

CHAPTER 2: SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

2.1. Context and Participants.

2.1.1. Community

The school from which the case study students were initially selected is a semi-private school located in San Andrés Cholula, a municipality of about 50,000 people. San Andrés is located near a city of about 2 million which is the state capital. Jiménez, Smith and Martínez-León (2003, p. 494) say that this municipality “is one of the oldest continually populated cities in the Americas. Its history reaches back at least 2,000 years, perhaps further.... This region is close to areas considered ‘expulsion zones’ (Cortés, 2001, as cited by Jiménez et al., p. 38) by the Mexican government because so many people ... leave to work in the United States ... This region is also a ‘recipient zone’ for persons of indigenous background who come primarily from the southern regions of the country” (Jiménez et al., p. 38). According to INEGI (2001 tabulation based on 2000 census) 320 persons from San Andrés (0.7 per cent of the population 15 years and over) and 335 from San Pedro (0.4 per cent of the population 15 years and over) reported emigrating to another country in the year 1995. This is a substantial change from what Álvarez, Corro and Lorandi (1992, p. 27) report from the 1990 census. They say that only ten persons from San Andrés attempted to emigrate to the United States in 1990 and that not all were successful. These numbers seem low given that 96 of 218 (44%) of those who participated in the *censo-lingüístico* survey (described in Section 2.2.3)

responded that they had family living abroad. However, only one of the participants in the current study reported having lived in another country (U.S.A.).

Because many persons from the research community emigrate to the United States for work, their transnational status may affect literacy in the homes of the families still living in the community. For example, families of trans-nationals may receive letters and gifts from their relatives in the United States which may include English names and expressions. The gifts they receive may include instructions for use in English, such as for a small appliance. Many persons of indigenous background also move to the area from other parts of Mexico, mostly from the southern regions, in search of work (Jiménez, Smith and Martínez-León, 2003, p. 494). For this reason the research community is influenced by literacy practices and indigenous languages of the new residents' places of origin. One of the members of the COSOLEM team (see section 2.2.1.1) is currently writing her Master's thesis on how trans-nationalism and migration within Mexico affect literacy practices in the homes of families in San Andrés. Sullivan's (2005) preliminary results indicate that when a family member is living abroad, the remittances that the family member sends back to his family in Mexico have an indirect impact on literacy practices. Although these remittances are being used to meet everyday needs, they are also invested in more long-term undertakings, such as opening a business which introduces new literacy practices to the children and practices which the mother may already use but applies in new ways. In addition to the thesis being done by Sullivan, the directors of the COSOLEM project have done work on transnationalism and Mexico Profundo (indigenous peoples and their customs as discussed below) (Smith, Murillo & Jiménez, 2005).

The state of Puebla also has a high concentration of speakers of indigenous languages, and the school from which the case study students were selected also directs “outreach centers” in the northern part of the state to help indigenous populations (Jiménez et al, 2003, p. 38). These outreach centers consist of schools based on the same philosophy as the school from which the case study students were selected. The two communities in which the participant families live have many remnants of indigenous cultures in the food, everyday language and religious customs (Murillo, 2005, Jiménez & Smith (2004). INEGI (2001 tabulation based on 2000) reports that 6.1 percent of the population of San Andrés and 3.7 per cent of the population of San Pedro speak an indigenous language. Shadow and Rodríguez (1992, p. 65) describe in detail San Jaun Tlautla, which is only five kilometers from the center of San Pedro. They report that in this community, Nahuatl, the language spoken by their great-grandparents, has disappeared. However, it is still apparent in many family names and local vocabulary. Although, there are still some speakers of native languages in San Pedro and San Andrés, the situation is similar to that of San Juan Tlautla in that most of the population do not speak a native language, but their family names and the vocabulary they use reflects the native languages of the predecessors.

Bonfil Batalla (1996) discusses in-depth how indigenous peoples’ customs still play an important part in the everyday life of the average Mexican. This is in spite of the efforts made by colonizers to rid the country of these customs. He refers to these indigenous peoples and their customs as *México Profundo*. Bonfil Batalla urges that policy changes be put into effect which would allow indigenous persons to have more

control over their own destinies and that would allow them to “reconstruct the necessary cultural space to develop a modern civilization” (p. 172). He says that

educational policy must be revised in depth with the goal of leaving in the hands of the community an ever-larger number of decisions about the content, methods, general organization, and functioning of the school system. It will be necessary to direct the sufficient credit and funding to finance self-directed productive projects, without trying to subject them to the rigid policies of the imaginary Mexico,

that is the Mexico which ignores the culture and needs of indigenous peoples. Of course, doing so would include allowing indigenous persons to incorporate their own literacy practices into their schools and local governments. Luke (2003, p. 139), speaking of indigenous communities in Australia, says that “it is easy to deliver education and, indeed, alphabets on the one hand while running policies that actually accelerate the deterioration of communities’ kinship structure, traditional values, and forms of work, ... and community social infrastructure on the other.” These are the kind of policies that Bonfil Batalla (1996) seeks to replace with approaches that are more sensitive to indigenous persons’ background. This is important for the current study because some of the participating families have roots in *México Profundo*.

The community is a rich archeological zone and is also rich in colonial architecture and history. For this reason many tourists, both Mexican and those from other countries, visit the area. It is common for residents of San Andrés and San Pedro to say they want to learn English to be able to speak with foreign tourists. Like other parts of Mexico there are many small businesses which cater to residents and visitors. These businesses generate much “community script” which shows variations from standard Spanish (Smith, Jiménez, & Martínez-Leon, 2003). There are several large

universities in the community which provide educational and employment opportunities for the local residents as well as for those from other parts of Mexico and other countries.

Although poverty is evident, there is a significant middle-class, as evidenced by the many housing developments and late model automobiles. The populations of the two communities are quite young with about 62 percent of the population being 29 years and younger. (2001 tabulation based on 2000 census INEGI). While this is about the same as the rest of Mexico, the percentage of persons in the United States 29 years and under is only 42 per cent (US Census Bureau, 2000). Álvarez, Corro and Lorandi (1992, p. 158) say that in 1992 the area was essentially rural; however, it now shows all the signs of becoming increasingly urbanized.

The area is rich in traditions which have been passed down from pre-Hispanic and colonial times, such as the religious cargo system (described later in this section). One lower-middle-class family expressed disappointment that although many of these traditions still exist they are slowly disappearing because of new residents and modernization. One of participants of the present study, a middle-class mother who grew up in the nearby capital city, said the reason she chose the area for her and her son is because it “represents a quality of life: clean food, lack of pollution, not a lot of noise, and the ability to walk the streets.”

Mlade (2001) has described the two municipalities in which the eight participant families live. She says that the two municipalities, which are adjacent, are closely related politically and economically. Both communities still have some unpaved streets; however, the commercial areas and all major streets are paved. All respondents to a socio-linguistics census, described in section 2.2.3, reported having electricity in their

homes, although two families interviewed for purposes of the larger study said that service was often cut off because the landlord did not pay the bill and they do not have separate metering. See Table 2.2 for more information on access to basic services in the research communities.

Although San Pedro and San Andrés were originally agricultural communities, this is no longer the case. In their description of San Juan Tlautla (described above) Shadow and Rodríguez (1992) say that in Tlautla the majority of the residents cannot make a living in agriculture and that most residents either work in the local brick-making industry or find employment in San Pedro or the nearby state capital. According to Shadow and Rodríguez the situation is the same for the residents of San Andrés; that is, they often find employment in nearby communities.

Mlade (2001, p. 18) reports that religion is an important part of the residents' daily lives, and that many events, such as birthdays and saint days, are "celebrated with a mass." Indeed Álvarez, Corro and Lorandi (1992, p. 256) conducted a study of one of the two communities, San Andrés, in which they analyzed the government census data, Civil register, and interviewed 14 percent of the population. They report that in 1992 72.9 percent of the population said they attended mass every week, although they believe this to be an exaggerated number, "an attempt to project a favorable image of themselves [my translation]." There are many churches in the two cities: thirty-eight Catholic and two Protestant (Mlade, 2001). Mlade (2001) describes in detail a religious cargo system which is an important part of religious and social life in San Andrés and San Pedro. This cargo system is characterized by fiestas, "rites and rituals which are designed to appease their spiritual network of God, Jesus, Mary, and the saints" (p. 25). Participation fulfills

both spiritual and social obligations. It is also common for residents of San Andrés and San Pedro to participate in pilgrimages to religious shrines, some of them many miles away, by bicycle and on foot. All these religious practices involve literacy practices, such as memorizing prayers, reading the Bible, and making lists of guests and resources needed for fiestas. In spite of the general religiousness of the community only one of the participant families in the current study stated that they attend church regularly. Perhaps the participant families are not typical as far as involvement in religious life is concerned.

Álvarez, Corro and Lorandi (1992, p. 234) report that at the time of their study 89 per cent of the heads of household reported that they could read and write and a third of those interviewed indicated they hadn't completed the third grade. Indeed, while conducting the socio-linguistic survey, described in section 2.2.3, it was noted by members of the larger project that there were some parents who didn't feel competent enough to fill out the questionnaire without the help of the interviewer. Only 9.9 percent of those who participated in the Álvarez study indicated that they read a newspaper everyday and 60.2 per cent said they rarely or never read a newspaper (p. 235). Álvarez, Corro and Lorandi (p.248) conclude that there are two obstacles that make education difficult for the children of the area: (1) economic necessities and (2) a lack of perceived relevance that the educational system has to the lives of the families. They say that there is still a need for children to help the family to earn a living and that parents in San Andrés often don't see the practical relevance of educational programs. In order to overcome these problems they say that competent and motivated teachers are needed and that the "classroom needs to be inserted into the community." Mlade (2001, p. 39, 40) reports that in the past many women did not finish primary school, and that now the

attitude is changing and many mothers encourage their daughters to finish high school. The literacy rates in the two communities still reflect this attitude. See section 1.2.5. INEGI statistics show an increase in the literacy rate in San Andrés from 89 percent in 1992 (according to Alvarez) and 92.3 percent in 2000 (according to INEGI).

2.1.2. The Case Study School

The school from which the case study students were selected was part of the larger study, and regular observations in the first grade classroom of Gertrudis (pseudonym) had been ongoing for nine months when the present study began. Access to the school had already been negotiated by the larger study. Indeed, the eight case study students had already been selected, as will be described in the next section.

The school, Centro Telpochcalli, is a semi-private, non-governmental institution which was founded in 1985. Members of the local community built and equipped the school which consists of 16 classrooms, along with workshops, offices, computer lab, and library. The school originally consisted of preschool, primary, middle and technical high school (Vázquez, 2003, p. 2). (The Vázquez document was written by a former principal of the school for fund raising purposes.) During the 2004-2005 school-year only the high school is in operation,¹ along with special after-school classes in art, English, and computers for primary and middle school students who attend other schools. However, at the time the case study students were identified, during the 2003-2004 school year the primary and middle school levels were still in operation.

The mission of Centro Telpochcalli is to “investigate, develop and implement psycho-socio-educative actions and processes in order to develop the human, social and

technical capacities of the children, youth and the marginalized population of the country in order to better their socioeconomic situation and that of their families and their communities (Vázquez, 2003, p.8).” The stated goals of the school include the betterment of the levels and quality of life for indigenous populations and the acquisition of knowledge, abilities and attitudes by the students that promote their personal, social and economic development along with that of their families and communities (Vázquez). Although the original goal was to fill the needs of low-income and marginalized children, the students represent a range of socio-economic classes, from children of laborers to children of university professors. The director told me the main focus has always been low income children and children with learning disabilities (Juan Balmaceda, personal communication. May 10, 2005). Because the school claims to be based on an educational model which responds to the human potentials of children and youth, it appeals to parents who are concerned about their children’s education. Álvarez, Corro and Lorandi (1992, p. 234) reported that although much progress had been made in providing education to all children in San Andrés, a quality education was still not available to all public school students in the community. (Lorandi, one of the authors of the above cited reference, is a co-founder of the case study school.) Indicating that this problem still exists, several participant families stated that the low quality of public education was the primary reason for choosing Centro Telpochcalli for their children.

One middle-class father who participated in the study told me that he and his wife had chosen the school because it included children with disabilities. He was glad that his daughters had had the opportunity to learn sign language and thus converse with deaf students at the school. He said that the fact that there were art, English and computer

classes had also influenced their decision. In the *censo-lingüístico* survey conducted at Centro Telpochcalli (described in Section 2.2.3) 34 of 65 parents gave the quality of education as the reason for choosing the school for their children. Some of the others reasons given were music, English, and computer classes; teaching methods which helps the students to develop self-esteem and thinking ability; and the inclusiveness of all peoples.

The case study parents saw Centro Telpochcalli as an alternative to both public and private school curriculum. However, since the selection of the case study students (described below) Centro Telpochcalli has closed the primary and middle school sections and only the high schools remains. The school raised the tuition from 600 pesos (about \$54 US) a month to 1200 pesos (about \$108 US). This resulted in many parents choosing to send their children to other schools and thus led to the closure of the primary and middle school sections.¹ One of the participant families told me that there had been rumors of corruption in the financial dealings of the school. I attempted to get the director's side of the story, but this proved to be impossible. Since the school was closed I probably spent more time with the children's family than otherwise would have been the case. If the school had been open I could have observed the case study student's literacy development both at home and at school.

2.2. Researchers

2.2.1. Larger Project

As previously stated, this study was part of a larger project being conducted at a university in central Mexico. This project began in 2002 and is scheduled to continue

through 2005. The primary investigators for this research project are two professors from a local university, both with Ph.D.'s in Education, and a professor from Vanderbilt University in the U.S., who also holds a Ph.D. in Education. During past semesters the professor from Vanderbilt has taught classes as a visiting professor at one of the universities situated in the proposed research site. Also, there are three graduate students and one undergraduate student gathering and evaluating data in support of the larger project. One of the graduate students is studying education and two of them along with the undergraduate are studying applied linguistics. The research team is made up of three native Spanish speakers, one who speaks English fluently, and four Americans, two who speak Spanish fluently and two who speak it at the advanced level. Teague (2004), who is bilingual, was part of the research team from 2002 until 2003. Thus, all members of the COSOLEM team are either advanced or native speakers.

2.2.2. Primary Researcher

I am a U.S. citizen and have lived most of my life in the United States. I had considerable exposure to literacy events and material from an early age. I lived with my mother, older brother, and grandfather until I was 18 years old. My mother and grandfather both read for pleasure regularly. My mother was a very religious person and read the bible and bible-related materials daily. She also required that my brother and I read such materials when we were old enough to read. She also required us to attend religious meetings three times a week where these materials were read. After each paragraph was read aloud, a question that was printed in the magazine was read and the audience was invited to answer the question by summarizing the information in the

paragraph. My mother required my brother and I to read the article ahead of time, to underline the main points in the paragraphs and to participate in the church meetings. All of this was, of course, in addition to the reading I did in and for school. In spite of this additional reading, I never developed the ability to read rapidly. However, about in the seventh grade I did start to read for pleasure. In the ninth grade I started reading classics such as works by Charles Dickens and Somerset Maugham. Also, in the ninth grade I started to apply myself in my school work and achieved a B average throughout high school. I believe that I achieved modest success in high school because I had learned to read for pleasure. I believe that if one reads for pleasure, reading becomes second nature and academic reading becomes easier.

I am the father of one child (now an adult), so I have considerable personal experience with family literacy. Both my former wife and I read for pleasure regularly, and our daughter acquired this same habit and did very well in school. Unfortunately, because of the religious beliefs we held at the time my daughter did not go to college. In fact, I did not attend college until I was fifty years old. During the years between high school and university I often read news magazines, such as *Time*, and novels. During this time I worked as a computer programmer and regularly read information technology journals.

While completing an undergraduate degree in Spanish I studied as an exchange student at the university where the larger study is being conducted. I am currently studying a master's degree in applied linguistics at the same university and have lived in the research area for two years. One of the required courses of this program gave me opportunity to learn about the literacy practices of San Andrés. Each student was

required to gather information about the literacy practices in the community in different domains, such as in schools, libraries, and businesses. In a final course project, I investigated and reported on literacy practices in a sixth grade classroom in a public school in San Andrés (Vance, 2005). The graduate students read each other's observations and interviews and used this information when writing their research papers. This added to my background knowledge of the research communities. Before living in Mexico I spent many vacations in Mexico and other Latin American countries. During these visits I noticed an absence of materials that I associate with mass literacy. I noticed that book stores and newsstands do not seem to sell many novels. The easy-to-read novels sold at most American supermarkets seemed to be missing, although translations of the classics were often available in bookstores. Although comic books also seemed to be commonly available at newsstands, I started wondering if Latin Americans have acquired the habit of reading for pleasure.

While doing research of a sixth grade classroom in a public school (explained above), I noticed that many fathers accompanied their children to school and spoke with their teachers. They also attended special events and meetings to which parents were invited. While interviewing fathers for the current study, I found that they viewed literacy as an important asset which would allow their children to have a better quality of life. I see fathers in the research community as being very interested in the literacy acquisition of their children.

My knowledge of Spanish is at the advanced level. During the data collection phase of the study, I compensated for not being a native speaker by recording interviews and having them transcribed by a native speaker, as well as by verifying my

understanding of local culture with residents of the area and with members of the research team. During my two years in Mexico I have lived with a Mexican who is a primary school teacher who has twenty years of teaching experience. He has proved to be a valuable resource regarding Mexican literacy practices and ideas about schooling.

2.3 The Families

As part of my work with the larger project, I observed and interviewed eight families that had already been selected by the larger project regarding their literacy practices. These eight families were participants in the current qualitative study. All the families had at least one child who attended the Centro Telpochcalli during the 2003-2004 school-year. As part of my work with the larger project, I observed the first-grade class of teacher Gertrudis during the last two months of the 2003-2004 school-year. Teague (2004) observed this same class from August 2003 through May of 2004 and had already selected ten students to be case study students. The case study students were chosen on the basis of their literacy level (high, medium, low) (Teague 2004). This is similar to the way Jiménez, García and Pearson (1995, 1996) assessed reading levels of the participants in their studies, but in this case an addition level was added, medium. Teague (2004) made an initial determination of the students' literacy levels after observing the class for three months. Without revealing his findings, he asked the teacher to divide the students into the same three literacy levels (high, medium low) for the purpose of confirming/disconfirming his findings. The case study students were then selected from each of the three literacy levels with an effort to include students from different socio-economic status, genders, those with and without family living abroad,

and some who have family members who speak an indigenous language (see section 2.1.1). Of course, with only ten subjects it was not possible to have perfectly balanced groups, so the ten students represent a mix of these factors (Teague 2004, pp. 41-43).

While the main purpose of the Teague study (2004, p.2) was to “understand the processes and ideologies that contribute to the construction of readers and writers” in the classroom, the main purpose of the current study was to understand these processes and ideologies as they occur in the home. For this reason it was necessary to visit the families in their homes. In order to get to know the parents of these ten case study students the other researcher and I waited at the front gate after classes were dismissed for the day until the parents came to pick up their child(ren). We introduced ourselves and asked if we could visit them at their homes in order to talk about home literacy practices. Two of the families were contacted by Teague (2004) and I contacted seven of the families. The father was present when I initially visited these seven families, which was important since the focus of this study is to assess the father’s influence on their children’s literacy development. All the families received me well and I told them that I was doing a thesis on family literacy. All of them indicated they would be willing to talk with me further. Although one of the families contacted by Teague (2004) is headed by a single mother, I decided to include this family in the study because one of the research questions asks how fathers’ views of literacy tend to differ from mothers’ views. I was unable to contact two of the ten families.

The families were informed that participation in the study was voluntary, that all information was confidential and that their identities would be concealed. They were

asked to sign a consent form giving me permission to publish my findings using pseudonyms (see Appendix H).

As stated in section 1.2.5, Álvarez, Corro and Lorandi (1992, p. 74) report that although the father is the head of the family, his relationship with the family is somewhat distant. They say the mother is always the one who establishes the ties of communication and intimacy with the children, but with the support of the father. Mlade (2001, p. 61), who conducted her study nine years later, reports that gender roles are still well defined, but that they are “subject to individual interpretation and flexibility.” The fact that the families who participated in this study had chosen an alternative school in hopes of improving their children’s education could mean that the fathers in these families are more involved in their children’s upbringing than most fathers in San Andrés. What follows is a brief description of each of the eight families.

The Torres family consists of seven persons. Juan moved to the research area when he was three years old and Elvira when she was 12 years old. They have three children, Mara, Rebecca, and Jaime, a case study student. Juan’s parents, Pedro and Juana, also live with the family. They live in a lower-middle-class house with three bedrooms, a kitchen, a living/dining room, and a bathroom and they own a 1988 pick-up truck. Their house is made of concrete blocks and has a cement floor. The property they live on was purchased by Pedro, Juan’s father, thirty years ago. They live on a dead-end street which is near several upscale housing developments. Across the street from their home there is a cornfield. The property has a run-down look to it. The roofs of the various buildings have the skeletons of second floors not yet completed. Juan’s brother also lives on the property in a separate house with his family and has a fork-lift repair

business there. This arrangement fits the pattern described by Robichaux (2003) for families with Mesoamerican roots, in which the sons build homes on their father's property. In fact, Juan is in the process of building a separate apartment for his family above the house his family is currently living in with his parents.

Juan, who finished *secundaria* (middle school), was unemployed when I first met the family, but subsequently found work in a tire shop. Toward the end of the study he quit his job at the tire shop and is now doing construction work. He lived in the United States, where he worked in a tire shop for over three years, and returned about two years ago. He recently mentioned that he'd like to go back to the United States in order to earn money to support his family. He has mentioned several times that he earns very little at his current job. His wife, who works as a housekeeper, finished only the second grade of primary school, but gives the impression of having had more education in the way she expresses herself. She likes to do handicrafts such as embroidery and ceramics. Juan's parents, Pedro and Juana, also, finished only second grade of primary school. The three children were attending Centro Telpochcalli when I met the family. Mara was in the fifth grade and Rebecca and Jaime were in the first grade. Jaime is a year older than Rebecca, but they are in the same grade because Jaime had to repeat the first grade. The children are now attending a public school. The three children were very friendly and always greeted me enthusiastically.

The Vázquez family consists of five persons. Ricardo and Alma and their three children: Carlos, 19, Eric, 10, and Hector, 8 (case study student). The parents were both born and raised in other parts of Mexico, Ricardo in Mexico City and Alma in Saltillo, Coahuila. The family lives in an upper-middle-class home which is in very good

condition and has a fenced yard for their two small dogs. Ricardo, who attended three semesters of university, is an instructor of automobile mechanics and Alma, who finished *secundaria* (middle school), does not work outside the home and is currently attending a high school for adults. She plans to have a high school diploma by the end of 2005. Carlos, who has always attended public schools, is taking a year off school and working in a restaurant before finishing his last year of high school. Eric and Hector, who are very fond of playing soccer, were attending Centro Telpochcalli when I met the family, and are now attending a bilingual parochial school. During the summer of 2004 Ricardo and Alma took a two-week tour of Europe, which is something that the other participant families would not have the resources to do. Eric and Hector are both very quiet and usually only talked to me when I asked them specific questions.

The López family also consists of five persons, Aldo and Amparo and their three children: Natalia, 17, Teresa, 15 and Alicia, 8 (case study student). Aldo and Amparo were born and raised in the research area. They live in a rural community about seven kilometers from the center of San Pedro Cholula in a middle-class home. They say they intentionally chose to live in a rural area so that they are not close to their families, who live in the city of Puebla. This is in opposition to the pattern Robichaux (2003) describes for Mesoamerican families, in which sons often build homes on their parents' property. Their home is at the end of a dead end street which has about five homes on it. Their living room is attractively painted and has nice furniture; however, the rest of the house is a little more rustic. Aldo has a master's degree in rural development planning and Amparo, who doesn't currently work outside the home, has a bachelor's degree in engineering. Amparo is currently studying English for three hours a day and Aldo works

as a training consultant. The three children were all attending Centro Telpochcalli when I met the family. Aldo and Amparo both taught content subjects in an indigenous school in the northern part of the state for seven years after they finished their university degrees. Both have expressed their belief in the importance of acceptance of all people, including people of different races, handicapped persons, and gay and lesbian persons. The children tend to be shy, but did make an effort to talk to me. All three of the children are now attending a private school.

The Arellano family also consists of five persons: Javier and Lila and three children. Javier, who was born and educated in Cuba, is the step-father and does sound engineering work as a private contractor. Lila, who studied one year at a local university, describes herself as a *comerciante* (merchant). The children are Octavio, 13, Dolores, 12, and David, 8 (case study student). Of the three children, only David attended Centro Telpochcalli when I met the family. The family lives in a small middle-class home in a housing development. The home, called a *casa aparte*, is similar to what is commonly called townhouse style in the U.S. It has a very small front yard, which is mostly taken up by the only parking place. The family owns two cars. The two older children tended to disappear upstairs when I visited the family, but David, the youngest, is very outgoing and liked to talk to me. He is now attending a public school.

The Lara family is made up of the two parents, Marcelo and Marilú, and three children: Esaú, 8 (case study student), Areli 6, and Leticia, 1. They live in a one-room home above Marilú's father's workshop and own a late model economy car. Their home is divided into sleeping area and living/kitchen area by a curtain. When I met the family the main door to their home was a curtain, but they have since installed a white metal

door. They are also in the process of painting the walls which were unpainted previously. Both the parents finished high school. Marcelo was unemployed when I first met the family and is currently working for a bus company as a mechanic trainee. Marilu works as a clerk for a large discount chain. When I met the family, Esaú was the only child attending Centro Telpochcalli because the younger two weren't then of school age. Esaú and Areli are now attending a public school. The children tend to be shy, but seem to enjoy talking with me about their literacy practices.

The Escoto family consists of only two members: Mariela, the mother, and Roberto (case study student), age 8. They live in a small two-bedroom apartment in a pleasant apartment building, and Mariela bought a used late model economy car about three months before the study ended. Mariela completed a technical degree in accounting and works at a local university. Mariela has traveled to Cuba and England for short periods for vacations. She is interested in learning Nahuatl and also in having Roberto learn it, so he will learn something about his heritage. They were studying Nahuatl in an informal study group when I met them, but their teacher left the area for two months, but has now returned and Mariela hopes that she and Roberto can continue to study Nahuatl with him. She says the study group mostly reads poems in Nahuatl. Roberto is very outgoing and seemed to enjoy interacting with me. He is now attending a bilingual parochial school.

The Ramírez family is made up of six persons: Alejandro and Rocío and their four children, Roman, 12, Cristina, 10, Isela, 8 (case study student) and Graciela 4. Alejandro studied for three years to be a veterinarian, but dropped out of university and has been a semi-truck driver for twenty years. He is away from the home for one to two weeks at a

time because of his job. He works for a company based in Laredo, Texas, and drives between Laredo and Puebla. Rocío, who doesn't currently work outside the home, completed middle school. The family lives on a property owned by Alejandro's parents. Alejandro's parents live in a large house and three of their sons, including Alejandro who is the oldest, live with their families in smaller separate houses on the same property. This fits the pattern Robichaux (2003) describes for Mesoamerican families (see section 1.2.5). The property has a prosperous feel to it. There is a very pleasant picnic area near the houses with picnic tables and lawn. Alejandro and Rocío have recently added a new kitchen to their house. The walls are decorated with colorful tiles below and painted peach above. Alejandro's father, Isela's grandfather, is an author of books which he says tell the unofficial history of Mexico. Alejandro tells me that his youngest daughter, Isela, enjoys reading her grandfather's books. All the children except Graciela, who suffers from cerebral paralysis and attends special education classes, were attending Centro Telpochcalli when I met the family. The children are now attending a private school.

The Gutiérrez family is made up of five persons, Jose Luis and Nehomí and their three children Antonio, 9, Abril, 8 (case study student), and Fernando, 1. They live in a very basic brick house and don't own a car. The house has a dirt floor which has been treated in some way so that it is not dusty. The brick walls are sparsely decorated and the furniture is quite old. The kitchen has a refrigerator and a two-burner hot plate, but there are no cupboards or counters. Two cardboard boxes serve as storage space. The family lives on property owned by Jose Luis's mother. His father recently passed away. Jose Luis, who works as a butcher for his brother-in-law, finished middle school. Nehomí, who currently does not work outside the home, attended Normal, which is a teacher

training school, for two years in Puebla. She left school before graduating in order to care for the children. Jose Luis works seven days a week and doesn't arrive home until eight at night. Although Jose Luis seemed concerned about his children's education, he didn't seem as interested in participating in the current study as the other fathers. The children are very shy and only talk to me when their mother encourages them to do so. Antonio and Abril both attended Centro Telpochcalli when I met the family and are now attending a public school.

As the foregoing discussion shows, the eight participant families share some similarities and a number of differences. Six of the eight families own their own home, but their homes vary greatly, from a home with a dirt floor to an upper-middle-class home. All but one of the families owns at least one car. The educational level of the parents varies greatly. Alicia's mother has a bachelor's degree and her father has a master's degree; whereas, Jaime's mother finished only the second grade and his father finished middle school. Most of the parents finished at least high school. Six of the eight families have three children. The socio-economic level of the families varies from lower-class to upper-middle-class, with most being middle-class. On average, the socio-economic level of the eight participant families is higher than the community at large. See Table 2.2 for further information. Five of the families have family members living abroad and six of the heads of household have traveled to a foreign country. None of the family members report being able to speak an indigenous or a foreign language.

2.4 Case Study Students

David is an energetic, intelligent seven-year old, who says he likes American football very much. He exerts himself in school, although he is easily distracted. At the end of the first grade his teacher told me that although he learned rapidly he had not developed as much as he should have during the first grade. She said this was due to a lack of support from his mother. I mostly observed and talked with David in his home. He was always friendly and anxious to be a part of the conversation, although he didn't interrupt the adults. He had the major role in the Christmas play at his school and was very excited when he told me about it. When I asked him if he likes to read, he said, "not much." When I probed a little more he said he likes to read action and suspense stories, but not novels. His mother tells me that he does not like to write, but when I asked him about that toward the end of the second grade he said he had written notes and letters to his friends. His mothers tells me that he has to work harder in the public school he is now going to than he did in Centro Telpochcalli. She says this is because the public school demands more of him. The miscue analysis performed near the end of his second grade (described in section 3.3 of this thesis) suggests that although his oral reading ability was low, his comprehension was high.

Although Alicia appears to be shy when talking to adults, she was often reprimanded by her first grade teacher for talking to her table-mates too much. During my visits to the family she always spoke with me and showed me a book or something

she had written. Her teacher told me that Alicia is very good at drawing, that she exerts herself in her school work, and that she reads and writes very well. Her parents tell me that she often writes “historietas,” which are similar to what Americans call comic books (see example, Chapter Three, Figure 3.2), and that she reads very rapidly for her age. Her mother says Alicia likes to read stories, especially novels, and that she also likes to read aloud. Her mother says that Alicia sometimes reads to her when she is doing housework. The miscue analysis assessment performed near the end of the second grade (described in section 3.3) suggests that her reading level was high in both oral accuracy and comprehension.

Esaú is a quiet boy who says he likes to do homework very much. At the end of the first grade his teacher confirmed this, saying that he seemed to really like school. She also said that he is creative and that he had changed considerably during the year. She said by the end of the year he had become more outgoing, didn't get angry as easily, and that he had developed the ability to make friends. She also said that he was able to write long sentences. His parents told me that he reads well and that he likes to read silently, although the miscue analysis test performed near the end of the second grade (described in section 3.3 of this thesis) suggests that although his oral reading ability was high, his comprehension was average. They also said they were proud of how well he had done during the first grade. When I asked him what he liked to do in school he said, drawing, reading, and arithmetic. When I asked him if he liked doing homework he replied, “Mucho (very much).” He says he likes to read about dinosaurs and the human body. He says he likes to write stories in school, but when he is at home he prefers to draw. His parents said they were concerned that he wasn't learning as much in the public school as

he had in Centro Telpochcalli. They said that much of what was being covered in his second grade class he had already learned during the first grade at Centro Telpochcalli.

Hector is a quiet boy who takes school seriously and takes soccer even more seriously. His first grade teacher told me that he learns very quickly and that at times he got bored so she assigned him additional work. She said that although he was serious about school he did have the tendency to play around during class at times. When I first met him at school he seemed very shy and would hardly speak to me, but at home he did respond when I talked to him. His parents say he is conscientious about doing his homework and that he likes to read fables. His father says that if he explains something complicated to Hector, he understands and can repeat the details very exactly. He says Hector is very articulate and that he has a good imagination. He is now going to a private bilingual school, where he is studying English. The miscue analysis procedure performed near the end of the second grade (described in section 3.3 of this thesis) suggests that his oral reading level was average, but his comprehension was low.

Abril is a quiet girl who likes to talk with her friends. Her teacher told me that she is very studious and that she likes to learn new things. Her teacher says she advanced considerably during first grade, but that her mother helps her too much. When I visited her family's home she seemed quite bashful, but when I engaged her and her brother in a game of "Basta" (see section 4.12 of this thesis), both were quite animated. Her parents tell me that her reading is limited to school work, although on the first visit they did show me a story book that they read to the children from time to time. Her mother said that she has Abril read to her while she is doing her housework, and they look up words they don't know in the dictionary. Her parents said that the subject she prefers the most in

school is Spanish language arts. She likes to write and she often plays at writing letters to her friends. She also likes to tell stories to and read to her baby brother. When she reads to him she read from her Spanish language arts book and from a small book of children's fable. Her parents report that she is doing well at public school and the miscue analysis performed near the end of the second grade (described in section 3.3) suggests that her reading level was average.

Jaime is a distracted seven year who was thought to suffer from learning difficulties when he was in the first grade. His teacher told me that was a very noble boy who likes to share and that he likes to talk to everyone. The first time I talked to his parents they told me that he had a learning deficit; however, the observations done by Teague (2004) suggest that he is easily distracted but that he can learn when he puts his mind to it. His parents reported that he has progressed well during the second grade, however, a miscue analysis assessment performed near the end of the second grade (described in section 3.3) suggests that his reading level was low. His mother says that he matures slowly and attributes this to his lack of progress. His parents report that the family only reads when the children are doing their homework. His father says Jaime seems to be more interested in earning money than in studying.

Isela is a quiet, hard-working girl who likes to talk with her friends. Her first grade teacher described her as an excellent student who likes to read and who writes interesting stories. Her teacher also said that she gave Isela extra work at times because she was able to finish the regular work before the rest of the students, and therefore would get bored. Her parents tell me that she loves to read and that she reads for pleasure just about everyday. Isela's grandfather writes books which he says are about the

“unofficial history” of Mexico. Isela likes to read her grandfather’s book, showing she is at an advanced reading level for her age. Her parents tell me she is continuing to do very well in all her subjects at the private school she attends. The miscue analysis performed near the end of the second grade (described in section 3.3) suggests that her reading level was high.

Roberto is a very out-going boy who enjoys playing soccer and talking with his friends. His teacher tells me that he changes between being aggressive and affectionate. She says he reads well, which was confirmed by the miscue analysis procedure performed near the end of the second grade as far as comprehension is concerned, (described in section 3.3), and that he expresses his ideas very well when he writes. Roberto draws very well and his father, who is an artist, gives him drawing lessons. His mother says he spends a lot of time drawing. During first grade he was disciplined by his teacher for fighting with other students and not working. His mother reports these problems are continuing in second grade. His mother also tells me that his language is mature for his age. Roberto tells me he likes to read about robots and outer-space.

Table 2.1 Background of Case Studies Students and Their Families

Case Study Student	Education of Parents Father Mother	Socio-Economic Status ²	Gender of Case Study Student	Reading Level of Case Study Student ³
Jaime Torres	Middle school 2 years prim.	Lower-middle	Male	Low
Hector Vázquez	3 semesters univ. Middle school	Upper-middle	Male	High
Alicia López	Masters Bachelors	Middle	Female	Medium
David Arellano	Bachelor's 1 year univ.	Middle	Male	High
Esaú Lara	High school High school	Lower-middle	Male	Low
Roberto Cano	NA ¹ Tech. degree	Middle	Male	High
Isla Ramírez	3 years univ. Middle school	Middle	Female	High
Abril Gutiérrez	Middle school 3 years univ.	Lower	Female	Medium

¹ No data available on father. Does not live with family.

² Socio-Economic Status was arrived at by observing the families' homes and possessions.

³ Reading level is what was originally determined by Teague (2004) and confirmed by their first grade teacher after three months of first grade.

Table 2.2 is based on data collected by the larger project using the *censo-lingüístico* instrument (see Appendix B) which was developed to gather socio-economic and linguistic information about the families whose children attended the three schools that the larger project is studying. The questions focused on the type of home the family lives in, their educational level, their perceived importance of learning English, whether or not the family has relatives living abroad, whether or not the family has visited other countries, etc. These data were collected at Centro Telpochcalli during November 2003 by asking parents to fill-out the *censo-lingüístico* form. The table compares the eight participating families with the sample (65) collected from the school from which the families were selected (Centro Telpochcalli). The last column contains the same information from samples of the three school (218) which the larger project studied, Centro Telpochcalli and two nearby public schools. The data seem to indicate that the eight participating families are representative of the school from which they were selected, but when the participating families are compared to the data of two public schools, it appears that their socio-economic and educational levels are higher. This is understandable given the fact that Centro Telpochcalli charges tuition, and parents with higher socio-economic status would be more able to afford to send their children to this school. Also, Centro Telpochcalli is an alternative school whose stated goal is to provide better learning opportunities for its students. It seems likely that parents with higher levels of education would be more apt to have chosen such an alternative school.

On average, the socio-economic status of the eight participating families is higher than that of the families whose children who were attending the two public schools being studied as part of the larger study. A higher percentage of participant families have

phones, cable TV, Internet access, and cars than the public school families. Also, the case study families have a substantially higher level of formal education, on average, than do the public school families. 100% of the heads of household of the case study families finished middle school, while only 50% of the heads of household of the public school families finished middle school. The difference is even more pronounced when high school (75% versus 23%) and university (50% versus 5%) are compared. The percentage of participating families that have traveled abroad is also much higher than the public school families (75% versus 4%) as is the percentage that reports that they speak some English (25% versus 5%).

Table 2.2 Censo-lingüístico data. Comparison of Cento Telpochcalli and the Two Public Schools Being Studied as Part of the Larger Study.

	The participating families (8)	Centro Telpochcalli (65)	Paz Montañaño (69)	Abraham-Sánchez (82)	PM and AS (151)	The three schools (218)
Phone	7 88%	55 85%	40 58%	56 68%	96 64%	151 69%
Cable	2 25%	6 9%	0 --	6 7%	6 4%	12 6%
Internet	3 38%	23 23%	0 --	6 11%	6 4%	29 13%
Car	7 88%	52 80%	10 14%	27 33%	37 25%	89 41%
Own their own home	6 75%	47 72%	51 74%	60 73%	111 74%	158 72%
Finished middle school	8 100%	60 92%	23 33%	52 63%	75 50%	135 62%
High school/technical career	6 75%	53 92%	10 14%	25 30%	35 23%	88 40%
At least some university	4 50%	34 52%	2 3%	6 7%	8 5%	42 19%
Post graduate	1 12%	8 12%	0 --	0 --	0 --	8 4%
Family living aboard	5 63%	34 52%	24 35%	38 46%	62 41%	96 44%
Visited other countries	6 75%	23 35%	2 3%	4 5%	6 4%	29 13%
Speak English fluently	0 --	1 1%	0 --	0 --	0 --	1 1%
Speak Some English	2 25%	28 43%	2 3%	5 6%	7 5%	35 16%
Indigenous Languages	0 --	0 --	3 4%	4 5%	7 5%	7 3%

(00) number of families interviewed % represents percentage of those interviewed

Notes for Chapter Two

1 In August of 2005 the middle school was reopened, with class sizes averaging about 7 students.