

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 Overview

This study has found that fathers in the research context are very interested in their children's education and that they view it as their responsibility to help their children learn to read and write well. Contrary to stereotypes of Latino men, the fathers in the current study, regardless of socio-economic level, indicated that they view it as very important to help their children with their school work, and all say they provide such help on a regular basis. This is true even if the father had negative experiences when he was learning to read and write. All the participant families also want their children to receive a good education so that they can be better off economically in the future. All the families, again, regardless of socio-economic level, want the children to go to college. The data support the findings of other studies that if at least one parent reads for pleasure the children are more apt to learn to read and write well. The data show that among the study's participants the mother is more apt to read to the children than fathers during pre-school years. It is important to remember that these results were found in a research context where six percent of those 15 years and older are reportedly unable to read and write, another 15 per cent have not finished primary school, and another 29 per cent have not finished middle school ("Alarmante rezago educativo," 2005). In spite of, or perhaps because of, these low levels of education, the participants are very interested in their children's education. The results of this study suggest that the residents of the research communities place a high value on education; however, the above-cited statistics show

for that everyone to have an equal access to education more is needed than placing a high value on education.

5.2 Discussion of Research Questions

Each of the four research questions will be discussed based on the results contained in the previous chapter. The results are compared with results of other studies which were discussed in Chapter One in order to show how these results relate to trends in the field of home literacy.

5.2.1. Research Question #1: In the context of the study do Mexican fathers' literacy experiences tend to influence their view of their children's literacy?

The data do not seem to indicate that father's literacy experiences tend to influence their view of their children's literacy. Whether or not they had positive or negative experiences while learning to read and write, the data indicate that all seven of the fathers are anxious to have their children learn to read and write well. The data also indicate that they are willing to spend time with their children helping them to learn. This supports the findings of Ortiz (2004, p. 16), that Hispanic "fathers participated in early literacy activities because they viewed it as important, interesting and necessary." Those fathers who had positive experiences while learning literacy want their children to have the benefits of learning to read and write. Those who had negative experiences also believe it is important to learn to read and write. They do not want their children to have negative experiences, but they do want them to receive the benefits that one derives from being literate.

Jaime's father says all his experiences were good although he says he liked school "*regular*" (OK). Hector's father says reading extensively helped him to achieve his goal of increasing his vocabulary and being able to express himself better. Alicia's father says he had some bad experiences with a literature teacher in middle school and, also, that he has vision problems that make it hard for him to read. David's step-father says that reading has been a source of pleasure since he was seven or eight years old. Esaú's father says he had negative experiences with a teacher in primary school. Isela's father regrets that he was not required to exert himself to learn to read well while in (public) primary school. Abril's father says he didn't always get enough to eat while he was in school and that this affected his learning.

These various experiences didn't seem to affect how they view their children's literacy learning. All seven fathers want their children to learn to read and write well so that they will have a better future. In support of this, all said they were concerned that their children didn't miss school for unnecessary reasons and all said they very much wanted their children to attend college.

These findings are consistent with what Karther (2002, p. 191) reports in a study of two low-literate fathers. She found that "despite their own school failures and frustrations with learning, the fathers attempted to support their children's literacy learning." Four fathers in the current study report having had negative experiences while learning to read and write. However, all four make tangible efforts to support their own children's efforts to learn to read and write. Karther (p. 191) emphasizes that school "should not exclude or underestimate" father's influence on their children literacy development. Pucher (1997) says the school's view of the family literacy shouldn't focus

on just the “literate-mother-to-literate-child” paradigm, but should include the father. The results of the current study support this conclusion.

As previously stated, Ortiz (2004, p. 16) found that Mexican-American fathers helped their children with literacy activities “because they viewed it as important, interesting and necessary.” He says that this is true of fathers from “diverse backgrounds” (Ortiz, p.15). All the Mexican fathers in the current study expressed this same view that it is important and necessary to help their children. Those who were from middle-class families and those who were from low-income families believe that if their children are to have a better future it is their responsibility as fathers to help teach their children to read and write well. This concurs with the findings of Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (as cited in Millard, Taylor & Watson (2000), p. 191.) They found that parents of all socio-economic classes want their children to have a good education. Also, the fathers in the current study had this same desire for their children whether or not their parents had supported them in their own efforts to learn while they were children.

In support of this, these seven fathers all expressed their belief that it is important to help their children with their homework. Five of the fathers report helping their children with their homework frequently, and two say they help from time to time. One of the fathers that reported helping with homework from time to time works out of town most of the time; therefore, he is unable to help his children frequently. The other is a step-father and doesn’t seem to be involved in his step-children’s education. He says he helps them with specific questions only and that he checks for accuracy and completeness after the children have finished their school assignments.

Senechal and LeFevre (2001, p. 50) emphasize the importance of parents being involved in their children's literacy learning. An important way for parents to be involved is to help them with their homework. Lacasa, Reina and Alburquerque (2002, p. 61) report that when parents help their children with homework, it enlarges "the range of meanings that learners attribute to the task," because the parents provide a different "script" than that of the school. All the parents seemed to be instinctively aware of this in that they could see the importance of explaining things to their children that they didn't understand about their school work. They seemed to be aware that they possessed funds of knowledge (Moll and González, p. 143). For instance, I observed Hector's father help his older son study Greek mythology. He was drawing on his own knowledge to help his son. Esaú's father said he enjoys remembering the things he had learned in school, which he draws on when he helps his children with their homework. Jaime's father spoke of sharing the knowledge he and his wife have with their children. However, the parents seemed to discount the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Moll and González, 1994, p. 443)." For example, Jaime's father said he and his wife want their children to have more education than they would receive at home. As discussed in Section 1.2.3, a study conducted by Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) suggests that for parents to see the value in these types of funds of knowledge they need to be educated as to their usefulness.

Although fathers' experiences didn't seem to affect their view of the importance their children's learning of reading and writing, it appears that they had some effect on whether or not they provided a reading environment for their children. The data suggest

that parents who were read to as children are more apt to provide a reading environment for their children. Three of the four fathers who report that their parents read to them frequently during the preschool years provide a reading environment for their children.

The data collected from the eight families tend to indicate that the family's socio-economic level, the father's parents' educational expectations, and the father's educational level correlated with whether or not the family provided a "reading environment" for their children. When asked if reading and writing were important, all parents participating in the study responded that they were very important. However, the more formal education the parents have, the more apt they are to provide a "reading environment." Although it appears that reading for pleasure is a middle-class literacy practice, it is important to note that the ability to provide this reading environment requires the family to have the economic resources to buy books and other reading material. The data reflect this reality; the three families with the lowest socio-economic level are the ones that are least apt to buy reading material for their children.

5.2.2. Research Question #2: Do fathers' literacy practices and views of literacy influence their children's literacy practices and development?

Baker and Scher (2002) report that "what parents say and do" (views and practices) does more to promote constructive incentives than does socioeconomic status. The results of this study tend to confirm this. All seven fathers (and their wives) expressed the view that it is very important to them that their children learn to read and write. At the same time, all the case study students responded that they believe that it is important to be able to read and write well. Since both the father and the mother believe it is important for their children to be literate, it is not possible to posit whether the

father's attitude toward literacy is more important than the mother's. However, it is probable that when both parents hold this view that it has the most beneficial effect.

If we look at the practice of reading for pleasure, we see a difference between the mother and the father in several of the participant families. However, all the children who read for pleasure also have at least one parent who reads for pleasure. In the case of Hector, only his father reads for pleasure. Both of Alicia's parents read for pleasure, especially her mother. There are no data on Roberto's father (who does not live in the same household), but his mother does read for pleasure and Isela's mother has a passion for reading. The children who do not read for pleasure do not have a parent who reads for pleasure. This suggests that both the mothers' and the fathers' example is very important.

The data also tend to support Rockwell's (1991) findings from a study of eight diverse Mexican schools. She concluded that much of what children learn regarding reading and writing often takes place outside the school setting, in the home and community. The case study students in this study who seem to have the highest probability of succeeding academically are also those who see their parents reading at home and who are surrounded by reading materials. Seda-Santana (2000, p. 8) say that children tend to "appropriate reading and writing for themselves." It is more probable that they will do this successfully if they have the example and access to reading materials in their homes.

5.2.3. Research Question #3: To what extent do Mexican fathers in this context tend to engage in literacy practices with their children?

Some of the literacy practices that the fathers in this study report engaging in with their child include reading stories while their children were of preschool age, helping with school work, helping with English, and watching movies in English with Spanish subtitles. Some also reported that they have their children read street sign and advertisements while they were walking or driving down the street. When asked how they help their children with reading and writing all responded that they did so by helping them with their homework.

Only two of the seven fathers reported having read to their children frequently during their preschool years. As Karther (2002, p. 191) asserts “men may still be working through their role definitions in regard to early literacy activities.” Alicia’s father said they tried to stimulate their daughters’ interest in reading by reading to them frequently when they were preschool age. He says they also gave them books and other reading materials as gifts. He says that they have a family practice that if they give their children a present, such as a toy, they also give them a book at the same time.

Desde chiquitas, entonces siempre las estimulamos; yo creo que todas desde muy chiquitas agarraban libros, sin entenderlos, nos los leían. (Since they were very young we always tried to interest them [in reading]. I think that from a very young age they would grab books and even though they didn’t understand they would read them to us.)

He also says that the girls often memorized the stories that were read to them and that they would look at the page and pretend they were reading although they were reciting

the story from memory. Alicia's father was the only parent that reported that their children heard certain stories so many times that they memorized them.

The only literary practice that all father reported engaging in with their children is helping them with homework. Four of the seven reported helping them with their homework frequently and three reported helping them from time to time. The following paragraphs summarize some of the comments made by the fathers who report helping their children with their homework frequently concerning literacy activities in the home.

Although Jaime's father says he only read to his children from time to time when they were pre-school age, he says that he did spend time with them while they were learning to read, helping them to read syllable by syllable. When I first met the family Jaime was finishing the first grade for the second time, and Juan told me he was trying to help Jaime to learn the letters. However, he says his strong point is mathematics so he spends more time helping the children with their math assignments while his wife helps the two younger children with reading and writing. It appears that in Jaime's family the only explicit child-directed literacy practice is helping the children with their homework.

In addition to reading stories to the girls when they were of preschool age, Alicia's father also reports helping them with homework and giving them additional exercises to do if they didn't understand a certain point. He also says they have used games, music and theatre to stimulate their children's interest in literacy activities. He also says that they always encouraged the girls to write when they were preschool age. It didn't matter that they were just scribbles; the important thing was that they were developing an understanding of what writing is all about. He makes the following comment:

Me acuerdo que [nuestras hijas] siempre nos teníamos pintarrajeado la la televisión, las camas, los las paredes, el refrigerador, los cristales, todo siempre una vez que escribían empezaban a escribir en donde se les ocurriera, no? Y les dejábamos a ellas pus no a al principio nos molestaba ya después dijimos: “Bueno si esa es su manera de expresarse le empezaban a gustar vea a gustar mucho”. (I remember that we always had scribbles on the television, the beds, the walls, the refrigerator, and the windows. Once they started writing they wrote everywhere. At first it annoyed us, but they we said, “Ok, this is their way of expressing themselves. In this way they started to enjoy writing.”)

This is an example of how children form insights into how written language works before they receive formal instruction as discussed by Goodman (1986, p. 107). Alicia’s family engages in several literacy practices in addition to schoolwork. These include reading novels, magazines, and comic books for pleasure. The girls also write stories, “historietas,” letters, greeting cards, notes, and e-mail messages. They also play board games and use the computer for pleasure and to help with homework. Aldo sometimes brings work home that involves reading and writing, and Amparo studies for her English classes.

Esaú’s father is able to spend more time helping the children with school work than his mother because of her work schedule. Marcelo helps them by reading stories with them and by reading their school books with them. Marcelo says he does exercises with the children that help them with spelling and pronunciation of words. He also goes over the alphabet with his daughter who is in the first grade, helping her to form the letters correctly. He says he also has them read signs and advertising when they are walking or driving down the street. This is an example of how community and school literacy practices can differ significantly (Smith, Jiménez, & Martínez-León, 2003), as the signs observed in the research site often exhibit alternative spellings. Zamora (2005, p. 51) interviewed a business owner in San Andrés and found that non-conventional

literacy practices dominated not only in signs advertising his business, but also in official documents that he uses in conducting his business. Esaú's father did not say that he uses reading signs and advertisements as a way to educate his children as to the differences in school and community literacy practices. A big part of the literacy practices that take place in this family seems to be helping the children with their school work and reading children's stories with them. However, Esaú says he does write letters and notes to family members and friends, and his parents leave notes for him while they are at work. Also, Marcelo and Marilú read magazines and newspapers.

Abril's father says that literacy activities in their household are pretty much limited to the children's homework. Nohemí told me that the children sometimes play a paper and pencil game called "Basta" with their cousins who live nearby. On the next visit I asked Abril and her older brother to teach me the game. (See section 4.12 of this thesis for a description.)

Three fathers indicated that they helped their children with homework only from time to time. The following paragraphs summarize some of the comments made by these fathers concerning literacy activities in the home.

Hector's father, Ricardo, told me on my first visit to the family's home that he requires his sons to read novels. However, when I asked him about that on a later visit he didn't seem as determined about this requirement, but he did say that they read children's stories everyday. He says that rather than working with the boys as they do their homework, he reviews it after they have finished in order to ensure that it is correct. He says his middle son, Alberto, has never liked to read in spite of the encouragement he receives from his parents. However, during the last couple of months Alberto has taken

an interest in a computer game that requires him to do a lot of background reading. Ricardo is hopeful that this will trigger a love of reading in Alberto. Ricardo does spend time with his younger boys teaching them English, although his own knowledge of English is limited. Literacy practices in this family include helping with homework and reading for pleasure. Ricardo brings work home from time to time and Alma studies for the high school classes she is taking. Hector writes letters infrequently and the whole family uses the computer for pleasure and school.

David's father says that he and his wife help the children with their homework when they have questions and then review it to see that it is correct. He says that he and Lila read extensively for pleasure, but that the children do so only occasionally. The children play board games from time to time and use the computer both for pleasure and for school work. The family sometimes writes notes to each other, but this is rare.

A study conducted by Senechal and LeFevre (2001, p. 50) showed the importance of parents being involved in their children's literacy development. One of their findings is that "children who are exposed to a variety of home" literacy activities have the highest probability of being successful in literacy acquisition. The families who participated in the current study range from families who engage in very few literacy activities apart from homework to families who read extensively for pleasure and who encourage their children to do the same. The four case study students, Alicia, Isela, Hector and Roberto, who in my opinion have the highest probability of being successful in their literacy acquisition, are all "exposed to a variety" of home literacy activities. At least one of their parents reads for pleasure and their homes have books, magazines, games, and three of the four have computers. All four of these case study students seem to have a passion for

literacy activities and it seems that being in this reading environment has fuelled this passion.

5.2.4. Research Question #4: How do fathers' views of literacy tend to differ from mothers' views?

As discussed in Chapter One, much investigation into family literacy has focused on the mother's role in children's literacy development (Ortiz, 2004, p. 15). This is presumably because it is assumed that the mother carries the primary responsibility when it comes to helping children with their homework. The results of this study suggest that these seven families don't consider the children's literacy development to be primarily the mother's responsibility, with the possible exception of reading to the children when they are of preschool age. (See Chapter Four.) All seven fathers indicated that they read to their children when they were of preschool age, that they spent at least some time helping their children with homework, and that they bought reading materials for their children as a means of encouraging them to read. Some couples said that the mother spends more time helping the children with homework, not because she is primarily responsible, but because she has more time with the children. In fact, of the six families that included a father living in the home only two of the wives work outside the home. Thus, fathers are the primary source of workplace literacy that the children come into contact with. An example of this is Jaime's father, who has worked as a carpenter. He says this has helped him to have a good knowledge of basic mathematics and that he uses this professional knowledge to help his children with their homework assignments.

Of the seven fathers, four report helping their children with homework frequently. This includes Abril's father who works twelve hours a day, seven days a week. In Esaú's family it is his father whose work schedule allows him more time with the children; thereby, giving him more time to help the children with their homework. Isela's father indicated that the reason he helps the children with their homework only from time to time is because of his work schedule, which requires him to be away from home several weeks at a time. The data suggest that both the father and mother of the participant families view their children's literacy development as a joint responsibility. When asked how they see a mother's role as being different from a father's, the only difference the participants gave was the amount of time each parent has to interact with the children.

When asked their view of reading and writing, the fathers and the mothers gave similar responses. Both want their children to learn to read and write well so as to have a better future. They both mentioned learning about other peoples and cultures, communication, and reading and writing as the foundation on which human progress is based.

Three notable differences between mothers' and fathers' roles stand out when reviewing the data. It appears that the mothers in this study are more apt to express a passion for reading. David's mother: "I like to read everything." Alica's mother: "I have to read, because I very much like to read." Isela's mother: "I have many books; it doesn't matter if they're suspense, novels. I like all kinds of books." With the exception of David's stepfather, I did not notice this same enthusiasm for reading in the fathers who participated in this study.

Another notable difference between the mothers and fathers in this study was their view of the importance of reading to their children when they are of preschool age. As previously mentioned, five of the eight mothers report reading regularly to their young children and only 2 of the seven fathers reported doing so. It could be that the fathers tend to view reading to preschool age children as less important than the mothers do. However, as mentioned previously Karther (2002, p. 191) posits “men may still be working through their role definitions in regard to early literacy activities.” In other words, even though fathers believe they have a joint responsibility in their children’s literacy development, they may view storybook reading as “women’s work.” Ortiz (1996) found Mexican-American fathers “who share child care duties with their spouses, read and write more often with their children than parents who divide these tasks,” so it could be that the fathers in this study associate reading to their young children as a child care duty and not a way of teaching literacy.

The third difference between mothers and fathers participating in this study is that two mothers were involved in educational activities which would enable them to help their children with their literacy development. Roberto’s mother is attending informal classes with Roberto so they both can learn Nahautl, and Alicia’s mother says that one reason she is studying English is to be able to help her daughters to learn it. None of the fathers in the study indicated they were involved in similar activities. One might assume that mothers would be more apt to do this because they have more time with the children; however, Roberto’s mother works full time and still takes the time to attend educational classes.

5.3 Limitations of Study

This study focused on eight families in a small city in central Mexico. Because of the qualitative nature of the study and because of the small sample size the results are not generalizable to other populations. As stated in Chapter Two, the school from which the participants were selected claims to be based on an educational model which responds to the human potential of children and youth, so it could be that it appeals to parents who are atypically concerned about their children's education. For this reason the eight families may not be representative of the families living in the research site, many of whom send their children to public schools. Although the results are not generalizable beyond the participating families, certain implications result from the data which are discussed in the next section.

Although I visited each family eight times over the course of a year, I was not able to spend enough time with them to be able to confirm all the information they gave by observation. Because of this, at times I had to make a decision based on other information and on intuition. For example, Jaime's parents both reported that they buy reading material for their children frequently, but all three children reported that their parents never bought reading material for them. Since I didn't observe any reading material in the home other than school textbooks, and because I thought it possible that Jaime's parent were telling me what they thought they should do instead of what they do, I decided that the children's responses were probably more accurate in this case. I also based this decision on the fact that Jaime's parents stated that the literacy activities in the home were mostly limited to school work.

As mentioned in section 4.7 I found differences between what the participating parents said about their views of literacy and what their actual practices in the home were. This could be because their responses were reflecting community values, because they were not aware of the importance of their own role in their children's literacy development, and/or because they told me what they thought I wanted to hear as a researcher. Efforts were made to minimize this observer effect by making several visits over a period of a year, by using quantitative instruments in addition to qualitative interviews, and by triangulating data from multiple sources.

Another limitation is that I was able to get to know some families better than others. One of the reasons for this is because some family had more time available to talk to me than others because of work schedules and other obligations. For example, I talked with Isela's father only four times, because his work schedule requires him to be out of town for several weeks at a time, six weeks at one point, so it was difficult to arrange appointments. Another reason that I got to know some families better than others is because some of the families are naturally more hospitable. It could be that some families were more open and willing to participate in a research study conducted by a non-Mexican than others were. For example, in addition to the "official" visits to Jaime's family home, they also invited me to dinner three times and we took an excursion to the mountains one day, something that did not happen with any of the other case study families. This could be because Jaime's father, who has lived in the United States for an extended period of time, is very accepting of people from the United States. This extra time with the family helped me to develop a closer relationship with them.

Since the families tend to de-value non-school literacies, I was not able to document this aspect of home literacy as much as would have been desirable. Also, as Ortiz (2004, p. 14) points out, family literacy is an “activity continually in flux,” which is particularly true of non-school literacies. The home literacy inventory showed that these families have a variety of literacy documents in their homes, but because of time constraints I was not able to thoroughly document their uses.

5.4 Implications for Practice.

I have tried to look at the literacy practices of the eight participant families “with a theoretical perspective that seeks to understand the ways in which people make sense of” literacy “in their everyday lives (González & Moll, 2002, p. 625).” Doing so has helped me to see how the results of this have implications for practice. 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. Much of the literature reviewed in Chapter One points to the need for the schools to incorporate working class families’ literacy practices in their curricula. The parents in this study seem to believe they have to change their literacy practices to match those of the school. I believe the need for a two-way communication should be acknowledged. The schools and the parents have much to learn from each other and they need to be aware of this.

Based on the data of the current study it appears that reading for pleasure is a middle-class literacy practice. When parents read for pleasure, their children have a “more positive attitude” and have “better reading skills” (Britto and Brooks-Gunn (2001,

p. 76) and their way of viewing reading is “appropriated by their children” (Baker and Scher (2002, p. 265). The results of this study suggest that those children whose parents read for pleasure have a better chance of succeeding academically. Teachers need to be aware that children are influenced by how their parents view reading. Since not all students are encouraged to read by their parents, teachers need to be aware of the importance of encouraging students to read for pleasure. Along the same lines, Teague (2004, p. 133) reports that the teachers in his study did not take advantage of contacts with parents to find out what their students’ “reading habits and interests” were, so that they could use this information in planning literacy activities in the classroom.

Children learn to read by a variety of what Rockwell (1991) refers to as “extra-instructional activities.” One of these activities is reading magazines which are traditionally discouraged by schools, such as TVNOTAS (a popular magazine in México similar to the National Enquirer in the United States). Alicia’s father made this comment regarding this type of literature:

Si entonces pus yo se que es un son revistas vacías que son muy frívolas pero les digo a mi mujer, “prefiero que lea eso a que no lea nada, o sea, que se atrofie su mente.” (I know that this type of magazine is without value and frivolous, but I said to my wife, ‘I’d rather my daughter read this type of magazine rather than not reading anything so that her mind doesn’t atrophy.’)

As Alicia’s father says it is better to read something that has no academic value, than not to read at all. Like any skill reading requires practice, and the best way to get students to practice is to give them the opportunity to read materials that interest them and are part of their home literacy practices. Comic books and magazines such as “Conozca Más,” a magazine with very short articles, are other possibilities to help students develop an

interest in reading. Providing access to this type of reading material would be a way for the schools to help students develop the “reading habit.”

Allowing materials traditionally discouraged by the school would be a way to bridge the gap between home and school literacy practices (González & Moll, 2002, p. 624). If a student comes from a home where materials discouraged by the school are the norm, the mismatch affects the student’s ability to learn (Nagle 1999, pp. 174,175). Teachers need to know what kind of reading materials their students are familiar with and build on these (Duke & Purcell-Gates, 2003, p. 35). This is a way of making schools more like the homes of their students (Laosa, 1982, p. 824).

Laosa (1982, p. 824) also says there is a need to help parents to “better prepare children for school.” Although all of the parents expressed the belief that it is important to help their children with homework, some said they mainly reviewed it after their children finished. This is in line with what Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman and Hemphill (1991, p. 127) report. As Snow et al. point out it would be beneficial for all parents to be educated as to the importance of their role as supplementary teachers.

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Ortiz (2004, p. 15) posits that it is not known to what extent fathers contribute to their children’s education. The data from this study suggest that fathers play a significant role in the literacy development of their children. This is consistent with Ortiz’s (2004, p.16) findings that Mexican-American fathers do participate in their children education because they view it as important. This supports Karther’s (2004, p. 191) conclusion that “early childhood teachers should not exclude or underestimate fathers,” pointing to the need for schools to communicate with both the mother and the father regarding their children’s learning. One way to facilitate

this would be to have scheduled meetings with parents after work hours so the fathers could more easily attend.

A major concern of all the parents was that they want their children to learn English and computer skills, as they see these as important for finding good employment. The middle class families can afford to have computers in the home and to send their children to bilingual schools; however, those of limited resources cannot. The family with the most limited resources was concerned about art and music classes for their children. Although the families with limited resources who participated in the present study do send their children to English and computer classes a couple hours a week, this is not enough, especially for English, and probably there are families in the research area who cannot even afford two hours a week of English instruction for their children. The public schools in Mexico need to be more responsive to this need, so that children from families with limited resources can have the same opportunities as children from middle- and upper-class families.

The results of this study suggest that children in San Andrés would benefit if their fathers (and mothers) would model reading for pleasure. Of course, parents would need to understand the importance of this and may need to improve their own reading skills. Since the results of this study show that most fathers in San Andrés only read to their children from time to time during their preschool years, children would probably benefit by being read to by both their fathers and their mothers regularly. Two of the mothers in this study are taking classes in order to help their children with their literacy acquisition. Based on this study, I believe that their children would benefit if the fathers also did this.

The parents in the current study possess untapped Funds of Knowledge that the schools could take advantage of. For instance, Jaime's father could talk to classes about what it's like to live in the United States as an undocumented worker, and how this has affected him and his family. Would he have had to have worked in the United States if he had continued his education past middle-school? Isela's father spends considerable time driving a semi-truck between his home and Laredo, Texas. He could also explain to students what it is like to do this kind of work and how it affects his family. Does he regret having quit veterinary school after completing three years of the four years? David's step-father is from Cuba, so his life experiences would be a valuable addition to the students' education. How do literacy practices differ between Mexico and Cuba? These are just a few examples of the Funds of Knowledge that the case study families possess and that they could be asked to share in a school setting.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

Because of the limitations of the study as discussed in section 5.2, other questions arose during the investigation period. This section discusses some of these questions.

Although this study suggests that fathers in the research site are interested in and have a role in their children's education, it would be beneficial to see how this sample compares to other families in the research area, such as those who have always sent their children to public schools. As previously stated, the parents in the current study may be more interested in their children's education than parents who send their children to public school. Although three of the participant families were working-class families, it is not clear from the present study how well the results apply to other working-class

parents in the area? Do other working-class parents in the research context spend time helping their children with homework, and do they have similar expectations for their children, such as wanting them to attend college?

It would be beneficial to study the effects of implementing a two-way communication about literacy in which both the school and the parents take advantage of the opportunities of learning from each other and of adopting each others' literacy practices. Much of the literature reviewed in Chapter One points to the needs for this type of relationship between home and school, so there is a need to investigate just how it would affect children's literacy development.

One of the issues that the current study did not look at is the quality of help parents give to their children. It would be useful to study how parents' socio-economic class, education, prior learning experiences, etc. affect their ability to help their children with their schoolwork. Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman and Hemphill (1991, p. 127) posit that parents can play an important role as supplementary teachers, so it is also important to study ways to help parents improve the quality of help they give their children.

Another important issue is encouraging children to become readers. Some of the parents in the study seemed to believe that ensuring that their children completed their homework was their major responsibility regarding their children's literacy acquisition. Further research needs to be conducted as to how parents can be encouraged to help their children read for pleasure. Since the results of this study suggest that many children in the research site do not read for pleasure, research is needed in regard to how teachers can help their students in this respect. For example, if the teacher reads to the students for 15

minutes to a half-hour a day, does this whet their appetite for reading as entertainment? Does organizing “*Círculos de lectura*,” where a group of students analyze a book they have all read, stimulate an interest in reading?

Results of this study also suggest that many children have not learned to express their own ideas in writing. Research is also needed as to how teachers can encourage their students to write. For example, do children tend to write more if they are in the habit of reading for pleasure? Also, if the teacher assigns them to keep a diary of their daily activities and thoughts, does this stimulate a desire to write?

Also, much could be learned about the population living in the research site if a longitudinal study were conducted. If case studies families were studied over a period of several years, more in-depth information could be obtained as to how parents’ attitudes and practices affect their children’s literacy acquisition. Are parents becoming more aware of the need to help with homework, to read to school age children, to foster a love of reading in their children over time? A follow-up study could compare the progress of the case study students during their fourth or fifth year of grade school with those of the current study. The parents of the case study students could be re-interviewed to see if/how their beliefs and attitudes about literacy acquisition have changed and if this has affected their children’s progress. Changes in the fathers’ employment could also be tracked to see how this affects their children’s literacy acquisition. In this study there was a father from Cuba. It would be useful to study how fathers’ trans-national status and the literacy practices they learned in their home countries affect their attitudes toward their children’s literacy.

The current study was not able to examine non-school literacy practices in detail. How these non-school literacy practices impact children's literacy acquisition is an important topic for future investigation. Along the same lines, because of the various backgrounds and occupations of the participants of the current study, it was evident that they possess Linguistic Funds of Knowledge (see section 1.1.1 of this thesis) that could be studied along with how these funds of knowledge affect their children's learning of literacy. Computer use is another area this study was not able to address in depth. Whether or not a family owns a computer is partially dependent on their economic situation. It would be useful to investigate how having a computer in the home influences a child's literacy acquisition. Payant (2005) did a short study on computer use in San Andrés. She did a case study of one university student and found that he was willing to take the initiative in learning computer skills. He learned certain software packages, such as Word, through formal training, and he learned to use the internet "from his own trial and error." She posits that it would be beneficial to investigate how these digital practices are used by the residents of San Andrés. This might help educators interesting in integrating computer literacy into the classroom. The results of the current study show that middle-class families are apt to have computers in the home and that families without computers go to internet cafes from time to time.

5.6 The Researcher

Doing this study was a learning experience for me since this was the first in-depth study I have done. When I first approached the parents at the school in order to make arrangements to visit them in their homes, I was very nervous, mainly because of my

non-native Spanish. However, since the parents were always very kind and accepting this nervousness soon abated. I found them to be willing to speak with a person who doesn't speak Spanish natively. Because of stereotyped images that some Americans have of Mexicans I didn't necessarily expect the fathers in my study to show so much interest in their children's education. Talking in-depth with Mexican families about educational issues reinforced my belief that it is important to look beyond stereotypes. I soon learned that before every visit it was essential to review notes from prior visits. This helped me remember the names of all the family members and also helped to refresh my memory as to the individual family members' interests and concerns. I also learned the importance of patience and perseverance. One of the fathers seemed irritated during my visits at the beginning, but by the end of the study he spoke freely and treated me hospitably, showing that it takes some people longer than others to open up. Always treating the participants with respect and not being irritated if they were not at home for a scheduled visit also paid off, in that it allowed us to build mutual respect and confidence.

5.7 Conclusion

This study has tried to develop "new understandings of the local and distinctive meanings and uses of literacy in the lives" of the residents of San Andrés and San Pedro Cholula (Taylor, 1983, p. 89). By visiting and interviewing eight families from these communities over a period of a year I have found that the fathers participating in the study are interested in the literacy acquisition of their children, despite popular beliefs to the contrary. I also found that they are aware of the benefits of spending time with their children in literacy activities. I have also shown that there is a range of awareness among

the participant families as to the importance of encouraging their children to read regularly, not only by making reading materials available, but also by their own example of reading for pleasure as defined in section 4.1. Some of the families reported that the main literacy activity in their homes is school work. It has also been shown that both fathers and mothers are willing to share the responsibility of helping their children learn to read and write. Also, I have outlined educational implications of the results and suggestions for future research on the topic. It is my hope that the results of this study will help educators in Mexico and the United States to see the importance of encouraging parents to act as supplementary teachers and to help them understand that it is important that their children learn to read for pleasure. I also hope that both parents and teachers will take advantage of the funds of knowledge that both possess, and thus be better able learn from each other. To this end, I have given the school from which the case study families were selected a copy of this study. I have also written an executive summary of this study in Spanish which I have shared with the families and the teachers in the school. This summary includes the findings which I believe will help both the teachers and the parents understand how they can be more effective in guiding the literacy development of their students and children.