the participants are from other countries or other parts of Mexico their practices and beliefs could be influenced by their places of origin in addition to their residence in the local community. One of the instruments used in the larger study, the Socio-Familiar form (see Appendix C) which is described in the third chapter of this thesis, was designed to confirm this assumption (Teague 2004, p. 17).

I also made the assumption that we do not know enough about the father's role in literacy development and that there is great potential in using this knowledge to improve the outcome of the pedagogical process (see section 1.1.3 of this thesis).

1.3.2. Possible Outcomes.

One of the principal questions of the proposed study was: do the fathers' feelings and views about literacy influence their children's feelings and views about literacy? At the start of the study I thought it possible that even though the fathers' feelings and views seem to influence their children's feeling and views about literacy, there are other factors that may influence them more, such as the child's personality and interests. Keeping this in mind helped me to keep an open mind about the outcome of the study. I also thought it possible that some parents had experienced low access to education when they were young and that they would seek more opportunities for their children.

In Karther's (2002, p. 191) study of two fathers with low literacy, she found that "the fathers attempted to support their children's literacy learning" (Karther, p.191). Based on preliminary evidence, I thought it was possible that the current study would find that the fathers in this context also attempt to support the children's development of literacy. The extent to which fathers do this and the ways in which they see and define "support" may be influenced by their own literacy experiences and activities. Other factors could have been identified which seem to influence this, such as socio-economic status and educational level.

Bennett, Weigel and Martin (2002) found the literacy activities in the home had a positive effect on children's literacy development. I expected that the current study could come to a similar conclusion. Other possible factors which could have been identified included parents' attitudes toward literacy and/or the actual practices that take place in the home.

Ortiz (2004) found that Hispanic fathers participated with their children in literacy practices "for many reasons, such as bringing the family together, taking part in fun time," and involving their children in their work (p. 15). I viewed it as probable this study would also find that Mexican fathers engage in literacy practices for these reasons and I thought it was probable that it would discover others. I thought it possible that the findings would be similar to those of other Mexican contexts and contexts outside of Mexico; however, I thought it was also possible that there would be important differences.

I also expected to find that some families wouldn't provide a reading environment, defined in section 4.1, (Teale and Sulzby, as cited by Sénéchal, LeFevre,

Thomas and Daley, 1998, p. 96; Britto and Brooks-Gunn, 2001, p. 75; Webster and Failer, 1998) for their children and that that would effect the literacy development of their children in a negative way.

1.4 Research Design

The design of this study was based on qualitative methods outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2003). The qualitative paradigm was chosen because the purpose of the study was to identify and analyze the literacy practices of parents in a certain community. Gay & Airasian (2003) say that the qualitative “researcher studies the perspectives of the research participants toward events, beliefs, or practices.” The investigation consisted of case studies of eight families. As Merriam (1998, p. 28) explains a case study design is used when “researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing.” Case study design does not imply a particular kind of data collection or analysis, but refers to a design which involves “the examination of an instance in action (MacDonald and Walker (1997), as cited by Merriam, p. 29).” Ethnographic methods, such as interviews and observations, were used to examine “how people create and understand their daily lives—their method of accomplishing everyday life” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 29).

Case studies can be distinguished from other types of qualitative research in that they are “particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 30). Particularistic means certain ‘situations, events, programs, or phenomenon’ are the focal point. Each case reveals important information about the phenomenon. Descriptive refers to the end product containing “rich, thick description.” The description is qualitative and

uses narration and documentation of situations and events instead of numerical data to analyze phenomenon. Heuristic means that the reader is helped to understand the phenomenon under study. The case studies “can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known” (p. 30).

Data collection was mainly based on interviews, observations and document analysis. I interviewed the families using a form (described in the third chapter of this thesis) which was developed by the larger project to gather basic educational, employment, and literacy information on the families. I also used a form (described in the third chapter) developed by the larger project to gather socio-economic information along with linguistic characteristics of the families. Another important source of information was the field notes taken during the 2003-2004 school year by Teague (2004), who observed the first grade class from which the eight case study families were selected. Additional data were gathered during the literacy inventory and semi-structured in-depth interviews, which are described in the third chapter of this thesis.

Qualitative research design entails a blend of data collection and analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (2003, p. 66) describe it this way: “First the interview, then the analysis and theory development, another interview, and then more analysis, and so on.” This constant comparative method is ideal for multi-data source studies and since the analysis starts near the beginning it is almost complete when data collection is finished (Bogdan & Biklen). Glaser ((1978), as cited by Bogden & Biklen, p. 67) says that the constant comparative method can be described as a series of steps, but these steps happen at the same time. “The analysis keeps doubling back to more data collection and coding (Glaser as cited by Bogdan & Biklen, p. 68). As Neuman (2000) points out the

qualitative researcher “is not seeking universal laws, only regularities within a social context.” The constant comparative method was useful in seeking these “regularities within” the “social context” of the study.