

Oaxacan Parents' Perceptions of Literacy Learning

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to learn about the perceptions that Oaxacan parents, from three different socio-economic status (SES) groups, have about literacy learning. This study intended to answer the following research questions: (1) Are the Oaxacan parents' perceptions of literacy learning consistent with an emergent literacy model? (2) To what extent do these perceptions differ among the three different socio-economic groups? (3) What do Oaxacan parents do to help their children learn to read and write? (4) What did the parents and teachers of the parents interviewed ask them to do to learn to read and write?

A survey was adopted for this study. Forty parents were interviewed. A thirty-three-Likert-Type-item-structured interview plus two open-ended questions were used. The interviews were recorded, and then transcribed in their entirety.

Results showed that most Oaxacan parents held beliefs consistent with an emergent literacy model. On the other hand, they also held notions consistent with a traditional model. There were more similarities than differences between the SES groups. There were only three items in which the three SES groups differed. Moreover, results showed that Oaxacan parents help their children become literate by providing a wide variety of activities. Reading to/with children was the most valued activity by Oaxacan parents. Finally, most parents were asked to work on literacy skills to learn to read and write. Most parents had to do "endless" letter, syllable and word drills.

A limitation of this study was the sample being too small. Implications for researchers, curriculum designers, and teachers were drawn based on the results of this study. It was concluded that this survey should be applied in every classroom as a way to

learn more about the child's environment and build on his/her previous knowledge and that a library is urgently needed in Oaxaca, Mexico.

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If I miss someone, please forgive me and let me thank you all again!

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the boy without a backpack

Dedico esta tesis al niño que no tiene mochila

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

I will introduce this study with one of the most touching and life-learning experiences I have ever had. One afternoon, I went to one of the participating primary schools in Oaxaca, Mexico to interview some parents who had agreed to collaborate in this research. Many parents usually take a snack to their children and wait until they finish school to take them home.

I started interviewing one of those parents. During the interview, I would usually read the statement and let the parents read it at the same time, so they could re-read it if they have not understood the idea. While I was interviewing this mother, she would not look at either the questionnaire or me. I thought that this mother was either very shy or not very interested. By the 19th question, in which the interviewee had to read “knt” to suggest invented spelling for the word “canté” (I sang), this mother told me she was illiterate.

In the middle of the interview, a child, who was wearing a worn-out uniform, came out from one of the classrooms and ran toward us. He was as happy as a clam. He was screaming, “Mamá, mamá, tengo zapatos nuevos. Me los dio mi maestra” (Mummy, mummy, I have new shoes. My teacher gave them to me). When I looked down to see his new shoes, I noticed that they were not brand new, but rather old. The mother said, “Ah, muy bien. Ve a tu salón” (Oh, great. Go to your classroom). I simply saw the child running back to his classroom, and I could not say a word. Nevertheless, this was not the end of this experience.

I continued with the interview, and close to the end, the child came back again. He was very excited. “Mamá, mira mis libros” (Mummy, look at my books). He had just received new books that had been provided by the ministry of education. He opened one of these books and pointing at a picture, he said, “Están jugando a la rueda de Sn. Miguel” (They are playing “a la rueda de Sn. Miguel”—a typical game in Mexico). The mother told him, “Muy bien! Están muy bonitos. Anda; ve a terminar lo que estabas haciendo” (Very good! They are beautiful. Come on; go to finish what you were doing). The child replied, “Está muy fácil. Ya terminé” (It is very easy. I already finished). The child did not want to leave, and I tried to persuade him by saying, “Por qué no vas a meter tus libros en tu mochila? Ya pronto vas a salir” (Why do not you go and put your books in your back pack? It will be time to go soon). The child looked at me and said, “No tengo mochila” (I do not have a backpack), and left.

I felt terrible! I finished the interview and wanted to go away and hide. I had made stupid assumptions and forgotten that many children in my country are extremely poor. This experience served as strong encouragement to pursue my long-term goal, which is to open a bilingual school in Oaxaca, Mexico, my home state. This school will have as its goal to enable Mexican children, especially low and middle socio-economic status, to cope with the great demands of the future. This research is one of the first steps to this major project, or my dream as I call it.

My personal fascination with how children develop literacy in a first and in a second/foreign language and my desire to do something to help the children in my state have guided my research. In this journey, I have found that teachers, parents and children are the main participants in literacy development. Moreover, I have realized that the

development of literacy does not start in school, as people believed before Durkin's study in 1966 (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). The current belief is that it starts in homes that promote and foster literacy development in young children before they go to school (Durkin, 1966).

1.2. Research problem

In the 60's and 70's, researchers were interested in those children who learned to read before receiving formal instruction. The studies of Durkin (1966) in the States, Clay (1967) in New Zealand, Goodman (1967) in the United States, and Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979) in Argentina were pioneer studies in the area of emergent literacy. One commonality that these studies share is the view or belief in the importance of parents in the child's literacy development.

In the 80's, many research efforts started focusing on the child's environment and the roles that family members, especially parents, played (Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1983; and Teale, 1986). These studies were conducted in the United States.

Heath's (1983) ethnographic research focused on the social nature of the child's interaction within their families. She described in detail the parents' beliefs in her three participating communities in the Piedmont area of the southeastern United States: Trackton, a black working-class community, Roadville, a white working-class community and a mainstream community. She found that: "Roadville parents do provide a good foundation for their children... Trackton parents would seem at least to demonstrate the positive attitudes towards school... and mainstream parents begin early to 'lesson' their children" (p. 160).

Taylor (1983) conducted a three-year longitudinal study with six middle-class families in an urban area of the United States. She found that the interactions between parents and children were critical in their literacy development and successful transition to school. The parents in this study modeled reading and writing for both function and pleasure. Children observed these models and started to imitate them. All these activities contributed to the children's literacy development.

Unlike Taylor's study, Teale (1986) focused on low-income families. He observed the literacy activities available in these homes. He observed that these children were provided with numerous valuable literacy activities, some of which occurred at the market place or at church. He disagreed with the idea that children from low socio-economic status (SES) background "come to school with a dearth of literacy experience" (p.192). He concluded that economic circumstances do not limit the amount of literacy experiences for children.

In the year 2000, emergent literacy and parental support are viewed as important and are widely studied. However, there has been a concern that most of these studies have focused on mainstream, middle class participants only and have not reflected the non-mainstream culture participants' values and beliefs (Pellegrini, 1991). There have been several studies which have tried to shed light on these "non-mainstream" parents' perceptions within North America (Anderson & Gunderson, 1997; Anderson, 1995; Anderson, 1994), and different countries such as England (Weinberger, 1996).

Gunderson and Anderson (1997) have worked with parents from different cultures, such as Chinese-Canadian, Indo-Canadian, and Euro-Canadian in British Columbia, Canada. They concluded that these parents hold some beliefs related to

emergent literacy, but reject others such as, invented spelling. Anderson (1994) concluded that “individual parents support an emergent literacy model to varying degrees, that the majority of parents [25 participants from different ethnic groups] have perceptions of literacy which are highly consistent with an emergent literacy view, but that some parents have more traditional perceptions of literacy acquisition” (p.181). These studies reflect the issues in British Columbia, a part of Canada which has a wide diversity of ethnic groups and socio-economic levels, and, therefore, a wide diversity of perceptions towards literacy learning.

In spite of all the research in the last four decades, there has not been a study which focuses on Mexican people. It is true that there have been studies and projects which have included Mexican participants (Otto and Johnson, 1994; and Perez-Granados and Callanan, 1997); however, these studies have been conducted in the United States, and not in Mexico. There is an urgent need to learn more about Mexican parents’ perceptions of literacy learning.

1.3. Purpose of the study and research questions

The purpose of this study was to learn about the perceptions which Oaxacan parents, from three different socio-economic groups, have about literacy learning.

The research intended to answer the following questions:

1. Are the Oaxacan parents’ perceptions of literacy learning consistent with an emergent literacy model?
2. To what extent do these perceptions differ among the three different socio-economic groups?

3. What do Oaxacan parents do to help their children learn to read and write?
4. What did the parents and teachers of the parents interviewed ask them to do to learn to read and write?

1.4. Significance of the study

This study is significant for two main reasons: the idea behind the 1993 Educational Reform in Mexico and the desire of the researcher to open a bilingual school in Oaxaca, Mexico.

In 1993, there was a major change in the education system in Mexico (Secretaria de Educacion Publica, 1994). Most programs were reviewed and drastically changed. Literacy learning was no exception. The “propuesta” (proposal), as some teachers call it, is a new approach to literacy learning. The Mexican curriculum developers tried to adopt a child-centered approach consistent with emergent literacy and whole language. This is a major change, which I believe is basically adopting a fad rather than analyzing the system’s needs and problems in order to improve it.

This reform has affected both schools and the “Normal”, the school for teachers. Teachers are now given seminars to learn more about this new approach, which they are expected to implement in their classrooms. The curriculum for student-teachers has been drastically changed as well. The 1984 curriculum objective was to prepare teachers who had a strong research background. Its goal was to develop researchers. The 1997 curriculum objective is now to prepare teachers to have a stronger pedagogical background (Secretaria de Educacion Publica, 1998). Readings by Ken Goodman and Emilia Ferreiro are becoming part of the student-teachers’ courses.

This study is relevant because we will learn, in an indirect way, what parents think about this new approach. We know that parents play a very important role in an emergent literacy approach. Are Oaxacan parents ready for this? Are they going to struggle and reject some of the principles of this approach, as many parents in British Columbia do (Gunderson and Anderson, 1997)?

The second significant aspect of this study is my desire to open a bilingual school. Because I agree with an emergent literacy and whole language approach, I am aware that I cannot ignore people's beliefs about and perceptions of literacy learning. Somehow, many people in Mexico know how to read and write. There must be some good aspects in the current and old approaches to teaching literacy; otherwise, nobody would know how to read and write.

In order to have a successful school I need parental participation. I would like to build on their perceptions, rather than ignore them. In other words, this study is part of my needs analysis for this big project. Its objective is to give many low and middle SES children a great tool: literacy in both Spanish and English.

1.5. Limitations

This study has some limitations. The first limitation is the sample. It was intended to interview 75 parents, but only 40 parents were available at the end. This is a small number in order to make generalizations. This study focused on Oaxacan parents; however, all the participating parents are from the city of Oaxaca and not from the whole state of Oaxaca.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the literature

I find the way that children develop literacy fascinating. It is one of those mysteries that researchers are still trying to explain. It is relevant to explore the literature regarding emergent literacy.

In this review of the literature about emergent literacy, I will provide a brief history of the common beliefs about literacy development during this century. I will present the rationale behind emergent literacy, as well as the characteristics of this paradigm. I will also describe some of the studies about emergent literacy focusing more on parent's participation in and perceptions of literacy learning. Finally, I will describe Oaxaca, its literacy situation and education system.

2.1. Emergent Literacy

Judy, aged 4, and Mikey, 5, are huddled close together looking at a picture storybook. Mikey begins to "read" to Judy. He is self-assured as he turns each page, his face displaying the knowledge of someone very familiar with the text. Although the words he utters are not always exactly those appearing in the written text, his rendering is an extraordinarily close approximation. Moreover, the meanings conveyed by Mikey are consistently appropriate, as are his intonation and style of storybook reading.

Judy notices that Mikey's attention seems rooted to the pictures and asks, "Mikey, what are all those black marks at the bottom of the page for?"

With unwavering confidence, Mikey answers, "Oh, those are for people who can't read the story from the pictures. (Strickland, 1990:18)

These kinds of stories are frequently cited in books and articles related to emergent literacy. These are cute stories for some people, and fascinating and interesting

for others. Before getting into the engaging topic of children's emergent literacy, it is important to have a clear idea of what literacy entails.

Literacy is a complex term to define. Indeed, the "Literacy" Dictionary starts defining literacy with Soare's (1992) statement, "consensual agreement on a single definition [of literacy] is quite implausible" (p. 140). I have drawn definitions from several authors. Venesky, Kaestle, and Sum (1987) define literacy as a continuum of skills that are acquired both in and outside of formal schooling and that relate directly to the ability [of individuals] to function within society. Freire (1985) defines literacy as "a process of search and creation by which illiterate learners are challenged to perceive the deeper meaning of language and the word, the word that, in essence they are being denied" (p.10). Froese (1996) defines literacy as the ability to read, write, and figure in a functionally useful way.

In Mexico and in many countries of Latin America, "teaching reading and writing is viewed as one of the major responsibilities of the educational system" (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1979). In my opinion, literacy should be defined as the most important tool that people need to survive in the new millennium. It is the first step people have to take to improve their lives. "The value society places in literacy is growing. If we are going to achieve greater literacy for all, then we must have the understanding necessary to observe literacy develop in the very young child" (Goodman, 1986:13).

For the purpose of this study, I will take Froese's (1996) simple definition, "the ability to read and write", combine it with Venesky, Kaestle, and Sum's (1987) idea that, "[literacy is] acquired both in and outside of formal schooling", and end it with Freire's (1985) contribution, "the word that, in essence they are being denied". Then, my

definition will read as follows. Literacy is the ability to read and write acquired both in and outside of formal schooling, which is denied to many people in Mexico.

2.2. History

Teale and Sulzby (1986) summarized the history of literacy development from the early 1900's to the late 1980's. At the beginning of the century, it was believed that literacy began with formal instruction and not at home. From the 1920's, literacy development was influenced by the ideas of Arnold Gesell (1925). He saw that development was controlled by maturation. According to Gesell, children had to be mature enough in order to receive literacy instruction.

The study of Morphett and Washburne (1929) determined that children were ready to start learning when they were 6 years and six months old. After this study, the term "reading readiness" became widely accepted. Studies like the aforementioned resulted in a dominant maturationist viewpoint. All that educators had to do was wait until the child was "ready" to start receiving literacy instruction to be successful.

During the late 1950's and the 1960's, there was a shift away from reading readiness as maturation to readiness as the product of experience. It was then believed that educators could do something to get the child ready to start to read instead of just waiting for them to mature. The idea of reading readiness influenced people's thinking about literacy development in two ways. First, it led them to conceptualize the early childhood period as precursors to "real" reading or writing, implying that only after the child has mastered the various sub-skills or reading readiness does the real part begin.

Second, it also led teachers and parents to believe that literacy instruction began in schools (Teale and Sulzby, 1986).

The assumptions underlying the readiness paradigm were: 1) learning to read follows the mastery of a prerequisite set of basic skills; 2) learning to read precedes learning to write; 3) reading must be formally taught by the careful introduction of sequenced sub-skills, logically ordered from an adult's perspective; 4) previous experiences with print are not considered (functional uses of reading are generally ignored); and 5) all children go through a scope and sequence of readiness and reading skills and are carefully monitored by formal testing (Teale and Sulzby, 1986).

Before the 1970's, a substantial challenge to the reading readiness tradition arose (Teale, 1995). Durkin's project (1966), which studied children who learned to read and write before receiving formal instruction, indicated that the reading readiness paradigm was theoretically and practically inappropriate. In the 1970's, Marie Clay (1975) rejected the maturation theory and the reading readiness paradigm. She worked with 5-year-old entrants in New Zealand and concluded that there was nothing that suggested that contact with printed language forms should be withheld from any five-year-old child on the ground that he was immature. She referred to early reading and writing in terms of children's emergent literacy. Emergent implies that becoming literate involves growth along a continuum rather than the mastery of a series of pre-reading skills, and literacy implies a broader perspective, which considers children's growth as writers and users of language, and not just as readers (Teale and Sulzby, 1986).

Similarly, when Clay was doing research in New Zealand, Yetta Goodman (1967) conducted research with first graders in the United States. She found that even children

“at risk” had knowledge about many aspects of reading before instruction. They knew how to handle books and they understood the directionality of written language and the function of print in a book. These studies led to what it is now known as emergent literacy.

Teale and Sulzby (1986) concluded that the emergent literacy paradigm acknowledges that: 1) literacy development begins long before children enter school; 2) children develop as writers and readers concurrently and interrelatedly—they are able to read what they write before they are able to read conventional text; 3) the functions and forms of literacy are apparent in all literacy events; 4) the foundations of literacy development begin at birth, the critical cognitive years begin 0-6 years; 5) children learn written language by actively participating in and observing literacy events with an interactive, social context; and 6) while there may be generalized stages of development in literacy learning, the rate at which children progress through these stages and the variety of strategies employed with these stages are individual.

2.3. Emergent literacy’s rationale

Emergent literacy was the result of different theories and studies, which view the child as a human being who starts learning right when he/she is born, or even before then, we should say. The work of Jean Piaget (1969) and Vygotsky (1962), and the results of language acquisition research have had great influence on emergent literacy.

Piaget (1969) stated that a child builds up knowledge through interaction with the world. His theory of cognitive development referred to as constructive structuralism suggested that intellectual growth is a process of assimilating new experiences with

existing mental structures to construct new knowledge. In the Piagetian perspective, “children’s reading and writing behavior at some stages would be very different from adults’ reading and writing because it reflects concepts of reading and writing *as the child has constructed them*” [italicized in original](McGee and Richgels, 2000:7).

Sulzby (1986) builds her perspective upon Piaget’s theory. Based on Piaget’s theory, she states, “children construct ideas about reading and writing that are not taught to them, are not modeled for them, and are not yet conventional” (p.52). This suggests that the child is an active participant in literacy development.

Ferreiro and Teberosky (1979) based their studies on Piaget’s theory as well. They argue that their research is an interpretation of Piaget’s theory because Piaget did not address literacy development directly. They mention that Piaget’s theory allows them to introduce written language as an object of knowledge and the learner as a thinking individual. Piaget’s theory supports the idea that the path toward objective knowledge is not linear; that is, we do not move toward it step-by-step, adding bits of knowledge one on top of the another, but we reach it through great global reconstructions, some of which are erroneous but constructive.

Piaget’s theory can be applied to emergent literacy. In emergent literacy, each child constructs his own path. The child makes constructive “mistakes” such as invented spelling. Each child goes through a development process, which may vary from child to child.

Vygotsky’s theory has had great influence on emergent literacy. Vygotsky’s (1978) theory focused on cognitive development as a process, which is culturally and socially based. Learning is seen in terms of the interactions of the individual with other

people. Emergent literacy emphasizes the importance of parents and older siblings in the child's literacy development.

Au, Carrol & Scheu (1997) state that one of the major themes in Vygotsky's work is the idea that complex types of human activity, such as language and literacy, begin in the social world. In Vygotsky's view, the key to learning is the social support the child receives from adults or peers. "Children's success or failure in learning to read and write, Vygotsky's thinking suggests, can best be understood by examining the social world in which learning is taking place" (Au, Carrol & Scheu, 1997:15).

Several studies have been influenced by Vygotsky's ideas. Taylor (1983) used his theory to support the findings in her study. She observed six families to determine what influence the family and home environment have on literacy development. Heath (1983) also focused on the language and social interactional characteristics of sustained, face-to-face adult-child talk. In addition, Teale & Sulzby (1986) argued that much information is presented to children about written language during social interactions.

During the 1970s, researchers increasingly turned their attention to close observations of young children. The language acquisition research area was formed in an attempt to describe the strategies employed in learning and using language (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Researchers found that the child is an active hypothesis-generating language user. "Findings from the language acquisition research (which had focused entirely on oral language) were used by researchers who hypothesized that oral language and written language proficiency might develop in parallel ways" (Teale & Sulzby, 1986: xv).

Charles Read (1971) studied young children's categorization of speech sounds by analyzing their invented spellings. He found that children categorize speech sounds in phonetically justified ways. This study was relevant because it showed that children's "errors" or invented spellings, which may not be correct by adult standards, were consistent and logical.

The theories of Piaget, Vygotsky and other language acquisition researchers' findings have led educators to study the child's literacy development in terms of *emergent literacy*.

2.4. Emergent literacy's characteristics

The International Encyclopedia of Education (1994) defines emergent literacy as the reading and writing behavior that children exhibit before they learn to read and write conventionally. It also suggests that written language development starts early and it is not added onto oral language development, social development, or motor development. Graves, Juel & Graves (1998) define emergent readers as "...children who are in the process of learning what reading and writing are for and how to read and write" (p. 87).

Research on emergent literacy clearly indicates that literacy acquisition may begin during the preschool years, when children usually acquire concepts of literacy, learn about the functions and conventions of print, and develop an interest in reading and writing (Teale, 1986). Anderson and Gundersen (1997) suggest that a key assumption undergirding emergent literacy is that learning to read and write are imprecise processes involving approximation and invention on the part of young learners. Consequently,

adult standards of correctness and convention will not be met in the initial stages of learning.

Several authors have tried to develop lists of characteristics of emergent literacy. Both Ollila and Mayfield (1992), and Strickland (1990) list essential characteristics of emergent literacy. Their characteristics overlap, but are essentially the same.

Emergent literacy includes an awareness of print, writing, and other uses of language (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992). Children are aware of print when they are young. They start to make sense out of print embedded in a particular context. Print on food boxes, logos, and TV are some of the common first encounters. Once, I brought my nephew, Daniel, who was 2 years old at that time, a video. He excitedly cried “BJ Barney” as soon as he saw it. I was impressed because, in fact, the video did have “BJ Barney” on it. What was more interesting about this was that he read this title in English, and not in Spanish, which is his only language. Many children like Daniel start to make sense out of print at an early age. Learning to read and write begins early in life and is ongoing (Strickland, 1990).

Emergent literacy is child-driven (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992). This means that children set their own pace in becoming literate. They become literate by actively participating in listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. It is true that parents can help their children go through the literacy development by providing a literacy-rich environment of talks, discussions, and reading and writing materials. However, each child is a separate identity and follows a personal process in becoming literate. Ollila & Mayfield (1992) state that growth in literacy varies from child to child.

Strickland (1990) argues that learning to read and write requires active participation in activities that have meaning in the child's daily life. For example, the child can help write the list for grocery shopping, or the ingredients for a particular recipe. She can also be encouraged to write a message in Grammy's birthday card. These activities are relevant to the child. Children can also engage in reading at a very early age in situations that may be part of their routine, such as having breakfast where they can read the print on a cereal box or observe their parents reading a cookbook.

Emergent literacy includes speaking, listening, reading, and writing, all of which are interrelated (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992). Strickland (1990) states the same idea suggesting that "learning to read and write are interrelated processes that develop in concert with oral language" (p. 21). Each of these areas is developed and reinforced by the others. Thus, becoming literate does not only include actual reading or writing, but also such things as going on field trips, having discussions in the classroom, having parent-child discussions, listening to the radio, and even watching TV.

Learning to read and write involves interaction with responsive others. Adults play a major role in helping children develop literacy (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992; Strickland, 1990). It is important for parents to be models for their children because children tend to imitate or emulate their parents' habits. If reading and writing are shown as pleasant activities by the parents, it is likely that it will be the same for the child. As mentioned before, parent-child discussions are also very necessary. Children learn about the world through these discussions.

When parents ask what they can do to help their child become literate, reading to her is one of the first answers given to parents. "Sharing books with the young has long

been recognized as a crucial aid to their language and literacy development and as a socializing process within families” (Strickland, 1990:21). “Children who have been read to in the years before formal schooling enter classrooms with considerably more ideas about how print works, more understanding of how stories work, and more knowledge of literary language structure than children who lack this advantage” (Graves, Juel & Graves, 1998:86).

As we can see, children and parents are both important participants in the development of literacy. In the last two decades, research on emergent literacy has increased. Many researchers have realized that the first years in the child’s life are extremely important and complex.

2.5. Research on emergent literacy

All the research conducted on emergent literacy has included different areas and participants. Some of the studies have focused on the importance of reading to children (Sulzby and Teale, 1987). Others have focused on the child’s hypothesis of literacy development (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1979; Sulzby, 1986). Still, others have studied the social environment of the child (Taylor, 1983). Recently, studies have explored parents’ perceptions of literacy learning (Anderson, 1994; 1995; Fitzgerald, Spiegel, and Cunningham, 1991). All these studies have included different socio-economic groups, cultures, and parents’ levels of education. Some have been longitudinal studies. Others case studies or ethnographies. I will briefly describe some of the studies related to different aspects of emergent literacy.

Teale and Martinez (1987) implemented a classroom kindergarten program in San Antonio, Texas. They based it on an emergent literacy perspective, which assumes that listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities develop concurrently and are interrelated rather than sequential. They observed that writing was linked with other activities in children's lives. These connections included using writing for functional purposes, linking writing with reading (which involved students reading their written work aloud), and connecting writing with children's literature through various response activities such as creative drama, artwork and imitative writings.

Teale (1983) argued that children who become capable readers and writers before attending school and without receiving previous instruction should not be referred to as "natural" literates. He stated that all children require exposure to literacy events. He believed that adults present much of the literacy environment in a socialized, mediated form and that the child is actively creating his literacy environment.

Smith (1996) implemented a longitudinal study to examine the relationship between the emergent literacy knowledge of preschool entrants and their subsequent reading performance, 5 years later. She found that virtually all four-year-old children who entered preschool with advanced knowledge about print or rich literacy experiences became good readers 5 years later, while many of their counterparts ended up struggling.

There have been case studies where mothers observed, recorded and analyzed their young children going through the development of emergent literacy (Bissex, 1980; Baghban 1984; and Kapil, 1998). All of these case studies provided further insight into how children develop literacy. They supported the idea that providing the child with an

environment rich in print is essential; however, children control their development in a personal way.

McGee and Purcell-Gates (1997) concluded that the field of emergent literacy is alive and well. They argued that during this decade, the research frame of emergent literacy studies has shifted from a cognitive one to a socio-cultural one. Parents, or adults who spend time with children, are part of this culture surrounding the child.

2.6. Research on parents and emergent literacy

In Spanish we say: “Los hijos son el reflejo de los padres” (“Children are the reflection of the parents”). Many people may agree or disagree with this statement. “Parents are the child’s first teachers” (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992: 255) is another widely used statement. In emergent literacy, parents are key players. They help their children acquire language and literacy; although they may not realize it. Several studies have focused on the parents’ influence on children’s literacy development. These studies have been conducted mostly in North America. They have included people from different socio-economic levels.

Sonnenschein, Serpell, Baker, Gorham, and Hill (1996) conducted a longitudinal investigation that followed preschool children from different sociocultural groups in Baltimore, Maryland. Children were tested to see whether being brought up in a home that was predominantly oriented toward the view that literacy is a source of entertainment is more or less likely to develop literacy strands such as an orientation towards print, phonological awareness, and aspects of narrative competence than a child being brought up in a home where literacy is more typically viewed as a set of skills to be acquired.

They concluded that an entertainment approach was positively related to literacy development, whereas a skills based approach was either negatively related or not significantly related to the three aforementioned strands.

Sulzby and Teale (1987) conducted a three year-longitudinal study that combined research on the impact of storybook reading and parent-child interaction. They researched across different income and cultural groups. They concluded that storybook reading is an integral part of family life, and that it becomes internalized. As a result, children spontaneously engage in storybook reenactments.

Lauer (1994) designed a practicum for parents that enabled them to acquire the understanding, skills, resources, and materials to support the emergent literacy development of their young (preschool) children. She concluded that after this practicum, which included workshops and parent-child activities in the classroom, parents were more involved in their children's literacy development. They read to their children and participated in activities in the classroom more often. Moreover, they felt more confident reading to their children.

Neuman (1993) explored the possibility of creating a collaborative approach to parent involvement with their children's education. There were 19 African-American adolescents mothers from low-income background in this study. She explored these mothers' perceptions of literacy through a series of peer group discussions. The perceptions ranged from behavioral to constructivist beliefs.

There have also been several studies related to parents' attitudes and their perceptions of literacy learning. Gunderson (in press) notes "what seems true across cultures and political affiliations is that parents, teachers, and other interested adults seek

“the best” for students. However, what is true both within and between cultures and groups is that there are fundamental disagreements as to what constitutes “the best” (cited in Anderson & Gundersen, 1997:514)

Anderson (1995a) examined how well some current practices in schools fit with the expectations that parents from different cultural backgrounds have for literacy learning and teaching. He found that Chinese-Canadian, Euro-Canadian, and Indo-Canadian parents supported some aspects of holistic learning, but rejected others.

Anderson & Gundersen (1997) found that most Chinese, Iranian, and Indian parents and many of their children in their study diametrically opposed many aspects of emergent literacy. They had different beliefs about teaching and learning related to accuracy/precision. A key assumption undergirding emergent literacy is that learning to read and write are imprecise processes involving approximation and invention on the part of young learners and that adult standards of correctness and convention will not be met in the initial stages of learning. However, these parents believed that accuracy and precision are important. They were critical of invented spelling and support the idea that printing neatly should be emphasized.

Anderson (1993) investigated the relationships between the beliefs which parents hold about literacy learning and their children’s early literacy knowledge and perceptions of learning to read and write. In this study, some parents held views consistent with emergent literacy, while others held more traditional views. The results of this study suggested that there was a relationship between these parents’ perceptions of literacy learning and the perceptions of literacy learning their children were developing. However, Anderson also concluded that there was an extremely weak relationship

between parents' perceptions of literacy learning and their children's emergent literacy knowledge.

Serpell (1997) analyzed ideas expressed by 38 parents of 4- to 5-year-old children about their socialization goals and the best ways of helping their child to attain them, with special attention to literacy. He concluded that the socio-cultural background of the family influenced parents' preferred approach to socialization and literacy. Parents attributed greater responsibility to the school for the socialization of children's literacy than for their moral development. In addition, Smith's (1996) research supported Serpell's findings. Smith found that many parents, particularly lower-income, still held the notion that learning to read is something children learn in elementary school.

Fitzgerald, Spiegel and Cunningham (1991) explored the relationship between parents' literacy level and their perceptions of the importance of literacy artifacts and events experiences in preschoolers' literacy development. One hundred and eight parents were interviewed and given a test. Parents were positive about the notion that literacy can begin during the preschool years. Those with lower literacy levels thought literacy artifacts and events were even more important than did parents with higher literacy levels.

Fitzgerald, Spiegel and Cunningham (1991) concluded that "low-literacy parents were much more likely than the high-literacy parents to view literacy as a bundle of skills" (p.209). On the other hand, they found that high-literacy parents embraced natural artifacts and activities, but were outspoken in their disapproval of skill-oriented materials and activities. They emphasized that knowing the families' socioeconomic level would

have helped them sort out potential overlap among socioeconomic status, literacy level, and perceptions of emergent literacy.

Robinson and Sulzby (1983) interviewed 15 parents about the favorite storybooks their preschool children selected. Their answers suggested that an important factor depended on the amount of parent-child interaction with the books. The more interaction, the greater the child liked the book. They also found that the parents had a range of motivations for spending time with their children.

Perez-Granados & Callanan (1997) explored the ways in which both parents and older siblings are important resources for young children's learning in the home context. The participants were from 50 Mexican-descent families. They found that parents' involvement encouraged children to wonder about, and investigate, the world around them, and to follow their own interests in a process of discovery. They also noted that an important perspective they identified from parents' responses to the questions about siblings was that the learning was not one sided; that is, both older and younger siblings learn from one another. They concluded that parent-child and sibling relationships are neither static nor universal.

In spite of all the research done about parents' participation in and perceptions of literacy, there has not been a study that focuses on Mexican parents' perceptions. It is my contention that learning about parents' perceptions is essential to help children develop literacy because parents' beliefs have a strong effect and we need to build on these beliefs. If we believe in a holistic approach and emergent literacy, parental participation must be part of our curriculum.

It is the purpose of this study to learn about Oaxacan parents' perception of literacy learning focusing on the three socio-economic levels: low, middle and high. Thus, it is important to learn about Oaxaca and literacy in Mexico.

2.7. Economy, literacy learning and education in Oaxaca

Oaxaca is a state located in the southern part of Mexico. It is close to Guatemala. It has a population over 2,700,000. Oaxaca is a tourist state with different ethnic groups, such as Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Chatinos, and Mixes. Nineteen different languages are spoken in Oaxaca; however, Spanish is the official language.

According to the last national census in Mexico in 1990, Oaxaca is the poorest state in the country. In Mexico, the minimum wage is \$5.00 Canadian dollars per day for an 8-hour workday. In Oaxaca, 24% of the population does not have any income. Twenty-eight percent make less than the minimum wage. Twenty-five percent make between \$5.00 and \$10.00 CD a day. Nine percent earn between \$10.00 to \$15.00 CD. Five percent earn between \$15.00 to \$25.00 CD. Three percent earn more than \$25.00 CD, and the rest, 3.2 %, is not specified. In other words, more than 50% percent of the population of Oaxaca (1 400 000) make no more than \$5.00 CD a day. This income is used to pay for food, education, clothing, bills, and taxes, just to mention some of the expenses. You may wonder: how do these people survive? I do not have that answer.

In addition, Oaxaca has the second lowest literacy rate in Mexico. Twenty-seven percent of the population over 15 years do not know how to read and write; nineteen percent of six to fourteen-year olds do not attend school. Oaxaca is the fourth highest state in this category in Mexico. Only 23.5 % of the population over 15 years of age,

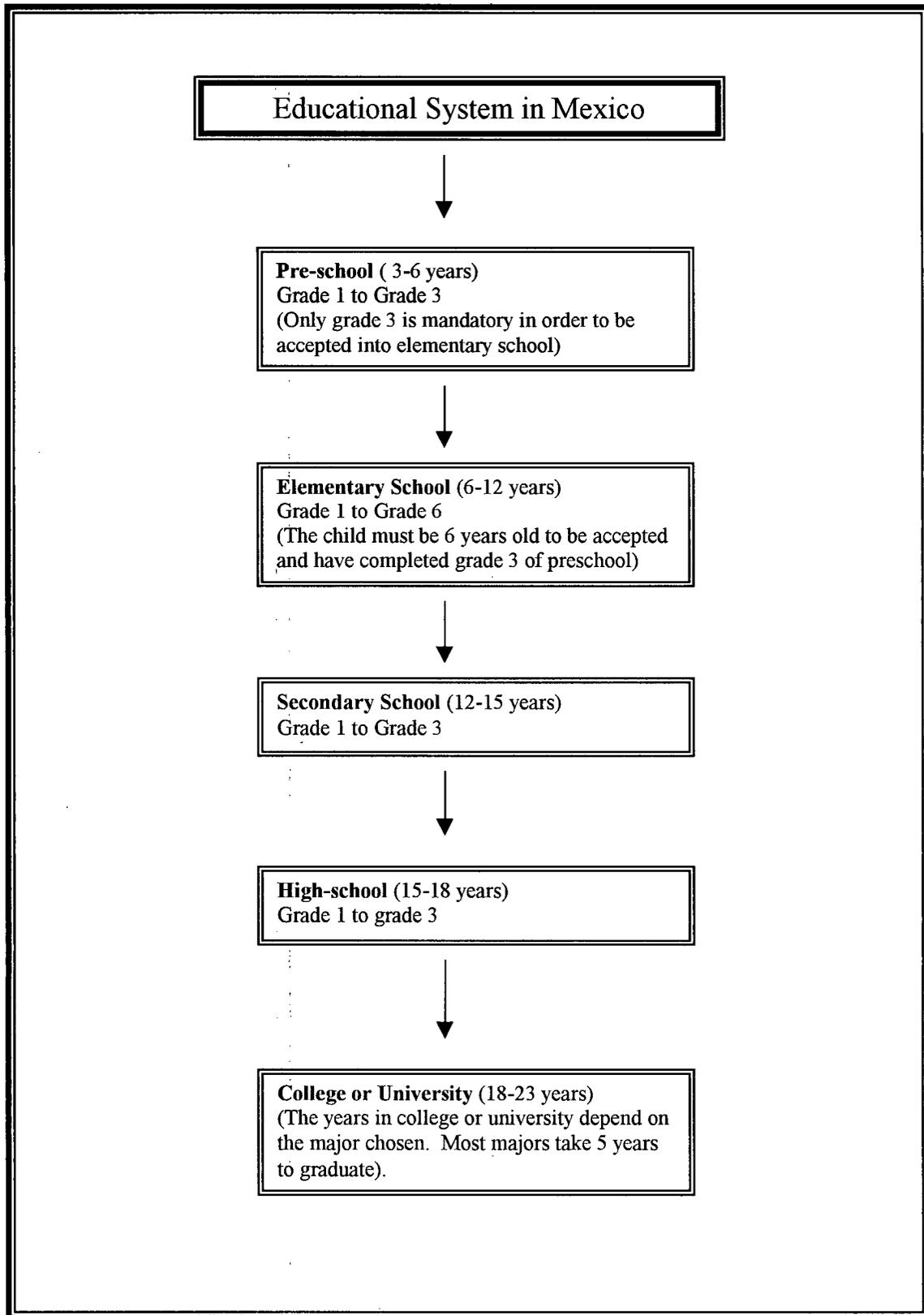
write a page full of syllables, but I also had to print neatly. My work was not accepted if the letters were not printed nicely. My nephews and nieces still do these exercises. They find them boring. Children do get to read and write by using these methods; nevertheless, there is something missing, the desire to read. Very few people read for pleasure in Mexico.

The chart—Educational System in Mexico—included in this section, provides a brief overview about the educational system that is used. It shows its different stages. The ages included in this chart may change, except for grade one in which the child must be six years old. Children must be 6 years old in order to be accepted into elementary school. The school year starts at the end of August. If the child is 5 years and ten months by then, he has to wait until the next year, and can spend one more year in pre-school, if the parents wish to do that. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on preschool and first grade.

Currently in Mexico, there is a question whether or not literacy should be taught in the preschool years. In fact, several pre-school teachers mention that they do not teach literacy because they do not want to create confusion in their students. Ferreiro (1997) addresses this issue saying that in Mexico, there is a misconception of what “teaching” literacy entails.

In order to understand this issue, it is essential to understand what “teaching” literacy means for these teachers. Ferreiro (1997) mentions that teaching literacy for many teachers means: having children do endless fine and gross motor skills such as holding a pencil and cutting paper; having children sound out letters and words; having

Figure 1



children work on penmanship skills filling up a page with one letter, syllables, and then words; having children “copy” things which is considered writing. In other words, teachers do not build on children’s previous knowledge. Moreover, they do not teach the function of literacy. Literacy is just a code for these teachers to be deciphered by children. They still believe that children are empty vessels in which we have to pour knowledge, when we know that even children “at risk” know much about literacy before receiving formal instruction (Goodman, 1967).

On the other hand, if teachers decide not to “teach” literacy during the pre-school years, every sign of print is taken away from the classrooms. Pencils are used to draw, but not to write. Ferreiro (1997) mentions that teachers “tell” and not “read” stories to children. “It is forbidden to read. It is forbidden to write [in the classroom]” (Ferreiro, 1997:118).

It is during the first year of elementary school where literacy learning takes place in Mexico. Children are supposed to learn to read and write during this year. If at the end of the year, a child cannot read and write, that child fails and has to repeat this year. Thus, many parents pressure their children to become literate during this year. A popular saying that is used is “la letra con sangre entra” (the letter enters with blood) (Ferreiro and Teberosky, 1979:6). According to the 1993 Educational Reform in Mexico, literacy learning and many aspects of the curriculum are supposed to change. Literacy learning will be taught in a more “holistic” way. The question now is: are Mexican society, economy, teachers, parents, and children ready for this drastic change?

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter has briefly described the history of emergent literacy, its characteristics and rationale. Moreover, it has focused on parents and emergent literacy. It has also briefly described Oaxaca's economic situation, education and literacy learning. As we have seen, many people need literacy to improve their standard of living.

I am interested in helping Oaxacan children become bilingual and biliterate in Spanish and English. Thus, my goal is to open a bilingual school. The approach to literacy used in Mexico is bottom-up or traditional. That is, children become literate by learning phonics and doing an endless number of exercises. Teachers or parents rarely ever read to children.

The purpose of this research is to learn about the Oaxacan parents' perceptions of literacy learning. I would like to teach English and Spanish literacy to Oaxacan children by using a holistic approach. In order for my approach to be successful, parental involvement and support are essential. Learning about their beliefs and ideas about literacy learning is the first step of my project.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The research design this study followed is described in this chapter. In addition, a description of a pilot study conducted is presented. The participating schools and the three groups of participants are also described. Finally, the procedures in this research are presented.

3.1. Research design

A survey, described as an interactive method by Palys (1997), was adopted to learn about the perceptions which Oaxacan parents from three different socio-economic groups have about literacy learning. One of the main techniques subsumed under interactive methods are questionnaires and interviews (Palys, 1997). For the purpose of this study, an in-person individual interview was chosen. Later in this chapter, I will describe the interview in detail.

The in-person individual interview has both advantages and disadvantages (Palys, 1997). Some of the advantages are: (1) the quality of the data is enhanced; (2) the interviewer can ensure that the appropriate person completes the interview; (3) immediate feedback can be provided in case of confusion about a particular question; (4) the respondent needn't be literate, since the interviewer asks the questions; and (5) the rapport that's built may have longer-term benefits for researchers engaging in longitudinal studies.

In this study, I had the opportunity to experience some of these theoretical advantages. I ensured that "parents" answered the interview. I provided clarification

when the question was not completely understood. One of the participants in this study was illiterate. This did not hinder this person's participation since I conducted the interview. I built strong rapport with some of the parents in this study. Indeed, some parents are looking forward to the results of the study.

In this study, the biggest disadvantages of in-person interviews—time and cost—were experienced. The goal was to interview twenty-five parents from each socio-economic group—a total of seventy-five parents; nevertheless, due to time and financial constraints, only 40 parents were interviewed.

3.2. Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted as part of this research. The purpose of this pilot was to verify that the items included in the interview were appropriate and comprehensible to the participating Oaxacan parents. The original interview was written in English. The interview, then, was translated into Spanish by the researcher, who has years of experience in translating. The Language Center of the University of Oaxaca verified this translation and provided its seal to make it official.

Five parents were interviewed during the pilot study. These interviews showed that the translation of the interview was appropriate and understandable for these participants. Only small changes in word order were made to some items in the interview.

The original interview consisted of 33 Likert-type items and one open-ended question. As a result of the pilot study, 3 closed, non-Likert-type, questions and another

open-ended question were added to the original interview. The purpose of the added questions was to collect more personal information about the interviewee.

3.3. Participants

For the purpose of this study, three schools were selected in the city of Oaxaca. Each school was selected to represent a different socio-economic status (SES), which was the focus of this study. St. Phillip Institute represented the upper SES, St. Joseph School represented the middle SES, and St. Christopher School represented the low SES group (Imaginary names have been used for confidentiality purposes).

St. Phillip Institute is the most popular private school in Oaxaca. It is located in the most affluent residential neighborhood of Oaxaca. It offers a day-care center, pre-school, elementary school, and secondary school. For the purpose of this study, we will describe the elementary section of this institute. St. Phillip Institute hosts over 250 students in the elementary level. It offers English, computers, music, dance and small classes right from pre-school, as extracurricular courses. These are typical features of private schools in Oaxaca. Children wear uniforms. They have a different uniform for physical education. Most of the students come from upper SES families. Indeed, I witnessed how three workers from the institute actually wait at the entrance of the school to help children unload from their parents' cars. Twelve parents from this school participated in the study.

St. Joseph School is one of the most popular public elementary schools in Oaxaca. It is located in an upper-middle class residential neighborhood in the city. It offers pre-school and elementary level. St. Joseph School hosts more than 450 students. Unlike St.

Phillips Institute, St. Joseph School offers only dance classes as extracurricular courses. Parents have to pay an extra fee to get these classes. Children wear uniforms. In addition, they have a different uniform for physical education. Most children come from middle SES families. They come from the different neighborhoods close to this school. Thirteen parents from this school participated in the study.

St. Christopher School is an urban public school. It is located in a lower class neighborhood. It offers elementary school level only. It has a population of 300 students. Unlike the two other participating schools, St. Christopher School offers classes in the afternoon. Children in St. Christopher School attend school from 1:30 to 6:30 p.m.; whereas, in the other two participating schools—St. Phillip Institute and St. Joseph School—children attend school from 8:00 to 1:00 p.m. Usually, low SES families choose afternoon schools because uniforms are not demanded and children can help in the house or work in the morning. Some of these families can not even afford a uniform. St. Christopher School does not offer any extra curricular courses. Fifteen parents from this school participated in the study.

3.3.1. Upper SES parents

The parents whose children attend St. Phillip Institute belong to the upper SES group. Eight out of twelve of the parents in this group are professionals. Three of them hold a college degree, and one has high-school level. Their monthly family income ranges from C\$1166 to C\$4166. The mean monthly family income for this group is C\$2083.00. All of these parents live in affluent residential neighborhoods.

This group was the most challenging one to arrange for interviews. Several families were contacted and seemed to be too busy to consent to an interview even after agreeing to participate. I had to call some of the families several times in order to arrange an appointment. There were cases in which the parents failed to make the appointment, even when the interview was conducted in the parents' homes. Although the parents had been informed about the purpose of the study three months in advance, and they had consented to participate, they usually seemed a bit reluctant to participate and questioned the researcher about the study.

3.3.2. Middle SES parents

The parents whose children attend St. Joseph School represent the middle SES group. The level of education in this group varies. Only one parent in this group has a professional career. Five parents have a college degree. Three have graduated from high school. Two have a junior high level of education, and two have an elementary school level. The monthly income in this group varies from C\$416 to C\$1166. The mean monthly family income for this group is C\$649. It is difficult to comment on their homes, since most parents were interviewed at their child's school.

This group did not present any difficulty in arranging the interviews. Some parents, especially mothers, take lunch to their children. The researcher took advantage of this time, and arranged interviews with some of these parents while they fed their child. It is interesting because the school closes its door during lunchtime, so parents have to pass the food through the school's fence.

3.3.3. Low SES parents

The parents whose children attend St. Christopher School represent the low SES group. The level of education of these parents is much lower compared to the other two groups. There is only one parent who is a professional, another one who has a college level, and one who has a high school level. Five of these parents have a junior-high-school level and six have an elementary school level. Also, one parent is illiterate. The monthly family income for this group varies from C\$50 to C\$333. The mean monthly family income for this group is C\$206.00. Most of these parents live in a poor urban neighborhood.

This group presented no difficulties in arranging the interviews. Although, most parents were interviewed at their child's schools, the researcher had the opportunity to interview some of the parents in their homes. They were very welcoming. One of the homes was a shack with a dirt floor. I was offered in one case, the only chair in the house. In Mexico, poor people tend to be very hospitable and offer you the best they have. They were certainly generous with their time.

3.4. The interview

The interview, Parents' Perception of Literacy Learning Interview Schedule (PPLLIS), was created by Anderson (1992). The PPLLIS is a 33 item interview and is similar to Deford's (1978) Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (cited in Anderson, 1994). To develop this instrument, Anderson (1992) conducted a review of the literature regarding emergent literacy and extrapolated a number of features. Then, these features were converted into questions such as, "Does a child learn to read by first learning the

letters of the alphabet and their sounds, then words, then sentences and then stories?”

The 33 questions were clustered in three groups—reading, writing, and literacy learning in general. Two university professors, experts in early literacy, reviewed the interview guide to establish face validity. In addition, “40 senior undergraduate education students, who had explored emergent literacy in an in-depth manner in reading/language arts courses, completed the interview such that 20 of them answered as they would if they agreed with an emergent literacy perspective while the other 20 answered as they would if they held a traditional assumption about literacy acquisition. A reliability of .95 was established when actual responses were compared to anticipated responses” (Anderson, 1994:167).

The developer of the PPLLIS decided, after using the original interview, to turn the interview into a Likert-type interview. The Likert-type questionnaires or interviews are distinguished by two features. The first attribute is that the items in the interviews are assertions, rather than questions. The second one is that the respondents’ task is to indicate the extent to which he or she agrees or disagrees with the assertion. (Palys, 1997).

For the purpose of this study, a Likert-type interview was very useful. One of the advantages of this type of interview is that once the respondents get used to using the agree-disagree format, they can deal rapidly with many different issues. In addition, one can tell the extent to which a person agrees or disagrees with a position formulated by the researcher (Palys, 1997).

With a Likert-type interview, it is possible to determine the extent to which parents agree or disagree with an emergent literacy model. The interview provided five

options—strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. (See appendix A). In this study, we did not restrict parents' comments on each item of the interview. On the contrary, parents were encouraged to add comments. I was interested in hearing both the respondent's position in his or her own words, and the extent to which they agree or disagree with an emergent literacy model.

To the PPLLIS, Anderson (1995a) added one open-ended question—"What are the five most important things you are doing to help your child learn to read and write?" He argues that with an open-ended question, "parents would identify what they were actually doing to help their child become literate and not be guided by what they thought the researcher wanted them to say" (Anderson, 1995: 399).

After the pilot study conducted for this study, I decided to add 4 more items to the PPLLIS. Three of them were closed questions: (1) level of education; (2) monthly-family income; and (3) Do you remember when you were learning to read and write? Moreover, one open-ended question was added—(4)"Could you mention five things you did or you were asked to do (by your parents or teachers) to learn to read and write?" The purpose of these questions was to collect more personal information about the interviewee.

3.5. Procedures

The first step of this research was to visit the schools, which had been chosen. This took place in April 1999. The schools were provided with a brief description of the study and were assured of its confidentiality. All principals were welcoming and supported the research. In the case of St. Joseph School and St. Christopher School, the principals agreed to participate immediately after meeting with the researcher. However,

in the case of St. Phillip Institute, the principal had to consult about this with the owner of the institute and the school committee. One week later, the study was approved.

Interestingly, all principals from the three participating schools suggested that the parents of children who were in grade 1 should participate in this study. It is during grade one when children “have” to learn to read and write in Mexico. If children fail to accomplish this, they have to repeat this year. Moreover, the three principals arranged a meeting where the researcher would meet the teachers of these grades. All teachers welcomed the study and looked forward to its results.

The researcher provided each school with one hundred forms, which were to be given to parents. In these forms, the parents were informed about the purpose and the procedure of the study, confidentiality issues, and that the interviews would take place during August, 1999. This form had also a section in which parents could choose whether or not they consented to participate. If they consented to do so, they were asked to provide their address, telephone number, and further comments.

The researcher collected those forms two weeks later. 35 parents from St. Phillip Institute, 45 parents from St. Joseph School, and 30 parents from St. Christopher School consented to participate. Since it had been decided to interview 25 parents from each group, 25 parents were randomly selected from the parents who had consented to participate.

All interviews were carried out by the researcher in August, 1999. All the interviews were in Spanish. The interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed in their entirety. Most interviews were conducted either at the parents' home or at their

child's school. There were some cases in which the researcher conducted the interview in the parents' offices or businesses as well.

During the interviews, the researcher would read aloud the question giving the parents a chance to read question at the same time. I would give the parents time to process the item, and provide extra information when the parent looked puzzled. This occurred very few times. Besides recording the interview, I recorded their answers in the hard copy of the questionnaire and wrote down notes that would give context to the recordings.

After a month trying to contact all the parents who had been randomly selected, I could only interview 12 parents from St. Phillip Institute, 13 parents from St. Joseph School, and 15 parents from St. Christopher School. Due to time and financial constraints, the researcher had to stop interviewing parents.

The interviews were then transcribed in their entirety and translated into English by the researcher. The translation of the transcriptions was verified by the Language Center of the University of Oaxaca and accepted as correct translations.

The 33 Likert-type items, education level and monthly family income were entered into a statistical database (SPSS). St Phillip Institute was entered as group A; St. Joseph School was entered as group B; and St. Christopher School was entered as group C. The monthly-family income variable was entered exactly as reported by the parents. The education level was entered as follows: professional = 5; college level = 4; high school level = 3; secondary school level = 2; primary school level = 1; and no education = 0.

The 33 Likert-type items were given a value from 1 to 5 according to the answers provided by the parents. A 5 value represented a view of literacy learning consistent with an emergent literacy model, and 1 value represented a view of literacy learning consistent with a traditional model.

SPSS version 6 was used to compute mean scores for each Likert-type item. It provided a mean score for each SES group and total mean score for the three SES groups. In addition, Pearson correlation was run in the statistical database. The significant positive and negative correlations are presented in chapter five.

The answers of the 2 open-ended questions were divided into 5 categories developed by Anderson (1995a). The five categories are: (1) participating in literacy activities/events; (2) teaching literacy skills; (3) valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy; (4) knowledge development; and (5) other responses. Both the researcher and an expert in the area divided the answers into these five categories. An inter-rater reliability of 90% was obtained. Percentages of the answers for each category were calculated.

This chapter has briefly described the methodology of this study. The following chapter will describe its results.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. They are divided into five sections. Results of the Likert-type items are divided into 3 sections: (1) reading; (2) writing; and (3) literacy-general. The other two sections come from two open-ended questions: (4) What are the 5 most important things you do in order to help your child learn to read and write? (5) Can you mention five things you did or you were asked to do (by your teachers or parents) in order to learn to read and write? Within each section, the findings from each SES group are presented. It is worth mentioning that the interviewees were given the opportunity to comment on any Likert-type item. Therefore, some of these comments accompany the statistical results.

The Likert type items were scored as follows. A "1.00" value represents "strongly agree" with a traditional perspective of literacy learning. A "2.00" value represents "agree" with a traditional perspective. A "3.00" value represents "neither agree nor disagree". A "4.00" value represents "agree" with an emergent literacy perspective. Finally, a "5.00" value represents "strongly agree" with an emergent literacy perspective to literacy learning. Mean scores for each question are presented. Group A represents the upper SES group (St. Phillip Institute). Group B represents the middle SES group (St. Joseph School). Group C represents the lower SES group (St. Christopher School). In addition, a total mean score for the three groups is presented for each question.

4.1. Reading

Table 1 shows the results for the reading section. The mean score for the three SES groups in this section is 3.00, which means that overall the Oaxacan parents have beliefs from both a traditional and an emergent literacy perspective. Let us focus on each of the groups.

Table 1. Reading

| Assertion | Mean Score Group A | Mean Score Group B | Mean Score Group C | Total Mean Score |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. A child learns to read by first learning the letters of the alphabet and their sounds, then words, then sentences and then stories. | M 1.58 SD .51 | M 1.61 SD .50 | M 1.87 SD .74 | M 1.70 SD .60 |
| 2. Teaching a child to recognize isolated words on sight (flashcards) is a suitable technique for teaching her to read. | M 2.41 SD 1.08 | M 1.69 SD .63 | M 3.06 SD 1.09 | M 2.42 SD 1.10 |
| 3. A child needs workbooks and basal readers to learn how to read. | M 1.50 SD .90 | M 2.07 SD 1.18 | M 1.93 SD .79 | M 1.85 SD .97 |
| 4. This book (e.g. Las bellas hijas del Sr. Mufaro) is suitable to read to very young children. | M 3.41 SD 1.56 | M 3.61 SD 1.19 | M 2.80 SD 1.08 | M 3.25 SD 1.29 |
| 5. Child benefits from hearing favourite stories that she has memorized read again and again. | M 4.25 SD 1.13 | M 4.46 SD .87 | M 3.46 SD .99 | M 4.02 SD 1.07 |
| 6. You should not encourage a child to join in sometimes while you read a book with which she is familiar for is it better that the child listen to the story without interruption. | M 3.92 SD .99 | M 3.84 SD .89 | M 3.33 SD 1.49 | M 3.67 SD 1.18 |
| 7. You will be teaching your child a bad habit if you point to print as you read. | M 2.66 SD 1.30 | M 3.69 SD 1.10 | M 3.73 SD 1.09 | M 3.40 SD 1.23 |
| 8. You are helping a child to learn to read by encouraging her to discuss what is being read. | M 4.75 SD .45 | M 4.07 SD .75 | M 3.80 SD .77 | M 4.17 SD .78 |
| 9. It is necessary to check a child's understanding by asking him questions at the end of each story. | M 1.25 SD .62 | M 1.92 SD .64 | M 1.66 SD 1.04 | M 1.62 SD .83 |
| 10. You should permit your child to "read" familiar books by retelling the story from memory using the pictures as cues. | M 4.50 SD .52 | M 4.23 SD .43 | M 3.60 SD .82 | M 4.07 SD .73 |

| | | | | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 11. Real reading begins only when a child begins to say the words as they are printed on the page. | M 2.83 SD 1.52 | M 3.15 SD 1.14 | M 2.73 SD 1.09 | M 2.90 SD 1.23 |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|

4.1.1. St. Phillip Institute (upper SES group)

This group of parents' mean score in this section was 3.00. In some of the items, they held strong beliefs consistent with a traditional perspective. For instance, in item 1, they agreed that literacy learning is sequential. They also agreed that workbooks and basal readers were necessary. Some commented, "I always buy them" and "They [workbooks and basal readers] get their [children's] attention. In their school, they loved the books and they adopted these books for the whole class". In addition, these parents strongly believed that it is important to check child's understanding by asking him questions at the end of each story. They supported their beliefs by adding comments such as, "[It is necessary] to know if he understands what he read", "To see whether or not, in reality, he paid attention because children tend to get distracted", and "They do not pay attention; thus, we should do it".

On the other hand, these parents also supported aspects of an emergent literacy perspective. In item 5, one parent said, "Yes, they benefit from it. The child understands as he reads the book more and more even if he does it for a month because he enjoys it". Item 6, in which the mean score was 3.92, was supported by comments such as, "The purpose [reading to a child] is for the child to participate. It is a link", "It is better if he interrupts. His thinking is creative", and "At this moment [when children ask questions], they exercise their imagination". Item 8 was the one that was in the closest accordance with an emergent literacy perspective (4.75). One parent commented, "It [encouraging the child to discuss what is being read] is good motivation". Item 10 was the second in

closest accordance (4.5). “Well, yes, it is helping his imagination”, one parent added. Finally, in item 4, one parent said, “You can read any book to the child” and another added “[This book is suitable] because of the illustrations”.

There were two items, in which parents disagreed with each other. In item 7, 50% of the parents agreed with a traditional perspective (25% strongly agreed and 25% agreed), and 41.7% agreed with an emergent literacy perspective. One parent emphatically said, “It [pointing to print as you read] is wrong”. Two others supported this belief by saying, “Because they will keep this bad habit” and the other one said, “It is important to read without hesitations. Fast reading is better”. On the other hand, one parent opposed this view saying, “ They use a small ruler to learn. I do not think it affects them. When they are young, this helps them and little by little this habit disappears”. In item 11, 50% of the parents agreed with a traditional perspective (25% strongly agreed and 25% agreed), and 41.7% agreed with an emergent literacy perspective (16% strongly agreed and 25% agreed). One parent agreeing with an emergent literacy perspective said, “By looking at the images, they create stories”. On the other hand, another parent disagreeing said, “Well, yes, because reading is like this”.

4.1.2. St. Joseph School (middle SES group)

This group held some perceptions related to a traditional perspective and some to an emergent literacy perspective. The mean score of this group for this section was 3.10. There were four items, in which they held a traditional perspective, and 5 items, in which they were closer to an emergent literacy perspective.

Some of their traditional views were the following. They believed that literacy learning is sequential. “That sequence [first learning the letters of the alphabet and their sounds, then words, then sentences and then stories] is followed”, one parent mentioned. They also supported the use of flashcards “Because that is the way they are taught”, one parent said. This group also supported the use of workbooks and basal readers. One parent mentioned something very interesting, “They need workbooks, but it is also necessary that one helps them because it is difficult for them”. Another parent, who agreed with this item, pointed out that workbooks and basal readers are not required in her child’s school. On the other hand, one parent opposed this view saying, “Sometimes he does not need workbooks and can learn in other ways”. Moreover, this group thought it was necessary to check a child’s understanding (item 9). One parent commented on this item, “[It is necessary to check his understanding] to see if he understood or what he liked.”

On the other hand, these parents strongly supported three items, which were consistent with an emergent literacy perspective. In item 5, these parents commented, “Yes, it is necessary because since a very young age, they can remember more” and another parent added, “Yes, because he learns his own stories sometimes”. This group of parents supported a child’s discussion of the readings (item 8). One parent emphatically pointed out, “Yes, he is helped this way because the child does not have to memorize, but to understand”. In addition, these parents held strong views on item 10. One parent held a strong view against memorization. This parent commented, “ Using drawings only because a book that he has memorized is not appropriate”. Item 4 was supported by a parent who said, “[This book is appropriate] because of the drawings, they may guide

themselves and learn". In item 6, many parents supported this notion with comments such as, "The child has to ask questions because he understands it [the story] this way. He has to participate" and "If [the child does not participate] not, it does not make sense because if they do not participate, they will not understand what it is about".

Within this group, parents had opposite views in 2 items. Thirty percent of the parents believed that pointing to print as you read is a bad habit. "Well, yes, because he will do the same" and "Yes, because he will read that way everywhere" were two comments. On the other hand, 70% opposed this view. One parent said, "As long as he is young, it is useful" and another one added, "Because he is learning that way". Item 11 had also both views. Some parents held a traditional view (60%), and others held an emergent literacy perspective (40%). One parent said, "[Reading begins only when a child begins to say the words as they are printed on the page] because we can notice if he really knows how to read". Two others opposed this view saying, "It [reading] starts since they begin to imagine what it [text] says" and "No, because he can explain it in his own words".

4.1.3. St. Christopher School (low SES group)

This group's mean score for the reading section was 2.90. Although the mean score does not show strong views toward either perspective, the comments provided by these parents show that this group has both traditional and emergent-literacy perspectives of literacy learning.

This group held traditional beliefs toward literacy learning. They believed that literacy is sequential. They also supported the use of workbooks and basal readers.

Moreover, they believed in the importance of asking the child questions to check his understanding at the end of each story. Some parents commented, “It is good to check what he is learning and what he is not” and “Yes, because we have to make sure they understood”.

On the contrary, this group had views consistent with an emergent literacy model. They agreed with item 5 “Because it useful for him”. Although the mean score for item 6 was 3.30 (40% of the parents having a traditional view and 60 % having an emergent literacy view), the comments from the parents encouraged child’s participation. Half of the parents commented on this item. Some comments were: “No, also the child has to participate. Everybody should participate, so the child begins to loosen up”, “He must be given the chance to give his opinion”, and “We have to cheer him up, so he participates”. This group believed that pointing to print was not a bad habit. “ No, it is not bad. It is good for them”, one parent opined. Another one contextualized his answer saying, “No, because my brother, who is in grade two, points and that is how he learns and does not miss the lines where he is reading”. Encouraging child’s discussion about readings was also valued by these parents. One parent opined, “Because he understands it more”. Finally, this group believed that the child should be allowed to “read” familiar books (item 10). “ I do this with my kids”, one parent said.

The parents in this group disagreed with each other in 3 items. In this group, 46.7% thought that the use of flashcards was a suitable technique for teaching a child to read, while 46.7% opposed this view. In item 4, 40% of the parents thought that the book shown to them was appropriate, while 53% did not. “He would not understand it [the story]; Red Riding Hood, yes”, said one parent. Another one said emphatically, “In the

kindergarten, teachers say we should not read to them”. On the other hand, one parent commented extensively, “I think that anything one reads to the child, he understands it— anything according to his age. It is adequate because the child has to create his own criteria since he is young... There are no limitations now. We have to prepare them better. It depends very much on the parents”. Moreover, another supported this item by saying, “Because it is there [during reading time] where he is learning”. Finally, 60% of the parents agreed that real readings begins only when a child begins to say the words as they are printed on the page, while 40% disagreed with this notion.

4.2. Writing

Table 2 shows the results for the “writing” section of the interview. The total mean score for the three groups in this section was 2.60. All parents held more beliefs consistent with a traditional perspective to literacy learning in this section. Comments from the parents will be added while describing the results.

Table 2. Writing

| Assertion | Mean Score Group A | Mean Score Group B | Mean Score Group C | Total Mean Score |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 12. IT IS necessary for a child to know the letters of the alphabet, and the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, before she begins to write. | M 1.16 SD .38 | M 1.92 SD 1.11 | M 1.86 SD .99 | M 1.67 SD .94 |
| 13. A child should learn to print neatly the letters of the alphabet before attempting to print messages, notes, stories and so forth. | M 3.00 SD 1.20 | M 2.69 SD 1.18 | M 2.26 SD 1.03 | M 2.62 SD 1.14 |
| 14. It is necessary for a child to have lots of experience copying words, then sentences, and finally stories before she attempts to write on her own. | M 3.91 SD .90 | M 2.61 SD 1.38 | M 2.80 SD 1.08 | M 3.07 SD 1.24 |

| | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 15. A child should be encouraged to write only easy words and short sentences when she begins to write. | M 2.25 SD 1.05 | M 2.15 SD 1.14 | M 1.93 SD .79 | M 2.10 SD .98 |
| 16. A child's early scribbles (show examples) are related to later development in writing stories, messages, etc. | M 4.16 SD .93 | M 4.30 SD .48 | M 4.13 SD .35 | M 4.20 SD .60 |
| 17. A child needs workbooks to learn how to write. | M 1.66 SD 1.37 | M 2.23 SD 1.16 | M 1.80 SD .77 | M 1.90 SD 1.10 |
| 18. A child can begin to write before she has learned the correct spelling of the words. | M 3.16 SD 1.19 | M 3.23 SD 1.23 | M 2.86 SD .99 | M 3.07 SD 1.11 |
| 19. You should correct a child if she writes "kt" for the word "cat". | M 1.50 SD .67 | M 1.92 SD 1.11 | M 2.00 SD 1.13 | M 1.82 SD 1.01 |
| 20. A child's confusion of "b" and "d" and "p" and "q" in printing is an indication of a major problem. | M 3.66 SD 1.30 | M 2.69 SD 1.25 | M 2.86 SD 1.12 | M 3.05 SD 1.26 |
| 21. A child can begin to write (e.g. notes, stories) before she knows how to read. | M 2.75 SD 1.21 | M 2.46 SD 1.12 | M 2.26 SD 1.03 | M 2.47 SD 1.10 |

4.2.1. St. Phillip Institute (upper SES group)

St. Phillip Institute parents held views consistent with both a traditional and an emergent literacy perspective. The mean score for this group in this section was 2.70.

Let us focus on their traditional views.

For these parents, "It is very important" for a child to know the letters of the alphabet and their sounds before she begins to write. These parents support the use of workbooks. Two parents said, "Up to now, my children still have their workbooks" and "Yes, because, it is a discipline. Writing is a discipline. My children started writing with the didactics [method] at school". One parent added, "They [workbooks] are big support, but not definite". In addition, these parents rejected the notion of invented spelling. "Yes, you must correct spelling. It is very important", one parent said emphatically. One elaborated, "He must be corrected because it is not the correct spelling, but the idea is correct".

On the other hand, these parents supported some aspects of an emergent literacy model. They do not think that the child has to have lots of experience copying. “They can write with drawings”, “[I disagree] because this is a behavioral pattern, and if you give him more freedom, it gives you better results”, and “Children like to write on their own. We should let them” were comments provided by these parents. In addition, these parents believed that a child’s early scribbles are related to later development in writing stories (item 16). One parent commented, “It is related to all his means of expressions such as, speaking and drawing”. Finally, on item 20, they expressed comments disagreeing with this item. For instance, “Not at all. They are related to the chronological child stages, and later they improve”, “No, because at the beginning, there is confusion. I corrected my child and it was not a big problem” and “I do not think so. It is part of the process of identifying words”.

There were some items, in which some parents disagreed with each other. These items’ mean scores were usually close to a 3.00, which means neither agreement nor disagreement. In item 13, 50% of the parents held an emergent literacy perspective, and 33.4% held a traditional perspective. They expressed different views about it, “It [having the child print neatly before attempting to write messages] should be done, so you can understand it. It is good, so he can start defining the image” and “He has to trace them”. On the other hand, some others said, “They can do it. It does not matter how they do it as long as they convey their ideas”, “They can write many things without having nice handwriting” and “It is not true because the messages have incalculable value”. One parent contextualized his comment, “ For example, my child can write with the computer. She knows all the letters, but she has problem with penmanship”. These parents had

opposite views on items 18 and 21. In item 18, 50% of the parents held an emergent literacy perspective and 33.3% held a traditional one. For item 21, 41.7% of the parents held a traditional perspective, 33.3% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 25% agreed with an emergent literacy perspective. Some parents commented, “It [learning to read and learning to write] is simultaneously”, and “He writes his own ideas and stories”. Some others disagreed. Two said emphatically, “No, because they would write incoherently. It may be that they do it in their world, but nothing comprehensible” and “No, they read first”. Clearly, this group held both traditional and emergent-literacy views.

4.2.2. St. Joseph School (middle SES group)

This group of parents also held both traditional and emergent-literacy perspectives. The mean score in this section for this group was 2.60.

This group of parents held several beliefs related to a traditional perspective of literacy learning. Parents commented on item 12, “Because if he does not know the alphabet, he would not know how to read. They need to learn both the alphabet and the words” and “Yes, it is necessary because through sounds they can differentiate the letters, so they can read them.” Middle SES parents also thought that it is important the child has experience (item 14) “Because he [the child] has to practice”. “It works. Now, they [teachers] are using that method”, another parent added. These parents also supported the use of workbooks and interaction with the child, “They need them, but we have to tell them how”. A parent commented, “Yes, they need them, but at school, they do not use them”. This group also rejected the notion of invented spelling, “Well, yes, because if you do not do it [correcting child’s spelling], she will continue doing it, and it is not

correct.” However, one parent said, “At the beginning no, if he is young. Later!”

Finally, these parents disagreed with item 21. One parent ironically said, “If he does not know how to read, how is he going to write them [notes and stories]”. “First, he has to learn how to read to be able to write”, another parent added.

Although this group of parents held notions consistent with an emergent literacy perspective, there was only one item, which reflected this position according to the mean scores. They agreed that a child’s early scribbles are related to later development in writing stories, messages, etc. Some parents emphatically said, “Yes, because they express what they feel and think” and “Because it is there where they can interpret what they are drawing or writing.”

Within this group of parents, there were four items, in which parents’ comments reflected both perspectives. First, in item 13, 53 % of the parents held a traditional view, while 38.5% held an emergent literacy perspective. Parents provided different comments. Some parents said, “Yes, that [child printing neatly] is the basis of how he is going to write” and “Yes, because there goes the beginning of his writing”. On the other hand, other parents opposed this view saying, “ It is not necessary for the letters to be pretty, but for them [children] to do them” and “The important thing is that he learns, and later he can correct his handwriting”. Although 77% of the parents held a traditional view on item 15, parents had different comments. Two said, “Yes, because if they show her a long word, she will not be able to figure it out. She will not put two and two together” and “ We cannot ask more than they can handle”. On the contrary, one parent said determinedly, “No, he can write what he likes”. On item 18, 46.2% of the parents held a traditional view, whereas 53.9% held an emergent literacy perspective. One parent

said, “No, he has to learn [the correct spelling of the words before attempting to write] first”. However, another one said, “ Yes, but I cannot understand what it [child’s scribbling] says.” Finally, there was controversy on whether the child’s confusion similar letters was a big problem (item 20)—46% of the parents agreed with a traditional perspective, and 38.5% agreed with an emergent literacy perspective. Some argued, “ It is a problem because if they do not stick to what one says, they will not learn” and “Yes, because Jorgito [this mother’s nine-year-old child] still has problem”. Oppositely, some others said, “It is logical because they are just starting” and “He is just learning”. Some others expressed that if one does not correct the child, this confusion becomes a big problem.

4.2.3. St. Christopher School (low SES group)

St. Christopher School parents held both traditional and emergent- literacy perceptions toward writing. The mean score of these parents’ answers for this section was 2.40 which leans more towards a traditional perspective.

This group of parents held some traditional perceptions of literacy learning. It is necessary for a child to know the letters and its sounds “Because it is the first thing they are taught—sounds and syllables” and “Because it is the method used in schools—sounds without having to write them”. These parents also supported the use of workbooks. Some of their comments were “Yes, it is necessary” and “ Yes, a lot of exercises.” Finally, these parents rejected the notion of invented spelling. Three parents commented that the child had to be corrected and two gave reasons; “Yes, because that is not a word.

That is only letters” and “Yes, because they do not know”. However, one parent said, “It depends on the stage. In the kindergarten, no!”

On the other hand, this group supported one item consistent with an emergent literacy model. Item 16, which had a mean score of 4.13, received a supportive comment from one parent, “Yes, because they are finding out [through their scribbling]”.

Within this group of parents, there were some items, in which some parents held different perspectives compared to others parents. Although, 73% of the parents in this group believed that a child should learn to print neatly before attempting to print messages (item 13), 20% opposed this view providing reasons. One parent opined, “ Yes, because he should get the habit of doings things correctly right from the beginning”. Another one comically commented, “Because if they do not, then they write “spiders” that are not legible”. On the other hand, some others said, “ No, it is not necessary because there are some of us who have “terrible” handwriting” and “ No, because a child who starts writing does not write neatly”. In item 14, 60% agreed with a traditional view and 33.3% agreed with an emergent literacy perspective. One parent commented “[It is not necessary for a child to have lots of experience copying] because it is good that he displays his idea first. He can write it in his own way”. On the other hand, others said, “Yes, because it is the only way she can be aware [of how writing works]” and “Because it is logical”. Moreover, in item 18, 40% of the parents believed that a child can begin to write before she has learned the correct spelling of the words, while 53% of the parents disagreed with this. In item 20, 40% of the parents held a traditional view, and 40% held an emergent literacy view. One parent said emphatically, “ I do not think so because he understands little by little. In first grade, they get confused with the letters. Teachers

sometimes give children traumas because they tell them that they have a problem instead of trying to help them overcome it". On the other hand, two parents commented, "Yes, because they have to see the word and not write any letter" and "Because you have to make him repeat it, so he can learn". Finally, although only 20% of the parents believed that a child can begin to write before she knows how to read, they supported their belief with comments. They mentioned, "[They can write] in their own way" and "It depends on the child and the support given to him". On the other hand, other parents commented, "No, because he would not be able to", "Because he does not have the knowledge yet", and "He first learns to read, and then to write".

This SES group, as well as the other two groups, held both traditional and emergent-literacy perspectives towards writing. Let us focus now on literacy learning in general.

4.3. Literacy-general

This section of the interview included items related to literacy learning in a general sense. Table 3 shows the results for this section. The total mean score for the three SES groups was 3.65. Parents held more perceptions consistent with an emergent literacy model than with a traditional one. Relevant comments were provided by the parents.

4.3.1. St. Phillip Institute (upper SES group)

The upper SES group held an emergent literacy perspective in this section. Most of the mean scores show this view. The mean score in this section for this group was

3.90. These parents provided comments, which supported these notions. Only one item was consistent with a traditional model and some comments provided by some of the parents.

Table 3. Literacy-general

| Assertion | Mean Score Group A | Mean Score Group B | Mean Score Group C | Total Mean Score |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 22. Learning to read and learning to write are similar to learning to talk in that children learn these skills gradually. | M 4.33 SD .88 | M 3.92 SD .64 | M 4.26 SD .45 | M 4.17 SD .67 |
| 23. It is only gifted children who learn to read and write before receiving formal instruction in preschool or elementary school. | M 3.66 SD 1.15 | M 3.31 SD 1.11 | M 2.46 SD 1.50 | M 3.10 SD 1.35 |
| 24. Reading to, and with, children help them learn to write. | M 4.66 SD .49 | M 4.00 SD 1.00 | M 4.13 SD .99 | M 4.25 SD .89 |
| 25. Children learn important things about reading and writing before they begin formal reading programs at preschool or elementary school. | M 3.75 SD 1.35 | M 3.38 SD 1.19 | M 3.06 SD 1.38 | M 3.37 SD 1.31 |
| These activities help children to learn to read and write: 26. Talking to them. | M 4.41 SD .51 | M 4.07 SD .75 | M 3.86 SD 1.24 | M 4.10 SD .92 |
| 27. Taking them on outings. | M 4.08 SD .99 | M 4.0 SD .71 | M 3.86 SD .91 | M 3.97 SD .86 |
| 28. Having them pretend to write grocery lists with you. | M 3.83 SD 1.19 | M 3.92 SD .95 | M 3.73 SD 1.16 | M 3.82 SD 1.08 |
| 29. Reading to them. | M 4.50 SD .52 | M 4.31 SD .48 | M 4.20 SD .77 | M 4.32 SD .61 |
| 30. Schools should be totally responsible for teaching children to learn to read and write. | M 4.33 SD .88 | M 3.92 SD .64 | M 3.06 SD 1.66 | M 3.72 SD 1.28 |
| 31. It is important that children see their parents reading and writing. | M 4.75 SD .45 | M 4.46 SD .87 | M 4.26 SD .70 | M 4.47 SD .71 |
| 32. Children have to be certain age before they can begin to learn to read and write. | M 3.25 SD 1.28 | M 2.76 SD 1.23 | M 2.60 SD 1.35 | M 2.85 SD 1.29 |
| 33. Children need training in hand-eye coordination, recognizing shapes, and so forth before they begin to learn to read and write. | M 1.83 SD 1.11 | M 1.61 SD .50 | M 1.53 SD .83 | M 1.65 SD .83 |

Within this group, there were seven items that were statistically highly consistent with an emergent literacy model—items with a mean score of 4.00 or higher (items 22, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, and 31). Comments supported these notions. On item 24, two parents commented, “A lot! Feeling that someone cares encourages them” and “They start getting it”. They also believed that “[Talking to children] is very important”. Moreover, they thought that outings “Encourage them [children]”, and that reading to them “Helps them”. On item 30, schools should be totally responsible for teaching children to learn to read and write, parents provided several comments. “It is shared”, “Not at all. It is parents who should be attentive”, “The family is mainly responsible”, and “No, it has to be a collaboration between parents and teachers”. Finally, they strongly believed that children should see parents reading and writing. One parent said, “It is motivating, but [we should read] good readings”.

Within this group, there were items with a lower mean score of 4.00, which received very supportive comments towards an emergent literacy perspective though. These parents believed that every child, and not only gifted children, is able to learn to read and write before receiving formal instruction. “It is the enthusiasm and the example. It is their desire for research, discovery”, “My children are not gifted, and they learnt” and “All children have similar intelligence. The environment is very important as well as the attention” were some of the supporting comments. In addition, they thought that children learn important things about reading and writing before formal instruction. One parent said, “If you read to them and get them used to because if there is no contact, no!” However, there was one parent who did not support this notion and emphatically said,

“They learn at school”. Having the child write the grocery list was seen as “A way to encourage him [child]”. Finally, on item 32, two parents opined, “There are children who learn faster than others” and “Every child has his own age to learn. They tell you when”.

In the last item of the interview (item 33), parents held a more traditional notion. “Yes, because through images they memorize and when they are taught the name [of the image or object], they know how to identify it”, one parent opined. This was the only item in which these parents held a traditional perspective.

4.3.2. St. Joseph School (middle SES group)

The parents from St. Joseph School held mostly emergent-literacy perspectives in this section. The mean score of this group for this section was 3.60. Nevertheless, there were a couple of items in which some parents disagreed with each other, and an item, which reflected a traditional perspective of literacy learning. Let us focus on the items, which received a 4.00 mean score or higher.

Middle SES parents believed that reading to/with the child helps him learn to write, “Because they start recognizing the letters”. One more parent said emphatically, “Yes, so they see writing to distinguish the spelling of words such as ‘vaca’ and not ‘baca’, which is not correct [the word ‘vaca’ means cow. It is a typical example to show the use of ‘v’ instead of ‘b’. Indeed, the letter ‘v’ is known as the ‘v’ of ‘vaca’]”. These parents believed that talking to children was important. Two parents emphatically argued, “Yes, because it is necessary to talk to them” and “Talking to them about the topic, yes!” Interestingly, item 27, taking them on outings, which had a 4.00 mean score, received a comment that opposed this notion. One parent said, “They do not learn”.

Finally, on item 31, parents believed that children seeing parents reading and writing was important “Because it would be a good habit”.

Although, items 28 and 30 did not have a mean score of 4 or higher, they received supporting comments. On item 28, one parent said, “Yes, [writing grocery lists helps child] because when she is writing the words, she learns them”. On item 30, parents commented extensively. Several parents said, “Parents, too”, “It is up to us, too”, “No, because the responsibility is also the parents”. Interestingly, two parents commented, “Yes, [schools should be totally responsible] because in pre-schools they ask you not to teach your child the letters or numbers because when one teaches those to the child, we make it more difficult for them [children and teachers] because it is supposedly another method. They want us to teach them discipline and behavior skills basically” and “Not totally, but they [teachers] are the qualified ones with the help of the parents”. In addition, parents rejected the notion that only gifted children learn to read and write before receiving formal instruction. Two parents said, “With the help from Mummy and Daddy, they can do it” and “It is not that they are gifted, but their parents spending time with them. For example, Arely [the interviewee’s niece] learnt because his dad worked with her a lot”.

There were some items, in which some parents disagreed with each other. About whether or not children learn important things about reading and writing before formal schooling, there were opposite comments—70% of the parents held an emergent literacy perspective and the rest a traditional view. On one hand, one parent suggested, “They learn things when they go to school”, and another said emphatically, “Before primary school, they know nothing!” On the other hand, others stated, “Now, they [children]

learn everything”, “Because if one starts teaching them at home, they understand better when they go to school” and “Well, as long as their mother helps them. It depends on the parents. If he is the only child [Some families in Mexico have many children; therefore, people believe that families with only one child have more time for their child]”. In item 32, children have to be certain age before they can begin to learn to read and write, 60% of the parents held a traditional view, 40% of the parents held an emergent literacy view. One parent commented, “Not precisely” and another one said, “Yes, because here they start since kindergarten”.

Finally, there was only one item, in which parents held a more traditional view. They believed that children need training in hand-eye coordination, recognizing shapes, and so forth, before they begin to learn to read and write. They said, “It is very necessary”, “It is good”, and “Yes, because that is what they do in the kindergarten”.

4.3.3. St. Christopher School (low SES group)

This group of parents held perspectives closer to an emergent literacy model. This group’s mean score for this section was 3.40. Some parents held views, which differed from other parents’ views. In addition, there was an item, which showed consistence with a traditional view.

This group of parents held strong views consistent with an emergent literacy model. They believed that learning to read and write is similar to learning to speak, “Because they start learning a word, then another one, etc.” and “[Because children] go in their own pace”. Most parents thought that reading to/with children help them to write. One parent commented, “[You should read to the child often] because if you are not

constant with them, they do not learn. You should support them as a little tree”.

However, one parent said, “ I do not know because I read to my child, but he does not write”. Although, item 30’s mean score was 3.00—53% of the parents holding an traditional view and 47% holding an emergent literacy view, the comments reflected an emergent literacy view. “Parents, too. We have to help them at home, too”, “No, because the support from the parents is important, too”, “We all have the responsibility”, and “Participation from both parties” were some of their comments. Finally, they strongly believed that it is important that children see their parents reading and writing. Several parents commented, “Well, yes, because in this way, they also sit down to read and write”, “Because it is a good example”, and “Yes, that is what they [teachers] say at school”.

There were different perspectives of different items within this group. For instance, 66% of the parents thought that only gifted children could learn to read and write before schooling because “They have to be more intelligent”; whereas the rest argued, “One helps them” and “I taught my child. My Mum taught me before going to school. It depends on how you educate them. You can get them used to”. Although item 26’s mean score was 3.80, 26.7% of the parents disagreed with this notion saying, “Only teaching them” and “That is why they go to school”. Interestingly, in item 27, some parents thought that taking children on outings help them in different ways. “They get knowledge”, one said. Two others elaborated saying, “It helps them in their development, but it does not help them in reading and writing” and “Yes, but in other subjects like science”. Sixty percent of the parents supported the notion that children

have to be certain age before they can begin to learn, but 26.6% of them rejected this notion arguing, “Some learn before, and some after”.

This group supported the notion that children need training in hand-eye coordination (item 33). One parent emphatically said, “Yes, it is very important”. Although, only one item showed that this group of parents held traditional views of literacy learning according to the mean scores, some previous comments supported this position as well.

The results of the Likert-type items have been presented showing that Oaxacan parents held notions consistent with both a traditional and an emergent literacy model. Let us now focus on the results obtained from the two open-ended questions.

4.4. First open-ended question results

For the first open-ended question, what are the 5 most important things you do in order to help your child learn to read and write?, 55/60 responses were received from group A; 59/65 from group B; and 65/75 from group C (see Appendix B). The response was excellent and parents provided a wide variety of responses—an average of 40 different responses within the three groups (see Appendix C for a complete list of these answers). For the purpose of the chapter, we will present these answers divided into five categories: (1) participating in literacy activities/events; (2) teaching literacy skills; (3) valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy; (4) knowledge development; and (5) other responses. These categories will also be used when presenting the results from the second open-ended question.

4.4.1. Participating in literacy activities/events

Within an emergent literacy model, it is believed that children learn about literacy by interacting with significant others (Ollila & Mayfield, 1992; Strickland, 1990).

Children get involved in literacy activities/events, in which parents do not “teach”, but rather simply collaborate with them. For instance, reading environmental print, reading to/with children, etc. “Within this theme are literacy activities and events in which parents and child collaboratively participate” (Anderson, 1995: 402). The percentages in table 4, represent the numbers of responses from each group that fell into this category.

Table 4. Participating in literacy activities/events

1. *Participating in literacy activities/events*

Group A:

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| - Reading to/with them. | 10 |
| - Having child read to parents. | 4 |
| - Communicating/talking with child. | 2 |
| - Going for walks, pointing at any sign that catches her eye and reading it with her. | 1 |
| - Sending messages to her friends during holidays. | 1 |
| - Writing with him. | 1 |
| | Total: 19 |
| | Percentage: 34.5% |

Group B:

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| - Reading to/with them. | 9 |
| - I ask him the letters or read with him the sings we find in the street. | 2 |
| - Listening to stories. | 1 |
| - Listening to songs with their books [lyrics]. | 1 |
| - Drawing, labeling their drawing with words and sounding them out. | 1 |
| - Having him tell me stories. | 1 |
| - Talking with him much. | 1 |
| | Total: 16 |
| | Percentage: 27.1% |

Group C:

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| - Reading to/with them. | 8 |
| - Writing stories with them—their own inventions and imagination. | 1 |
| - Showing them book and magazines. | 1 |
| - Telling him stories, so he gets interested and wants to learn. | 1 |
| | Total: 11 |
| | Percentage: 17% |

Table 4 shows the responses of the three groups that fell into this category. As we can see, reading to/with children was highly valued by all the parents. More than 50% of the parents in each group valued reading. The upper SES group was the one that valued most these activities; nevertheless, all groups supported these activities. Using environmental print was used by some parents in the upper and middle SES groups. Story telling and speaking to child was valued by at least one parent in each group.

4.4.2. Teaching literacy skills

Traditionally, literacy has been learnt by mastering literacy skills. Ferreiro (1997) mentions that in Mexico, teaching literacy means: having children do endless fine and gross motor skills such as, holding a pencil and cutting among many others; having children sounding out letters and words; having children work on their penmanship filling up a page with one letter, syllables, and then words; and having children “copy” things, which is considered writing. Unlike the first category, parents provide “direct instruction” (Anderson, 1995) in this category. Table 5 shows these responses.

Table 5. Teaching literacy skills

2. *Teaching literacy skills*

Group A:

| | |
|--|-----------------|
| - Doing homework with them. | 3 |
| - Doing comprehension exercises after the story. | 1 |
| - Correcting his writing. | 1 |
| - Having child do drills of letters and words. | 1 |
| - Showing him an image and the written word. | 1 |
| - Teaching him the letters. | 1 |
| - Having child practice fine and gross motor skills. | 1 |
| - Studying with him. | 1 |
| - Correcting his reading. | 1 |
| | Total: 11 |
| | Percentage: 20% |

Group B:

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| - Doing exercises in notebooks/drills of letters and words. | 4 |
| - Having child practice the letters of the alphabet/syllables. | 3 |
| - Checking the sounds of letters/words. | 3 |
| - Teaching them the vowels, so they learn to read. | 3 |
| - Having them do hand movements like tracing lines, shapes, etc. | 2 |
| - Teaching them how to pronounce. | 2 |
| - Doing homework with them. | 2 |
| - Correcting his spelling. | 2 |
| - Sitting with him to go over his readings. | 1 |
| - Dictating him, so you can correct him. | 1 |
| - Checking whether or not he did it [exercise] correctly. | 1 |
| - Writing two-syllable words. | 1 |
| - Asking him questions about the story. | 1 |
| - Helping them make words, so they can write and read them. | 1 |
| | Total: 27 |
| | Percentage: 45.8% |

Group C:

| | |
|---|---|
| - Helping child with homework. | 7 |
| - Dictating to her. | 2 |
| - Having child combine letters. | 2 |
| - I have him do exercises; for instance, writing his name. | 1 |
| - Having her memorize the alphabet and vowels. | 1 |
| - Making sure he knows how to write the alphabet. | 1 |
| - I show her drawings and the written words. | 1 |
| - I write words with her. | 1 |
| - Having child do penmanship drills. | 1 |
| - Writing big letters, so they get to know the letters. | 1 |
| - Teaching them how to write. | 1 |
| - Teaching them how to read. | 1 |
| - Teaching them how to recognize the letters of the alphabet. | 1 |

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| - Teaching them how to pronounce the letters of the alphabet. | 1 |
| | Total: 22 |
| | Percentage: 33.8% |

As shown in Table 5, all parents valued these skills in order for children to become literate. Almost half of the responses from the middle SES group fell into this category. In addition, low SES parents valued these skills. Helping a child with her homework was regarded as a valuable way to help the child become literate. It is worth mentioning that this item was placed within this category because Mexican children's homework tends to be drills of letters or penmanship exercises. Learning the letters of the alphabet and their sounds was seen as an important component of becoming literate by most parents. Correcting a child's reading, spelling, and exercises was considered their role by some parents in the three groups. The word "teaching" appeared in several parents' responses confirming the rationale behind this category.

4.4.3. Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy

This category includes the sociocultural aspects of literacy. Bissex (1980), Baghban (1984), and Kapil (1998) all agree on the importance of providing the child with an environment rich in print. Teale (1983) argues that adults present much of the literacy environment in a socialized and mediated form. Showing the child that literacy has a function in her parents' or significant others' lives encourages her to learn to read and write. For instance, observing Daddy write a letter, reading the doctor's prescription with Mummy, and writing stories with elder brothers and sisters are ways to promote child's

literacy development. Table 6 shows the responses of Oaxacan parents that fell into this category.

Table 6. Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy

3. *Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy*

Group A:

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| - Buying them educational magazines, books and workbooks. | 4 |
| - Children have to feel that they are accompanied. | 1 |
| - Having them create their own stories. | 1 |
| - Having books at home. | 1 |
| - They [the child and his brother] write together. | 1 |
| - Letting them play Nintendo, but having them read magazines to advance in the game. | 1 |
| - Having them listen to and read books with tapes. | 1 |
| - Showing him the textbook I used. | 1 |
| - Having whiteboards, pens and pencils handy. | 1 |
| - Teaching him the reason and importance of learning to read. | 1 |
| - Valuing his learning to encourage him. | 1 |
| - Telling him about the books I read, so he gets interested. | 1 |
| - Supporting him. | 1 |
| | Total: 16 |
| | Percentage: 29.1% |

Group B:

| | |
|---|------------------|
| - Having her read many stories from her reading textbook. | 1 |
| - Getting them workbooks and stories. | 1 |
| - Trying to get him to read. | 1 |
| - Having them invent their own stories with their scribbling. | 1 |
| - Having them “pretend” they are reading. | 1 |
| | Total: 5 |
| | Percentage: 8.5% |

Group C:

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| - If they are going to study, studying with them. | 4 |
| - Getting them didactic material. | 3 |
| - Bringing them to school, so they do not miss classes. | 1 |
| - Encourage him! If he wants to get something, he can do it in writing. | 1 |
| - When older, having them play with letters. | 1 |
| - When older and they are in school, they should be encouraged to study and be responsible. | 1 |
| - He [child] imitates his older sisters doing homework. | 1 |
| | Total: 12 |
| | Percentage: 18.4% |

The upper SES group provided more answers within this category (29.1%) followed by the low SES group (18.4%). Although, the middle SES parents did not comment much on this theme, they provided some answers as well. Providing books and didactic material was the most typical response in both group A and group B. The upper SES parents provided a wider variety of responses than the two other groups such as, sharing about books they read with their children and valuing child's learning to encourage her. In some and different ways, Oaxacan parents' responses show that they try to encourage their children by having them do things such as, reading stories, listening to and reading books with tapes, creating their own stories, and simply bringing them to school. "Encourage" was a typical word in these responses.

4.4.4. Knowledge development

According to an emergent literacy model, the child needs more than simply skills to become literate. It is obvious that we understand much more when we bring background knowledge to a reading. For instance, a person who is a football fan will get much more from a reading about a football match than a person who has never played or watched football. Snow (1991) has argued that reading and writing are complex processes, which required much more than literacy skills. Freire (1985) also argued that literacy entails both reading the world and reading the word. Table 7 presents the answers provided by the parents.

Table 7. Knowledge development

4. *Knowledge development*

Group A:

| | |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| - Playing with the computer. | 1 |
| - Teaching child the colors. | 1 |
| - Showing her objects. | 1 |
| | Total: 3 |
| | Percentage: 5.5% |

Group B:

| | |
|--|------------------|
| - I show them figures, circles, etc. | 1 |
| - Showing them stories with pictures. | 1 |
| - Helping him understand what he does not understand. | 1 |
| - Showing them figures about the words, they are learning. | 1 |
| | Total: 5 |
| | Percentage: 8.5% |

Group C:

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| - I teach him names of objects. | 2 |
| - Teaching the body parts with drawings. | 1 |
| - Teaching them words. | 1 |
| - Showing them colored drawings, so they can learn the colors. | 1 |
| - I explain words to her with the dictionary. | 1 |
| - Giving her examples about new words. | 1 |
| - Teaching the sounds of the animals. | 1 |
| - With TV programs such as Sesame Street. | 1 |
| - I teach him orientations such as right and left. | 1 |
| | Total: 10 |
| | Percentage: 15.3% |

As shown in Table 7, few answers fell into this category. The low SES group provided a variety of answers. Interestingly, one parent commented that watching “Sesame Street” was a good way for her child to learn to read. In addition, a parent from the upper SES group mentioned that using the computer helped his child. At least one parent in each group thought that learning names of objects was important. Learning

colors and new words was also valued by some parents. In addition, one parent mentioned the importance of teaching the child about orientation such as, right and left.

4.4.5. Other responses

Within this category are responses that do not help the child “directly” to become literate. The word “directly” is emphasized because it could be argued that “having a child put puzzles together” or “playing with them” does not have a direct relationship with becoming literate. However, this may have an “indirect” impact when one thinks that “playing with the child” may help her in the way that during the game, she may interact with her parents or significant others and learn about new words that she may find in a reading later on. If we look back at the introduction of this paper, we can see that the child in the researcher’s anecdote (page 1) knew that the children in his textbook were playing “a la Rueda de Sn. Miguel”—a typical game in Mexico. If that child had not played that game before, he might not have had the background knowledge to make the connection between the illustration in his book and his experience.

Table 8. Other responses

5. Other responses

Group A:

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| - Making sure that they are well fed and healthy. | 1 |
| - Offering them a prize. | 1 |
| - Playing with them. | 1 |
| - Encouraging them to be a well-educated, good and respectful person. | 1 |
| - Drawing. | 1 |
| - Having child make movements. | 1 |
| | |
| | Total: 6 |
| | Percentage: 11% |

Group B:

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| - Drawing. | 1 |
| - Singing to them. | 1 |
| - Having them put puzzles together. | 1 |
| - Being with him continuously. | 1 |
| - Having them color. | 1 |
| - With games and songs related to the topic. | 1 |
| | Total: 6 |
| | Percentage: 10.2% |

Group C:

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| - Singing to them. | 2 |
| - I give her math exercises. | 2 |
| - Helping child in everything. | 1 |
| - Having a lot of patience with him. | 1 |
| - Not hitting or putting them down when they cannot do their homework. | 1 |
| - Telling him that he will be rewarded. | 1 |
| - Playing with them. | 1 |
| - Spending time with them. | 1 |
| | Total: 10 |
| | Percentage: 15.3% |

Table 8, shows the responses provided by the Oaxacan parents. At least 10% of each group's responses fell into this category. Singing to children was identified by two parents in the low SES group and one parent in the middle SES group a way to help their child. Playing with them (games) was identified by at least one parent in each group. Interestingly, one parent from the low SES group mentioned that "Not hitting them or putting them down when they cannot do their homework". Also one parent from the upper SES group mentioned that "Making sure that they are well fed and healthy" was a way to help her child learn to read and write. Finally, two parents from the low SES group mentioned math exercises as a way to help the child.

We have presented the results for the first open-ended question. Let us now focus on the second open-ended question.

4.5. Second open-ended question results

The second open-ended question, “Can you mention 5 things you did or you were asked to do (by your teachers or parents) in order to learn to read and write?” provided interesting results. Forty nine out of sixty answers were received from group A, 54/65 from group B, and 58/75 from group C. At least 20 different responses were obtained from each group.

The answers for this question will be presented in the same way as the first open-ended question. Thus, five tables will be presented, which will include the total number of answers for each group and its percentage.

4.5.1. Participating in literacy events

Table 9. Participating in literacy activities/events

1. *Participating in literacy activities/events*

Group A:

| | |
|--|------------------|
| - Reading to/with child. | 2 |
| - Reading stories and listening to them. | 1 |
| | Total: 3 |
| | Percentage: 6.1% |

Group B:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| - Reading to/with child. | 1 |
| | Total: 1 |
| | Percentage: 1.8% |

Group C:

| | |
|---|----------|
| - They [teachers and parents] told us stories and fables. | 2 |
| | Total: 2 |

As shown in Table 9, this category received very few answers. Reading and telling stories to the child was the common answer among the three groups. Interestingly, group B provided only one answer.

4.5.2. Teaching literacy skills

Table 10. Teaching literacy skills

2. *Teaching literacy skills*

Group A:

| | |
|--|----|
| - Drills of letters/incorrect words/sentences. | 12 |
| - Lots of penmanship exercises. | 5 |
| - Reading to teachers to be corrected. | 4 |
| - Using the silabarium. | 3 |
| - Learning the vowels and syllables. | 2 |
| - With little squares with letters on the sides. | 1 |
| - Memorizing spelling rules. | 1 |
| - Using sounds, letters and figures. | 1 |
| - Learning to print. | 1 |
| - My teacher wrote all the syllables on the board. | 1 |
| - Tracing letters. | 1 |
| - Reading the letters of the alphabet. | 1 |
| - Going over my lessons. | 1 |
| - Doing homework and “knocks on the head”. | 1 |
| - My mum had me practice my handwriting. | 1 |

Total: 36
Percentage: 73.5%

Group B:

| | |
|---|----|
| - Drills of letters/incorrect words/sentences. | 10 |
| - Lots of penmanship exercises. | 4 |
| - Using the silabarium—repeating and reading the “holy” book. | 4 |
| - Going over my lessons. | 3 |
| - Joining words and syllables. | 2 |
| - They drew a picture and next to it, they wrote what it was. | 2 |
| - Cutting out words from the newspaper. | 2 |
| - Learning the vowels and syllables. | 2 |
| - Reading the letters of the alphabet. | 2 |
| - They [teachers and parents] took our hand to guide us when writing. | 1 |
| - With songs they taught us when we were learning the letters. | 1 |

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| - Doing homework in double-line workbooks. | 1 |
| - Making sentences and dividing them into syllables. | 1 |
| - I would spell a lot [He did not read fluently]. | 1 |
| - My dad had me write on blank paper, so I could learn to write. | 1 |
| - With little squares with letters on the sides. | 1 |
| - They taught us the sounds of the letters. | 1 |
| - Writing easy words—two-syllable words. | 1 |
| - Spelling. | 1 |
| | Total: 42 |
| | Percentage: 77.8% |

Group C:

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| - Drills of letters/incorrect words/sentences. | 14 |
| - Going over the vowels and the alphabet. | 6 |
| - Lots of penmanship exercises. | 5 |
| - Going over, over and over our lessons. | 3 |
| - Reading the vowels/ the letters until we learnt them. | 2 |
| - Reading and writing exercises. | 2 |
| - Using the silabarium. | 1 |
| - They taught us the letters first, then syllables, and then words. | 1 |
| - Going over words. | 1 |
| - Cutting out words from the newspaper. | 1 |
| - They showed me figures and wrote the letter next to it. | 1 |
| - We learnt the entire alphabet by singing it. | 1 |
| - We made words. | 1 |
| - Reading to be corrected. | 1 |
| - Repeating words and memorizing them. | 1 |
| - Using flashcards. | 1 |
| | Total: 42 |
| | Percentage: 72.4% |

As presented in Table 10, more than 70% of the responses of three groups fell into this category. The most common response in the three groups was letters drills, incorrect words and sentences. This is a typical exercise in Mexico for children to learn to write. Doing penmanship exercises was another typical response in the three groups. It is worth mentioning that the difference between penmanship exercises and drills of letters is that in the first one, children complete pages filled with little sticks or nonsense characters; whereas in the second one, children actually fill pages with letters, syllables or words. For instance, A A A A A A A A A A. Children have to do this neatly and from left to right. As we can see in these answers, the words “letter” and syllable” are frequently

mentioned. Many children in Mexico learned to read and write by working on syllables. Two parents gave the example: “Ese oso se asea” (That bear cleans itself), which is a typical sentence when children have learnt the vowels and the letter “s”. Three parents in group A, 4 parents in group B, and one parent in group C mentioned that they used the silabarium to learn to read and write. The silabarium is a small booklet that contains all the letters and possible syllables, which are then put into words and sentences. In order to read and write, children would have to memorize all the letters and the syllables and read them aloud to be corrected by the teacher. The use of flash cards, phonics, and letters cut out from the newspaper to make words were some other responses provided by the Oaxacan parents.

4.5.3. Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy

Table 11. Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy

3. *Valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy*

Group A:

| | |
|---|------------------|
| - Observing significant others read. | 1 |
| - The teachers gave us books with readings. | 1 |
| | Total: 2 |
| | Percentage: 4.1% |

Group B:

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| - He [my dad] had me read books. | 1 |
| | Total: 1 |
| | Percentage: 1.8% |

Group C:

| | |
|--|---|
| - They showed me colored books and letters, so that I could learn to read. | 1 |
| - My brothers helped me. | 1 |

Total: 2
 Percentage: 3.5%

As shown in Table 11, very few responses fell into this category. A parent in group A, and a parent in group C mentioned that observing significant others read and with the help from them helped them to read and write.

4.5.4. Knowledge development

Table 12. Knowledge development

4. Knowledge development

Group A:

Total: 0
 Percentage: 0 %

Group B:

- They took us out on field trips, so we could learn.

1

Total: 1
 Percentage: 1.8%

Group C:

- They showed us objects and told us their names.

1

Total: 1
 Percentage: 1.7%

This category received very few responses as well. No answers in group A were provided, and in the others two groups only one answer was obtained. Interestingly, one of the two responses was going out on field trips, which is an item in the interview.

4.5.5. Other responses

Table 12. Other responses

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| 5. <i>Other responses</i> | |
| Group A: | |
| - Drawing. | 2 |
| - I learnt with the book “Mis Primeras Letras” (My first letters). | 1 |
| - With no pictures. | 1 |
| - Singing. | 1 |
| - I was beaten if I did not learn. | 1 |
| - Learning shapes and math tables. | 1 |
| - My parents helped me with math. | 1 |
| | Total: 8 |
| | Percentage: 16.3% |
| Group B: | |
| - Drawing. | 3 |
| - Looking at drawings. | 1 |
| - Coloring books. | 1 |
| - They turned off the TV. | 1 |
| - They hit me if I did not remember. | 1 |
| - “Knocks on the head” from my Dad. | 1 |
| - Zero reading. | 1 |
| | Total: 9 |
| | Percentage: 16.7% |
| Group C: | |
| - I learnt only in school. | 2 |
| - It [becoming literate] was easier in a town than in the city. Now, they only write the sentence. | 1 |
| - The teacher would give us prizes. | 1 |
| - I did it on my own without my parents. | 1 |
| - Drawing. | 1 |
| - Teachers were very strict. | 1 |
| - They did not help me much at school. | 1 |
| - With knocks on the head. | 1 |
| - Practicing math. | 1 |
| - Counting little rocks. | 1 |
| | Total: 11 |
| | Percentage: 18.9% |

As shown in Table 12, this category was the second one with most results. At least 16% of the responses from all parents fell into this category. Drawing was the most

common response provided by 6 parents. One parent mentioned that teachers were very strict. Indeed, at least one parent in each group mentioned that being beaten and given “knocks” on the head was a way, in which teachers and parents “helped” the child to become literate. Interestingly, one parent emphatically said “zero reading” and one more mentioned about turning off the TV.

This chapter has presented the results of the study. Comparisons and analysis of the results will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to compare the results of the three SES groups. Some positive and negative correlations within the Likert-type items are discussed. Moreover, the results of this study are compared to other studies dealing with parents and literacy learning.

5.1. Similarities and differences in the reading section

Parents in the three SES groups supported some aspects of a traditional perspective and others of an emergent literacy perspective. There were more similarities than differences between the groups.

Within the reading section of the interview, all parents believed that literacy learning is sequential. They all supported the use of workbooks and basal readers. Moreover, they believed that checking a child's understanding after the story is read is important. These results are similar to Anderson's (1994) that suggest that high-literacy parents support the use of workbooks and the notion that learning is sequential. However, the findings in this study differ from Spiegel, Fitzgerald and Cunningham's (1993) findings that suggest that high-literate parents reject skill-based materials. It is worth pointing out that in Mexico, literacy teaching follows a number of steps and skills (Ferreiro, 1997). Most parents in this study learnt the vowels, then the consonants and syllables as part of their literacy learning. Their experience might be the factor that led to their beliefs rather than their socio-economic status. Moreover, their belief that checking a child's understanding after the story might reflect the phenomenon that not many

people in Mexico read for pleasure. Prices of books being extremely high and having only one library in the city are certainly two good justifications for such a view.

Most parents in the three groups held beliefs consistent with an emergent literacy perspective. They believed that a child benefits from hearing favorite stories that she has memorized read again and again. In addition, they held the notion that encouraging the child's participation and discussion helps them learn to read. Clearly, for these parents interacting with the child is extremely important. Indeed, there was a positive correlation .52 between item 8 (You are helping a child to read by encouraging her to discuss what is being read) and item 24 (Reading to, and with, children help them learn to write). With no doubt, Mexican parents will welcome the suggestion that reading to and interacting with the child is one of the best ways to help her become literate (Strickland, 1990).

Interestingly, within the three groups, item 11 was viewed differently. In general, 55% of the parents thought that real reading begins only when a child begins to say the words as they are printed in the page, and 40% disagreed with this notion. For some parents, reading "Starts since they begin to imagine what it [text] says", and for others, reading begins when a child begins to say the words printed on the page "Because we can notice if he really knows how to read".

The only difference between the groups was in item 7. In the middle and low SES groups, 70% of the parents believed that pointing to print is not a bad habit; whereas in the upper SES group, only 40% agreed with this.

5.2. Similarities and differences in the writing section

Similar to the reading section, parents' beliefs in the three groups were very similar. Oaxacan parents held both traditional and emergent literacy perspectives.

Among their traditional beliefs, Oaxacan parents believed that it is very important for the child to know the letters of the alphabet and their sounds before she begins to write. They supported the use of workbooks and rejected the notion of invented spelling. These findings are similar to Anderson (1994) that found that upper and middle class parents rejected the notion of invented spelling. Moreover, they are similar to Snyder's (1990) observation that many parents cannot tolerate the idea of invented spelling.

We live in a society where correct spelling is expected. Many people are judged by their spelling skills. Indeed, many teachers in Mexico have to take an exam in order to be hired by certain schools. It is typical to find a spelling section within these exams. Parents' concern about the "bad" habit of invented spelling was certainly reflected in the Oaxacan parents' responses. You have to correct the child's invented spelling "Because if you do not do it, she will continue doing it and it is not correct".

The use of workbooks was valued by Oaxacan parents. Indeed, there was a positive correlation .50 between item 3, a child needs workbooks and basal readers to learn how to read, and item 17, a child needs workbooks to learn to write. These results were expected since Ferreiro (1997) argues that in Latin-America, learning to write means learning a set of skills. It is important to mention that Oaxacan parents did not view the use of workbooks as the only way to learn to read and write. "They need workbooks, but it is also necessary that one helps them because it is difficult for them", one parent commented.

All parents in the three groups agreed that a child's early scribbles are related to later development in writing stories, messages, etc. This is an interesting finding, especially among parents who reject invented spelling. It seems that they focus on spelling when children start writing in a conventional way.

Parents in the upper SES group had different views in two items (14 and 20) compared to the two other groups. In the upper SES group, 75% of the parents believed that the child does not have to have a lot of experience copying words, then sentences, and finally stories before she attempts to write. However, only 46% of the parents in the middle SES group, and 33.4% of the parents in the low SES group agreed with this item. Similarly, 75% of the parents in the upper SES group disagreed that a child's confusion of "b" and "d" and "p" and "q" in printing is an indication of a major problem, while only 38.5% of the parents in the middle SES group, and 40% of the parents in the low SES group disagreed with this. The upper SES parents held beliefs closer to an emergent literacy perspective than the two other groups in these two items. Moreover, more than 70% of the parents in the middle SES group and the low SES group, and only 41.7% in the upper SES group, believed that a child cannot begin to write before she knows how to read. This finding is closely related to the parents' belief that literacy learning is sequential.

In the writing section, parents held beliefs closer to a traditional view. These findings differ from those of Spiegel, Fitzgerald and Cunningham (1993) that suggest that high literacy parents tend to reject skills based instruction. Moreover, they support Wells' (1986) belief that the skills based transmission model of schooling has been predominant.

5.3. Similarities and differences in the literacy-general section

In terms of literacy-general, Oaxacan parents held beliefs closer to an emergent literacy perspective. The findings in this section are similar to Taylor's (1983) and Heath (1983) findings that suggest that families get involved in a wide variety of literacy events. Interacting with the child is the main way in which Oaxacan parents help her become literate.

Most parents in the three groups believed that learning to read and learning to write are similar to learning to talk. Most parents believed that reading to/with children helps them learn to write. In addition, they strongly believed that talking to children, reading to them, and having children see significant others read and write help them learn to read and write. Similar to Anderson and Stokes (1984), Chall & Snow (1982), Delgado-Gaitan (1987), Diaz, Moll, & Mehan (1986), Goldenberg (1984), and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), the low SES Oaxacan parents value and support literacy development in different ways.

These parents showed their concern towards their child's literacy development by expressing that schools should not be totally responsible for teaching children learn to read. "It has to be a collaboration between parents and teachers", one parent commented. They also believed that it is not only gifted children who learn to read and write before receiving formal instruction in preschool or elementary school. "All children have similar intelligence. The environment is very important as well as the attention" and "With the help of Mummy and Daddy, they can do it" were two comments on this item.

According to the education system in Mexico, children have to be 6 years old in order to be accepted into elementary schools. They are supposed to learn to read and

write during grade one. One wonders whether the system is doing a disservice to Mexican children. Clearly, the Mexican system stills holds a maturation view point. This rule is so accepted that 60% of the Oaxacan parents believed that children have to be a certain age in order to learn to read and write opposing their other beliefs.

Interestingly, having children pretend to write grocery lists was not as much valued as other literacy events. We can understand this, especially with the low SES group because many families do not have enough money to go to the supermarket on a weekly basis. Many of these families survive on a daily basis. In addition, small grocery stores are typical in Oaxacan neighborhoods. Many people get their groceries from these small stores. Indeed, it is often children's first chore to go to get groceries from these stores while the mother is fixing lunch.

Similar to Anderson's (1994) finding, Oaxacan parents held a traditional view that children need training in hand-eye coordination, recognizing shapes, and so forth before they begin to learn to read and write. This belief reflects the instruction in kindergartens in Mexico. Children work on a set of skills to get "ready" for elementary school. Ferreiro (1997) states that in fact there are kindergartens where literacy is not "taught" at all. One parent provided an interesting comment regarding this issue, "...in pre-schools they ask you not to teach your child the letters or numbers because when one teaches them to the child, we make it more difficult for them [children and teachers] because it is supposedly another method. They want us to teach them discipline and behavior basically".

Oaxacan parents held both traditional and emergent literacy perspectives. It is clearly not the socio-economic level, which determines preference for any of these

perspectives. Due to the limited number of parents interviewed, it is difficult to generalize. However, it appears to be the way parents remember learning to read and write that influences their views. Whatever these parents' views are, it is clear that they support their child's literacy development. The fact that children from the low SES group were attending school is a sign of these parents' concern and value towards education.

5.4. Similarities and differences in the first open-ended question

Oaxacan parents provided a wide variety of responses to the question, "What are the five most important things you are doing to help your child to learn to read and write?" These results are consistent with Taylor's (1983) and Anderson (1994) findings that suggest that children participate in a wide variety of literacy activities.

The three different SES groups support an emergent literacy model to a certain extent. Considering the first category, "participating in literacy activity/events, the third category, "valuing, demonstrating, and encouraging literacy", and the fourth category, "knowledge development", as characteristics of an emergent literacy model, we have the following results. Sixty-nine percent of the upper SES group's responses, 44% of the middle SES group's responses, and 50.7% of the low SES group's responses are consistent with an emergent literacy model. These findings are inconsistent with those of Spiegel, Fitzgerald and Cunningham (1993), which suggest that low-literate parents, as the Oaxacan low SES group, do not support holistic principles.

Reading to/with children was the most valued activity by 70% of the Oaxacan parents. Having the child read to parents, talking to the child, and reading environmental

print were other typical responses. Within the third category, it is interesting to point out the different ways parents encourage literacy. The upper SES group encourages literacy by buying educational magazines, books and workbooks to their children, whereas the low SES group encourages literacy by “Studying with their children”. We can also see in the responses that the rest of the upper SES group’s responses involved “material”, which implies money, and the rest of the low SES group’s responses include more interaction and making sure their children attend schools.

It is obvious that the upper SES group is financially capable of encouraging literacy. I have witnessed how much the upper SES group invests in their children’s education. The fact that they send their children to St. Phillip Institute requires a money investment itself. Upper level people believe that private schools are the way to give their children the “best” education. Moreover, many of these children attend different courses such as computers, English, martial arts, music, etc. in the afternoon.

The fourth category, “knowledge development”, presents interesting results. The low SES parents provided more responses (15.3%) followed by the middle SES parents (5.5%). Again, many of the responses provided by the parents in these two groups involved interaction with the child. It is perhaps the way that parents, who do not have the financial resources, support literacy development. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) found that families living below poverty level use literacy for a wide variety of purposes, for a wide variety of audiences, and in a wide variety of situations.

Some of the Oaxacan parents’ responses were consistent with a more traditional model. The second category, “teaching literacy skills”, and the fifth category, “other responses”, represented this perspective. For the upper SES level, 31% of their responses

were consistent with a traditional model; 56% of the middle SES groups'; and 49.3% of the low SES group's. Doing homework with the child was the most common answer in this perspective. Delgado-Gaitan (1987) also found that families assist "their children in schoolwork by sitting with them to do homework" (p.28).

Interestingly, 45.8% of the responses from the middle SES group fell into the literacy skills category. Having the child practice the letters of the alphabet through drills of letters was a technique these parents use to help their children become literate. Certainly, these parents help their children having them do school-like activities. One would have to wonder how these parents, who support skill-based instruction, view the new "holistic" approach proposed by the ministry of education in 1993.

Interesting responses fell into the fifth category, "other responses". One parent mentioned that "making sure that they [children] are well fed and healthy" is a way to help them become literate. Nutrition is a big issue in Mexico. Ferreiro (1997) states that more than 50% of the children in Latin-America are under the recommended nutrition level. Oaxaca, being the poorest state in the Mexican Republic, faces the same problem. Indeed, I witnessed, during an interview with one of the teachers in the low SES school, a child who came into the office saying that she had a stomachache. The teacher asked her whether she had had lunch or not, the child replied that she had not. The teacher mentioned that it is not unusual for children to come to school with an empty stomach. Ferreiro (1997) argues that with this factor, we should not be talking about the failure of literacy learning, but about the "miracle" of literacy learning in Latin-America.

Another interesting answer in this category was "Not hitting or putting them [children] down when they cannot do their homework", provided by a low SES parent.

Not so long ago, in Mexico, teachers had the power to beat children if they did not learn. Indeed, parents encouraged teachers to beat their children if they did not behave or work hard. I experienced this a few times during his elementary school years. Nowadays, this is changing. Parents are aware of the difficulty of the literacy learning process, and express comments such as, “Having a lot patience with him”, “Helping child in everything”, “Telling them that they will be rewarded”. Similar to Taylor’s (1981, 1983) findings, Oaxacan parents are trying to help their children in different ways avoiding the negative experiences they had.

All the Oaxacan parents’ responses were spread in the five categories. However, this was not the case for the second ended-question responses. Let us focus on those answers.

5.5. Similarities and differences in the second open-ended question

Contrasting with the results in the first open-ended question, only 10% of the responses from the upper SES group, 5.4% from the middle SES group, and 8.7% from the low SES were consistent with an emergent literacy model in the second question, “Could you mention five things you were asked to do by your teachers or parents to learn to read and write”. Only 10% of the Oaxacan parents mentioned that reading to/with the child was a way, in which they were helped to become literate. Obviously, this has changed and Oaxacan parents value the importance of reading to/with the child now.

On the other hand, more than 70% of the Oaxacan parents’ responses fell into the “literacy skills” category. Ninety percent of the Oaxacan parents experienced doing drills of letters, incorrect words, and sentences. This finding was expected since Ferreiro

(1997) mentions that becoming literate in Mexico means doing endless letter drills. Many parents held bad feelings towards these drills. “I hate them”, one parent commented. Becoming literate for these parents involved learning the vowels and their sounds, the alphabet, and all the possible syllables to start reading and writing. These experiences are reflected in the Oaxacan parents’ beliefs such as, literacy learning is sequential and their support for workbooks.

The responses that fell into the fifth category were also interesting. One parent mentioned that teachers were “very strict”. “They hit me if I did not remember” and “I was beaten if I did not learn” two parents added. Another one said, “[I learnt to read and write with] knocks on the head from my Dad”. This phenomenon is changing now. Both parents and teachers are trying to find new ways to help the child become literate.

Although the sample in this study is too small, we can conclude that Oaxacan parents held both traditional and emergent literacy views towards literacy learning. We can also conclude that they support their child literacy development in a wide variety of ways and that they value education and are aware of the importance of becoming literate and their role in this process.

As educators, we should take advantage of parents’ willingness to help and find ways to incorporate them in literacy process. This chapter has addressed some of the issues regarding literacy learning in Mexico. The following chapter will address some implications and attempt to tie this study to the reality of Oaxacan parents and literacy learning in Mexico.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the study and its results briefly. Moreover, implications for researchers, curriculum designers, and teachers will be addressed. The limitations of the study will also be discussed. Finally, some suggestions for future research needed in Mexico will be provided.

6.1. Overview of the study

In the United States and Canada, literacy learning has been a controversial issue. Administrators, researchers, teachers, and even politicians are constantly looking for the “best” way to help children become literate. The importance of parental participation in children’s literacy development has been demonstrated (Taylor, 1983; and Heath, 1983). Due to the great diversity of ethnic and socio-economic strata in these two countries, several researchers have attempted to learn about “non-mainstream” parents’ perceptions of literacy learning and the way they help their children become literate (Anderson, 1994; Anderson, 1995a; Fitzgerald, Spiegel, and Cunningham, 1991). As Anderson (1995b) puts it, “given the increasingly diverse nature of North America society, we believe educators need to examine ways that schools can construct curricula which build upon the early literacy experiences of all children if we are to have a truly learner centered curriculum” (p.28).

Since the 1993 Mexican Educational Reform, Mexico has adopted an approach based on emergent literacy and whole language principles. According to an emergent literacy model, parents play an essential role in children’s literacy development. It is my

intention to open a bilingual school in Oaxaca, Mexico. I believe in an emergent literacy perspective, which builds on the child's early experiences. However, I also value parents' beliefs toward literacy learning and believes that both parents and teachers collaborate in this process; therefore, this study had the intention to learn about Mexican parents' perceptions of literacy learning.

Based on Piaget's (1970) belief that the child builds up knowledge through interaction with the world and Vygotsky's (1978) theory, which focuses on cognitive development as a process that is culturally and socially based, an emergent literacy model follows certain principles. It acknowledges that 1) literacy development begins long before children enter school; 2) children develop as writers and readers concurrently and interrelatedly; 3) the functions and forms of literacy are apparent in all literacy events; 4) the foundations of literacy development begin at birth; 5) children learn written language by actively participating in and observing literacy events with an interactive, social context; and 6) the rate at which children progress through these stages and the variety of strategies employed with these stages are individual.

Several studies have been conducted to shed light on parents' perception of an emergent literacy model. Fitzgerald, Spiegel, and Cunningham (1991) argue that high-literate parents embrace this model more than low-literate parents. On the other hand, Anderson (1994, 1995a) found that parents support some aspects of emergent literacy, but reject others. Taylor (1983) argues that children participate in a wide variety of literacy activities. In addition, Anderson and Stokes (1984), Chall & Snow (1982), Delgado-Gaitan (1987), Diaz, Moll, & Mehan (1986), Goldenberg (1984), and Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988), argue that low SES parents value and support literacy

development in different ways. This study, as the ones mentioned above, attempted to shed light on this topic.

A survey was adopted to learn about the perceptions which Oaxacan parents from three different socio-economic groups have about literacy learning. After conducting a pilot study, 40 parents were interviewed. Twelve upper SES parents came from a private institute, 13 middle SES parents came from a middle-class public school and 15 low SES parents came from a lower-class public school. These groups monthly family income range from C\$1166 to C\$4166, C\$416 to C\$1166 and C\$50 to C\$333 respectively. Most parents had children attending grades one or two.

A 33 Likert type item structured interview plus 2 open-ended questions were used for this study. The interviews, conducted in Spanish, were recorded, transcribed and translated in their entirety. The translation of the transcriptions were verified by the Language Center of the University of Oaxaca and accepted as correct translations. SPSS version 6 was used to compute mean scores, frequencies and correlations for each Likert-type item. The answers of the 2 open-ended questions were divided into 5 categories developed by Anderson (1995a). The five categories are: (1) participating in literacy activities/events; (2) teaching literacy skills; (3) valuing, demonstrating and encouraging literacy; (4) knowledge development; and (5) other responses. This study attempted to answer four research questions. Let us answer the research questions of this study.

The purpose of this study was to learn about the perceptions which Oaxacan parents, from three different socio-economic groups, have about literacy learning. The research intended to answer the following questions:

1. Are the Oaxacan parents' perceptions of literacy learning consistent with an emergent literacy model? Most Oaxacan parents held beliefs consistent with an emergent literacy model. They believed that reading to the child and encouraging her to participate in and discuss the reading helps her to become literate. They held the notion that early scribbling is part of the child's literacy development. Moreover, they believed that talking to children, parents providing reading models, and having children engage in literacy activities help them learn to read and write. Finally, they believed that literacy development should be supported by both parents and teachers.

On the other hand, parents held notions inconsistent with an emergent literacy model. All parents believed that literacy learning is sequential, that checking a child's understanding after the story is read is important, and that the use of workbooks and basal readers is important. Oaxacan parents believed that it is very important for the child to know the letters of the alphabet and their sounds before she begins to write. They supported the use of workbooks and rejected the notion of invented spelling. In addition they believed that children need training in hand-eye coordination, recognizing shapes, and so forth before they begin to learn to read and write.

2. To what extent do these perceptions differ among the three different socio-economic groups? There were more similarities than differences between the groups. There were only three items in which the three SES groups differed. Middle and low SES parents held a closer view to an emergent literacy model than the upper SES parents regarding to pointing to print as you read. On the other hand, the upper SES parents held a closer perspective consistent with an emergent model than the two other groups regarding whether or not the child has to have experience copying words, then sentences,

and finally stories before she attempts to write, and whether or not a child's confusion of "b" and "d" and "p" and "q" in printing is an indication of a major problem.

3. What do Oaxacan parents do to help their children learn to read and write?

Oaxacan parents help their children become literate providing a wide variety of activities. Reading to/with children is the most valued activity by Oaxacan parents. They also believed that talking to children and valuing literacy help children to become literate. The upper SES group encourages literacy by buying materials, while the two other groups interact with the child; for instance, doing homework and studying with them. The middle SES group believed strongly that having the child work on literacy skills helps them to learn to read and write. In addition, most parents attempt to teach their children avoiding the "bad" experiences they had.

4. What did the parents and teachers of the parents interviewed ask them to do to learn to read and write? Most parents were asked to work on literacy skills to learn to read and write. Most parents had to do "endless" letter, syllable and word drills. More than 70 % of the parents' responses fell into the "literacy skills" category. Some parents commented on the way they were "forced" to learn to read and write by "knocks on the head".

6.2. Implications for researchers

This study was introduced with a life-learning experience that occurred to the researcher while conducting this study. As researchers, we bring our "backpack" full of experiences, assumptions and expectations to our study. This should not be regarded as

negative, but should be treated with caution. We should learn to see things through our eyes and have the ability to see things through our participants' eyes as well.

This study dealt with different socio-economic strata. However, we cannot argue that the findings regarding the low SES group in this study are applicable to a low SES group in the United States or Canada. For instance, Snow (1987) describes that 50% of the low SES parents in her study read a major newspaper on a regular basis and that the vast majority owned some books of their own and half owned more than 20 books. This would not be the case with the Oaxacan low SES parents. Getting the newspaper is an "upper level" privilege in Mexico.

As researchers, we also have to be careful when "prescribing" best ways to teach or help children to become literate. Vukelich (1984) conducted a review of the literature from 1973 and 1983 about recommendations on parent involvement in children's reading. She found that reading to the child was the most recommended activity. Moreover, Morrow (1989) suggests to "have at least twenty-five children's books available at home and add to the collection regularly", Macfarlane (1994) suggests visiting the library, and Behm and Behm (1994) recommend parents to create a reading corner in the child's room. All these prescriptions could be useful for some parents, but totally irrelevant to especially the Oaxacan low SES parents. The mean monthly family income for the Oaxaca low SES group was C\$206.00. The researcher visited one of the bookstores in the city and found that children books cost an average of C\$20.00. A low SES family would have to spend 10% of their monthly income to buy a book, while all their income has to be enough for food, clothing, and sometimes rent. Creating a reading corner in the child's room could be an insult for these families, since in many cases, a whole family

lives in one room. Visiting the “library” is not the best advice for Oaxacan parents either. The researcher visited the public library in the city. There is only one big library and two more tiny libraries in the city of Oaxaca for 500,000 people. The children’s section of the main library consists of no more than 3000 “old” books. I am not against these suggestions. I and the Oaxacan parents do value reading as a way to help children. Simply, I wish to point out that as researchers we have to know the reality of our audience before prescribing ways to help children to become literate.

6.3. Implications for curriculum designers

Although the 1993 Mexican Educational Reform “supports” an emergent literacy model and a whole language approach, as I do, we have to question this decision. As I stated before, this is an adoption of a fad rather than a “better” approach to teach literacy. There are many aspects in the Mexican system, especially in the public schools that do not fit into a whole language paradigm. According to an emergent literacy perspective, literacy learning is child driven; that is, every child develops literacy at her own pace. Some children may start reading and writing conventionally in grade one and grade two. However, according to the educational system in Mexico, children *must* learn to read and write in grade one or they fail. And it happens to be that low SES children are the ones that fail for several reasons.

Oaxaca is a state with many small communities, in which agriculture is the main industry. In these communities, children start working in the fields when they are very young. Education is not their priority. However, many families, who do not succeed in agriculture, move to the city where they can try to make a living. These families’

children come to the city with limited literacy knowledge compared to city children who at least are surrounded by environmental print. Mexican teachers argue that it is extremely difficult to work with such different levels. Middle and upper level children come to the classroom with literacy knowledge. They know that literacy has a functional purpose through advertisement and television. However, most low SES children who come to the city from small villages start “from scratch” in grade one. As a result, in most cases they cannot develop literacy in one year, and fail.

Another problem with the Educational Reform is the lack of governmental support. In a whole language approach, books are one of the main sources of information. Thematic units are developed where children have to do research on a certain topic, learn about it, and develop literacy at the same time. It happens to be that in Mexico, elementary schools do not have libraries. Children only work with the textbooks provided by the ministry of education. Teachers complain that they are asked to use this new approach without being provided with the material needed. Ferreiro (1997) argues that the government has failed to meet public schools needs. The government has “washed their hands” of trying to improve public schools arguing that public schools are what they can offer, and if people want more, they can go to private schools.

In a whole language approach, children are taught to be critical. When children write, their ideas are more important than accuracy. In Mexico this is not the case. Especially in grade one and two, how well a child writes is the most important thing. Ferreiro (1997) provides an interesting example on this issue. She mentions that a teacher was telling her that “unfortunately” this teacher’s son taught “himself” to write

before he received formal instruction. This teacher mentioned that her child was communicating his ideas through writing, but his handwriting was “awful” and that this would not have happened if he had learnt in school. Clearly, if Mexico is to adapt a whole language approach, the expectations have to change.

Another problem with the Educational Reform is teachers’ perceptions of literacy learning. Especially in the city, there are teachers who have been teaching for at least 10 years. These teachers have already constructed their beliefs of how literacy is learnt. They reject many aspects of the new approach due to some of the difficulties we have mentioned. The new emergent literacy and whole language approach is still on paper and it will not be in another 10 years that it may come to the classroom for one reason. It is true that the Educational Reform the curriculum for the Normal was changed. Normal students are now learning about emergent literacy and whole language. However, the first generation of these students will not be in the schools until the year 2002. In Mexico, when teachers are first hired, they have to go to very small communities, in which one teacher is in charge of a whole elementary school. Elementary schools in many villages in Oaxaca consist of a classroom where children from grade one to six are taught by one teacher. These new teachers will have to face this reality. Moreover, it will take them at least ten years or a great connection to get a position in the city. Then, we are talking that an emergent literacy and a whole approach will get to the city by the year 2012, and probably by then, Mexico will have adopted the next new fad that American come up with.

Curriculum developers should build on teachers and parents’ beliefs of literacy learning, instead of changing the approach completely. There has to be good aspects in

the way literacy learning has been taught in Mexico because many people in Mexico are literate. In fact, the research became literate using the traditional approach. As Mason (1992) puts it, children still become literate. From this study, we have learnt that Oaxacan parents do support some aspects of emergent literacy, but they also support some traditional aspects. Curriculum developers should consider these beliefs and take advantage of the parents' willingness to collaborate in their children's literacy development.

6.4. Implications for teachers

The findings of this study show that Oaxacan parents care and support literacy learning. They provide their children with a wide variety of activities. They support the notions that schools should not be totally responsible for teaching the child to learn to read and write. They believe that is their responsibility as well. For many of these parents, some aspects of an emergent literacy model or a whole language approach might be new. They have to be aware of these aspects in order to support their child's literacy development.

There have been different projects, which attempt to encourage parental participation in the classroom. Enz (1995) points out the importance of communicating with parents through newsletters. Flood and Lapp (1995) argue that one of the best ways to encourage parent participation is showing them that their culture and language are valued in the classroom. Moreover, Miller (1995) argues that a simple handout given to parents may help them understand and support aspects of emergent literacy. Mexican teachers need to be aware that parents are there for them. Indeed, some parents'

responses show that Mexican parents' listen to teachers' suggestions. "Yes, that is what [providing a reading model] they [teachers] say at school" one parent commented. This study corroborates Oaxacan parents' willingness to be part of literacy process, and teachers should take advantage of this.

6.5. Limitations

The results of this study need to be interpreted cautiously. All the participating parents were from the city of Oaxaca. Therefore, we cannot argue that "Mexican" parents have the same beliefs. The sample was rather small, so it is difficult to generalize. Moreover, all parents were drawn from schools in the city of Oaxaca only. As we have mentioned, Oaxaca is full of small different communities where environmental print and education are limited. Based on this study, we cannot assume that all parents in Oaxaca accept and reject certain aspects of emergent literacy. More research is needed, especially with parents of street children who do not attend school, and with parents living in small communities.

6.6. Implications of this research for Oaxacan parents' reality

This study has shed light on Oaxacan parents' perception of literacy learning. The findings of this study show that most parent see reading as the way to help their children become literate. It is urgent then to start a children library where parents could come with their children to read and borrow books. It is the intention of the researcher to take over this project.

The instrument used in this study should be part of the need analysis in every classroom. Although the in-person interview used in this study is rich in information, this instrument could be used in a group interview where the teacher could lead the interview and parents could answer their interview and write comments where they wish. I believe it would be the first step to build on parents and children's previous knowledge. We cannot build on this knowledge, if we do not know what it is.

This instrument could also be applied to Mexican teachers. It would be interesting to learn to what extent Mexican teachers support aspects of an emergent literacy model. For the researcher's goal of opening a bilingual school, learning about the teachers' and parents' perceptions of literacy learning who would take part in this project is essential.

This study will be concluded with the researcher's philosophy. It reflects his desire to work with Oaxacan children, who do not have backpacks, to give them an opportunity to succeed in life.

My "Philosophy"

My philosophy is clear and obscure.
It is traditional and modern.
Shaped by the past and the present.

My philosophy is my path.
It is my colorful rainbow
Which leads to my dream.

My philosophy is peaceful and a troublemaker.
It encourages peace and understanding
But provokes change.

My philosophy is my inspiration.
It is concrete and strong

But willing to change.

My philosophy is basic.

It is children and I having fun

Using the opportunity given to us:

Life.

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Appendix A: Interview

| | | | | | | |
|---|--|----|---|------|---|----|
| 1. | A child learns to read by first learning the letters of the alphabet and their sounds, then words, then sentences and then stories. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 2. | Teaching a child to recognize isolated words on sight (flashcards) is a suitable technique for teaching her to read. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 3. | A child needs workbooks and basal readers to learn how to read. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 4. | This book (e.g. Las bellas hijas del Sr. Mufaro) is suitable to read to very young children. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 5. | Child benefits from hearing favourite stories that she has memorized read again and again. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 6. | You should not encourage a child to join in sometimes while you read a book with which she is familiar for is it better that the child listen to the story without interruption. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 7. | You will be teaching your child a bad habit if you point to print as you read. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 8. | You are helping a child to learn to read by encouraging her to discuss what is being read. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 9. | It is necessary to check a child's understanding by asking him questions at the end of each story. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 10. | You should permit your child to "read" familiar books by retelling the story from memory using the pictures as cues. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 11. | Real reading begins only when a child begins to say the words as they are printed on the page. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| <p>"Writing" sometimes refers to handwriting or penmanship. In the following questions, "writing" refers to the process of composing, of getting thoughts or ideas on paper.</p> | | | | | | |
| 12. | IT IS necessary for a child to know the letters of the alphabet, and the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, before she begins to write. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 13. | A child should learn to print neatly the letters of the alphabet before attempting to print messages, notes, stories and so forth. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 14. | It is necessary for a child to have lots of experience copying words, then sentences, and finally stories before she attempts to write on her own. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 15. | A child should be encouraged to write only easy words and short sentences when she begins to write. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 16. | A child's early scribbles (show examples) are related to later development in writing stories, messages, etc. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 17. | A child needs workbooks to learn how to write. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 18. | A child can begin to write before she has learned the correct spelling of the words. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 19. | You should correct a child if she writes "kt" for the word "cat". | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 20. | A child's confusion of "b" and "d" and "p" and "q" in printing is an | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |

indication of a major problem.

| | | | | | |
|--|----|---|------|---|----|
| 21. A child can begin to write (e.g. notes, stories) before she knows how to read. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 22. Learning to read and learning to write are similar to learning to talk in that children learn these skills gradually. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 23. It is only gifted children who learn to read and write before receiving formal instruction in preschool or elementary school. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 24. Reading to, and with, children help them learn to write. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 25. Children learn important things about reading and writing before they begin formal reading programs at preschool or elementary school. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| These activities help children to learn to read and write: | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 26. Talking to them. | | | | | |
| 27. Taking them on outings. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 28. Having them pretend to write grocery lists with you. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 29. Reading to them. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 30. Schools should be totally responsible for teaching children to learn to read and write. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 31. It is important that children see their parents reading and writing. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 32. Children have to be certain age before they can begin to learn to read and write. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |
| 33. Children need training in hand-eye coordination, recognizing shapes, and so forth before they begin to learn to read and write. | TA | A | NAND | D | TD |

TA: Totally agree

A: Agree

NAND: Neither agree nor disagree

D: Disagree

TD: Totally disagree

What are the five most important things you are doing to help your child to learn to read and write?

Level of education:

Monthly family income:

Do you remember when you were learning to read and write?

Could you mention five things that you did or were asked to do (by your teachers or parents) to learn to read and write?

Appendix B: Open-ended response overview

What are the 5 most important things you do in order to help your child learn to read and write?

Group A (12 participants)

Expected answers: 60
Answers received: 55
Percentage: 91.6%

Group B (13 participants)

Expected answers: 65
Answers received: 59
Percentage: 90.8%

Group C (15 participants)

Expected answers: 75
Answers received: 65
Percentage: 86.6%

Can you mention 5 things you did or you were asked to do (by your teachers or parents) in order to learn to read and write?

Group A (12 participants)

Expected answers: 60
Answers received: 49
Percentage: 81.6%

Group B (13 participants)

Expected answers: 65
Answers received: 54
Percentage: 83.1%

Group C (15 participants)

Expected answers: 75
Answers received: 58
Percentage: 77.3%

Appendix C: First and second open-ended question overall results

First open-ended question overall results

What are the 5 most important things you do in order to help your child learn to read and write?

Group A:

- Reading to/with them. 10
- Having child read to parents. 4
- Buying them educational magazines, books and workbooks. 4
- Doing homework with them. 3
- Communicating/talking with child. 2
- Going for walks, pointing at any sign that catches her eye and reading it with her. 1
- Sending messages to her friends during holidays. 1
- Writing with him. 1
- Doing comprehension exercises after the story. 1
- Correcting his writing. 1
- Having child do drills of letters and words. 1
- Showing him an image and the written word. 1
- Teaching him the letters. 1
- Having child practice fine and gross motor skills. 1
- Studying with him. 1
- Correcting his reading. 1
- Children have to feel that they are accompanied. 1
- Having them create their own stories. 1
- Having books at home. 1
- They [the child and his brother] write together. 1
- Letting them play Nintendo, but having them read magazines to advance in the game. 1
- Having them listen to and read books with tapes. 1
- Showing him the textbook I used. 1
- Having whiteboards, pens and pencils handy. 1
- Teaching him the reason and importance of learning to read. 1
- Valuing his learning to encourage him. 1
- Telling him about the books I read, so he gets interested. 1
- Supporting him. 1
- Playing with the computer. 1
- Teaching child the colors. 1
- Showing her objects. 1
- Making sure that they are well fed and healthy. 1
- Offering them a prize. 1
- Playing with them. 1
- Encouraging them to be a well-educated, good and respectful person. 1
- Drawing. 1
- Having child make movements. 1

Total: 55

Group B:

- Reading to/with them. 9
- Having child practice the letters of the alphabet/syllables. 3
- Checking the sounds of letters/words. 3
- Teaching them the vowels, so they learn to read. 3
- Doing exercises in notebooks/drills of letters and words. 4

| | |
|---|---|
| - I ask him the letters or read with him the sings we find in the street. | 2 |
| - Having them do hand movements like tracing lines, shapes, etc. | 2 |
| - Teaching them how to pronounce. | 2 |
| - Doing homework with them. | 2 |
| - Correcting his spelling. | 2 |
| - Listening to stories. | 1 |
| - Listening to songs with their books [lyrics]. | 1 |
| - Drawing, labeling their drawing with words and sounding them out. | 1 |
| - Having him tell me stories. | 1 |
| - Talking with him much. | 1 |
| - Sitting with him to go over his readings. | 1 |
| - Dictating him, so you can correct him. | 1 |
| - Checking whether or not he did it [exercise] correctly. | 1 |
| - Writing two-syllable words. | 1 |
| - Asking him questions about the story. | 1 |
| - Helping them make words, so they can write and read them. | 1 |
| - Having her read many stories from her reading textbook. | 1 |
| - Getting them workbooks and stories. | 1 |
| - Trying to get him to read. | 1 |
| - Having them invent their own stories with their scribbling. | 1 |
| - Having them “pretend” they are reading. | 1 |
| - I show them figures, circles, etc. | 1 |
| - Showing them stories with pictures. | 1 |
| - Helping him understand what he does not understand. | 1 |
| - Showing them figures about the words, they are learning. | 1 |
| - Drawing. | 1 |
| - Singing to them. | 1 |
| - Having them put puzzles together. | 1 |
| - Being with him continuously. | 1 |
| - Having them color. | 1 |
| - With games and songs related to the topic. | 1 |

Total: 59

Group C:

| | |
|---|---|
| - Reading to/with them. | 8 |
| - Helping child with homework. | 7 |
| - If they are going to study, studying with them. | 4 |
| - Getting them didactic material. | 3 |
| - Dictating to her. | 2 |
| - Having child combine letters. | 2 |
| - I teach him names of objects. | 2 |
| - Singing to them. | 2 |
| - Writing stories with them—their own inventions and imagination. | 1 |
| - Showing them book and magazines. | 1 |
| - Telling him stories, so he gets interested and wants to learn. | 1 |
| - I have him do exercises; for instance, writing his name. | 1 |
| - Having her memorize the alphabet and vowels. | 1 |
| - Making sure he knows how to write the alphabet. | 1 |
| - I show her drawings and the written words. | 1 |
| - I write words with her. | 1 |
| - Having child do penmanship drills. | 1 |
| - Writing big letters, so they get to know the letters. | 1 |
| - Teaching them how to write. | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| - Teaching them how to read. | 1 |
| - Teaching them how to recognize the letters of the alphabet. | 1 |
| - Teaching them how to pronounce the letters of the alphabet. | 1 |
| - Bringing them to school, so they do not miss classes. | 1 |
| - Encourage him! If he wants to get something, he can do it in writing. | 1 |
| - When older, having them play with letters. | 1 |
| - When older and they are in school, they should be encouraged to study and be responsible. | 1 |
| - He [child] imitates his older sisters doing homework. | 1 |
| - Teaching the body parts with drawings. | 1 |
| - Teaching them words. | 1 |
| - Showing them colored drawings, so they can learn the colors. | 1 |
| - Writing numbers with him. | 1 |
| - I give her math exercises. | 1 |
| - I explain words to her with the dictionary. | 1 |
| - Giving her examples about new words. | 1 |
| - Teaching the sounds of the animals. | 1 |
| - With TV programs such as Sesame Street. | 1 |
| - I teach him orientations such as right and left. | 1 |
| - Helping child in everything. | 1 |
| - Having a lot of patience with him. | 1 |
| - Not hitting or putting them down when they cannot do their homework. | 1 |
| - Telling him that he will be rewarded. | 1 |
| - Playing with them. | 1 |
| - Spending time with them. | 1 |

Total: 65

Second open-ended question overall results

Can you mention 5 things you did or you were asked to do (by your teachers or parents) in order to learn to read and write?

Group A:

| | |
|--|----|
| - Drills of letters/incorrect words/sentences. | 12 |
| - Lots of penmanship exercises. | 5 |
| - Reading to teachers to be corrected. | 4 |
| - Using the silabarium. | 3 |
| - Reading to/with child. | 2 |
| - Learning the vowels and syllables. | 2 |
| - Drawing. | 2 |
| - Reading stories and listening to them. | 1 |
| - With little squares with letters on the sides. | 1 |
| - Memorizing spelling rules. | 1 |
| - Using sounds, letters and figures. | 1 |
| - Learning to print. | 1 |
| - My teacher wrote all the syllables on the board. | 1 |
| - Tracing letters. | 1 |
| - Reading the letters of the alphabet. | 1 |
| - Going over my lessons. | 1 |
| - Doing homework and "knocks on the head". | 1 |
| - My mum had me practice my handwriting. | 1 |
| - Observing significant others read. | 1 |
| - The teachers gave us books with readings. | 1 |

- Learning shapes and math tables. 1
- My parents helped me with math. 1
- I learnt with the book “Mis Primeras Letras” (My first letters). 1
- With no pictures. 1
- Singing. 1
- I was beaten if I did not learn. 1

Total: 49

Group B:

- Drills of letters/incorrect words/sentences. 10
- Lots of penmanship exercises. 4
- Using the silabarium—repeating and reading the “holy” book. 4
- Going over my lessons. 3
- Drawing. 3
- Joining words and syllables. 2
- They drew a picture and next to it, they wrote what it was. 2
- Cutting out words from the newspaper. 2
- Learning the vowels and syllables. 2
- Reading the letters of the alphabet. 2
- Reading to/with child. 1
- They [teachers and parents] took our hand to guide us when writing. 1
- With songs they taught us when we were learning the letters. 1
- Doing homework in double-line workbooks. 1
- Making sentences and dividing them into syllables. 1
- I would spell a lot [He did not read fluently]. 1
- My dad had me write on blank paper, so I could learn to write. 1
- With little squares with letters on the sides. 1
- They taught us the sounds of the letters. 1
- Writing easy words—two-syllable words. 1
- Spelling. 1
- He [my dad] had me read books. 1
- They took us out on field trips, so we could learn. 1
- Looking at drawings. 1
- Coloring books. 1
- They turned off the TV. 1
- They hit me if I did not remember. 1
- “Knocks on the head” from my Dad. 1
- Zero reading. 1

Total: 54

Group C:

- Drills of letters/incorrect words/sentences. 14
- Going over the vowels and the alphabet. 6
- Lots of penmanship exercises. 5
- Going over, over and over our lessons. 3
- Reading the vowels/ the letters until we learnt them. 2
- Reading and writing exercises. 2
- They [teachers and parents] told us stories and fables. 2
- I learnt only in school. 2
- Using the silabarium. 1
- They taught us the letters first, then syllables, and then words. 1
- Going over words. 1

- Cutting out words from the newspaper. 1
- They showed me figures and wrote the letter next to it. 1
- We learnt the entire alphabet by singing it. 1
- We made words. 1
- Reading to be corrected. 1
- Repeating words and memorizing them. 1
- Using flashcards. 1
- They showed me colored books and letters, so that I could learn to read. 1
- My brothers helped me. 1
- They showed us objects and told us their names. 1
- Practicing math. 1
- Counting little rocks. 1
- It [becoming literate] was easier in a town than in the city. Now, they only write the sentence. 1
- The teacher would give us prizes. 1
- I did it on my own without my parents. 1
- Drawing. 1
- Teachers were very strict. 1
- They did not help me much at school. 1
- With knocks on the head. 1

Total: 58