CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.   Introduction

1.1.   Overview

1.1.1. Theories of Literacy

Research on the topic of literacy is abundant. Any library or internet search on this subject undoubtedly reveals hundreds or even thousands of available published materials. However, recently the term literacy has come to include so many varied meanings that nowadays only a select number of the aforementioned sources deal directly with reading and writing. In fact, Braslavsky (2003:7-8) comments that the Diccionario de Alfabetización de la Asociación Internacional de Lectura [International Reading Association's Literacy Dictionary] lists a total of thirty-eight different types of literacy, including reading and writing skills, functional and social dimensions, specific competencies, and liberation strategies (Harris and Hodges, 1995: 140). Other researchers (Barton, 1999; Barton & Hamilton, 2000) make note of similar definitions.

When the semantic scope of literacy is limited to reading and writing, there are similarly different theories that debate the precise definition of literacy. More specifically, while psychologists discuss literacy in terms of static, universal abilities, sociologists and anthropologists argue that it exists as a social practice, and thus that it must be analyzed not only in the mind, but also within particular contexts. Freire and Macedo (1989: 149) describe the psychological viewpoint as follows: "according to the cognitive development model, reading is conceived as a type of intellectual progress, achieved through a series of fixed, universal stages of development…" (my translation). In contrast, proponents of literacy as a social phenomenon claim that literacy practices

vary depending on the setting and that these practices likewise revolve around cultural ways of using and making sense of literacy, including personal and collective attitudes and values (Barton et al., 2000).

1.1.2. Objectives of Study

The present study, whose general aim is to understand the processes and ideologies that contribute to the construction of readers and writers in a specific Mexican context, drew its theoretical construct and ideas from the socio-cultural perspective (Vygotsky, 1978). This focus was chosen in order to allow for a rich awareness and understanding dependent on contextual particularities. Indeed, past studies conducted at some of the same research sites planned for this study have concluded that, at least in this setting, literacy learning and teaching is best appreciated through an examination of the local socio-cultural attitudes and values that underlie literacy education. Consequently, this project was carried out with the objective of analyzing "activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape" (Barton et al., 2000: 7).

Using ethnographic methods (described in detail in chapter 3), this study focused on the attitudes and teaching practices that inform literacy instruction in a semi-private elementary school located in central Mexico. Previous research in this and other local schools has revealed several interesting findings, which likewise motivate further investigation. First, it has been discovered that writing instruction centers greatly on form, as opposed to meaning (Jiménez, Smith, & Martínez León, 2003; Ballesteros, 2003). In other words, students are rarely encouraged to write for communicative purposes, what Barton (1999) calls "authoring." Second, reading has sometimes been

described (both by teachers and parents) as "antisocial behavior" (Smith, Martínez-León & Jiménez, 2003). Perhaps not surprisingly, most classrooms lack books (although local educators point out that this phenomenon is due, at least in part, to a shortage of financial resources), and free reading occurs only if time allows (usually at the end of lessons). Finally, researchers have found that school and community literacy practices differ significantly, given that community texts are produced primarily for communicative purposes (i.e. food stands, for example the term *cemitas* (a type of sandwich) written as *semitaz*), while school texts tend to be highly controlled and constantly revised for form (Smith et al., 2003).

Such discrepancies between community and school literacy practices motivated a further aim of the present study, which included an analysis of the extent to which educators incorporate home literacy in the classroom. Goodman (cited in Taylor, 1998: vii-viii) stresses the point that literacy learning is a result of "daily human interaction" and that schools often fail to take into account the many and varied paths by which children become literate. Accordingly, educators typically ignore the possible ways in which family literacy can directly support literacy learning in the classroom. Along the same lines, Pérez (1998: 27) outlines the benefits of integrating home and community knowledge in more formal instruction, mentioning that unfortunately "literacy skills and practices unique to the community…may be not only different but oftentimes at odds with school-based literacy practices." This scenario is precisely what appears to be occurring in the proposed research context, and thus was studied more closely as part of this project.

One way to consider the benefits of local literacy practices is to look at them as "funds of knowledge". According to González (1995: 4, cited in Smith, 2001), "funds of knowledge" refers to "historically accumulated bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household functioning and well-being." Originally proposed by Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg (1992), this concept is based on extensive documentation of family and community resources, specifically skills and specialized knowledge held by minority Latino students in United States school systems, from which teachers can draw in planning lessons and activities (Moll & González, 1994). In this way, learning has been observed to be more meaningful to the students and, perhaps more importantly, it acknowledges family and community knowledge as valuable and worth recognition. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978: 84) states that "any learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history", which suggests that academic instruction should intentionally involve these experiences.

While Moll and González (1994) applied this theory to content learning, such as mathematics, history, and biology, Smith (2001) has recently expanded its scope to allow for explicit focus on language instruction, both written and oral, calling it "funds of linguistic knowledge (FOLK)". Given that this study was carried out in classrooms intended to teach L1 literacy, the researcher proposes to assess the degree of integration of FOLK in elementary school literacy classrooms. One purpose of the study then was to demonstrate to educators how locally-based resources are both useful and worthy of respect, hence challenging the dominant ideologies that render local knowledge invisible and therefore inaccessible (Freire & Macedo, 1989; Moll & Díaz, 1987).

1.1.3. Motivation for Research

Until teachers recognize what their students already know and what they need to learn, formal education will be of little value, which was one of the primary motivations for this study. Significantly, education in Mexico in particular has recently received much attention and criticism, oftentimes in direct relation to literacy. Indeed, several publications have highlighted the surprisingly low number of books and newspapers read annually by Mexican citizens, especially in comparison to rates in more developed nations (Juárez, 2002 and Reyes Calderón, 2002, cited in Smith, Martínez-León & Jiménez, 2002). Thus, this project aimed to understand the attitudes and ideologies underlying this perceived lack of interest in reading and writing, through means of a comparative analysis of the perspectives of students, parents, and teachers.

Unfortunately for an understanding of the proposed context, most research on literacy, both past and present, has originated in the United States and Europe. Albeit abundant and resourceful, the findings of these studies cannot be applied directly to Latin America, due to important contextual differences. As mentioned above, the social view of literacy practices examines learning not in the individual mind, but rather as a social construct dependent on precise settings and local ideologies (Barton, 1999). For this reason, an additional purpose of this project was to gain further insight on literacy within the Mexican context (although the context under study is likely to be different from other sites in Mexico and especially from other countries of Latin America). This knowledge will be valuable not only to Mexican teachers, who will hopefully have a better understanding of local student and parental attitudes, but also to international educators who teach Mexican students on a daily basis (Jiménez, 2002).

1.1.4. Research Questions

This study concentrated on the following two research questions, established as part of a larger project (Smith et al., 2002)[1]:

1) What attitudes and ideologies underlie the literacy practices observed in this particular elementary school and community?

2) To what extent do educators identify, understand, and incorporate funds of linguistic knowledge in schools, specifically in the teaching of literacy?

The subsequent questions are subdivisions of the previous ones and reflect the researcher's personal interests within the larger project:

1) What attitudes do teachers, students, and parents hold toward different types of literacy and their importance? In what ways are these attitudes similar and/or different?

2) What do school, community, and family literacies have in common, and how do they differ?

3) To what extent does the school integrate home and community literacies in the classroom (i.e. local funds of linguistic knowledge)?

1.2.   Literature Review

1.2.1. The Socio-Cultural Nature of Literacy

The socio-cultural perspective of literacy considers the acts of reading and writing as "practices", in that any interaction with written language is determined and reinforced by culture-specific beliefs, attitudes, values, and social relationships (Barton, 1999;

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Barton & Hamilton, 2000). In other words, individuals read and write for specific purposes, to arrive at some desired end depending on their interests and needs. Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 21) add that in any specific place and time such practices have become "habitualized". In other words, they are performed regularly and often unconsciously. Given that literacy is unique to distinct settings, various researchers have argued that there is not only one type of literacy; instead, there are "multiple literacies" (Street, 1984, 2001; Pérez, 1998; Rogers, 2001). "Literacy is not just a set of uniform technical skills to be imparted to those lacking them – the "autonomous" model – but rather … there are multiple literacies in communities, and … literacy practices are socially embedded" (Street, 2001: 2, cited in Rogers, 2001).

Considering that literacy is closely intertwined with social, cultural, and political factors, it follows that some forms of literacy are more dominant, visible, and influential than others (Lewis, 2001: 10). Clearly, those with money and power make the decisions as to which literacy practices are accepted and valued, particularly in academic contexts. Bourdieu (1991) claims that one of the ways in which the dominant class maintains its power is through constant criticism and correction of the spoken and written language of members of the lower classes.

Lewis and Bourdieu describe how certain worldview ideologies define and perpetuate social environments, usually classifying the types of reading and writing performed by lower-class and minority individuals as substandard. Such attitudes have grave consequences for minority language learners, given that these children are not encouraged to draw upon prior knowledge and experience to scaffold further learning (Pérez, 1998). On the contrary, they are placed in classrooms where dominant literacy

practices are expected from the outset. This "deficit" view, which continues to be quite widespread with particular reference to Latino children in U.S. school systems, eventually leads many learners to become discouraged and to ultimately reject formal schooling in general (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995).

For these reasons, researchers who promote socio-cultural theories of learning are encouraging literacy educators to acknowledge their students' backgrounds and differences. This recognition is not to be intended to encourage a shift to dominant practices, but instead to provide a bridge to more academic knowledge, that is, learning based significantly on prior experiences (González and Moll, 2002). According to González and Moll,

> There can be bridges that join community knowledge and school validation of that knowledge. There can be bridges between parents and teachers, school and community. There can be bridges of understanding in learning communities. There can be bridges between practical, out-of-school, experiential knowledge and academic, abstract knowledge. And of course, there are bridges between diverse peoples who come together to fulfill a common mission (p. 624).

In short, the socio-cultural theory of learning implies that teachers of literacy should be more reflective of the nature of their own beliefs and values, in order to be able to recognize the merit of alternative literacy practices.

1.2.2. Home Literacy and Funds of Linguistic Knowledge

Many people associate literacy with schooling, an institution in which students are supposedly taught to read and write in the "correct" manner. In fact, as is discussed later, parents of minority Latino children in the United States have tended to entrust their

children's education to teachers, often taking a passive role in their learning (Serpell, 1997). Nevertheless, researchers are beginning to understand and appreciate home and community literacy practices, which can be both similar to and different from those of formal schooling.

Taylor (1998), for example, claims that everyday life is full of reading and writing, and that practically all families, including those belonging to the lower class of society, use different types of literacy to serve a variety of purposes and needs in accordance with their own lives. Thus, she highlights the existence of "local" literacies, asserting that "literacy is deeply embedded in the social processes of family life and is not some specific list of activities added to the family agenda to explicitly teach reading" (pp. 92-3). Similarly, McCarthey (2000) argues that the nature, purposes, and uses of literacy vary from family to family, and from community to community, which recalls the idea of "multiple literacies" mentioned in the previous section. She goes on to point out how these different definitions and ideologies of literacy clash in academic settings, where often only the dominant (middle-class) view of literacy is valued, taught, and permitted.

Whitehouse and Colvin (2001) also allude to different types of literacy, describing how educators tend to ignore home and community literacies that are at odds with school practices. What is worse, few individuals seem to question this "deficit discourse", especially parents of low-class and/or minority children. Indeed, Serpell (1997) refers to these parents as "silent participants", who "regard the cultivation of literacy as more the responsibility of school, and morality as more the responsibility of home" (p. 596). All these researchers agree that more of an attempt needs to be made to document,

understand, and apply home and community knowledge of written language to the formal teaching of literacy at school.

With particular reference to Mexican-American families in the United States, Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) coined the term "funds of knowledge", referring to the skills and practices that families possessed and drew upon in order to survive in difficult times. To give an example, it was discovered that many Mexican households were rich in knowledge associated with agriculture, business, construction, repair, arts, folk medicine, and social skills (Vélez-Ibáñez, 1995: 266-7). Nevertheless, these abilities and experiences were relatively invisible to educators, who regularly characterized the children as academically handicapped, just because their background was somewhat different from that of white, middle-class children. Valdés (1996) describes how school personnel are quick to conclude that Latino parents are uninterested in their children's education, simply because they rarely attend school functions or meet one-on-one with teachers, albeit often admittedly due to a lack of English language proficiency.

The work of Luis Moll and Norma González shows how student experiences can be used for educational purposes, specifically by encouraging teachers to become aware of what each student can contribute to individual and collective learning. In a shared publication written with several teachers working on a project whose main objective was to understand and integrate funds of knowledge in classroom instruction, they claim:

> It [the recognition and integration of funds of knowledge] begins by teachers themselves redefining the resources available for thinking and teaching through the analysis of the funds of knowledge available in local households, in the

students they teach, and in the colleagues with whom they work" (González, Moll, Floyd‑Tenery, Rivera, Rendón, Gonzales & Amanti, 1993: 15). Moreover, in this way, minority children and parents realize that they can personally make significant contributions to education.

Recently, Smith (2001) has extended the concept of "funds of knowledge" to focus specifically on knowledge of language. According to him, "'linguistic funds of knowledge' encompass what speakers know about their language(s), including how languages are learned and used" (p. 381). His idea refers to both the oral and written modalities of language, such as stories, letters, native speakers, and community announcements, all of which can be tapped by language and literacy instructors for productive and meaningful use in the classroom. The present study, which forms part of a larger research project (Smith et al., 2002), proposes to develop this concept of "funds of linguistic knowledge" by identifying literacy resources which children bring to their L1 Spanish lessons in a Mexican elementary school.

1.2.3. Research on Literacy and Literacy Instruction in Mexico

The 2000 Mexican census, conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information Technology (INEGI), reported a total of almost six million illiterates throughout the nation. The rate of illiteracy is higher for women, given that 11% of women are unable to read and write as opposed to only 7% of men (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 2000). Although at first glance these rates might not seem so alarming, King (1994) points out that in 1990 INEGI defined "literate" as someone who possessed basic, or rudimentary, knowledge of literacy. (The 2000 census uses the same definition). In contrast, designating literacy as the capacity to

read and write functionally in society (being able to fulfill a variety of personal and professional needs and obligations) would mean that a much larger number of Mexicans could be characterized as illiterate (p. 105).

King (1994) indicates that the acquisition of functional abilities of reading and writing typically necessitates at least six years of formal education. According to the 2000 census results, the national educational average in Mexico is slightly more than seven years of schooling (INEGI, 2000). Thus, while those who meet or excel this average are probably able to read and write functionally, this is much less likely of many of those with fewer years of formal schooling.

As mentioned earlier, research on literacy and literacy instruction in Latin America, and particularly in Mexico, is relatively scarce. Regrettably, many reading and writing programs within Mexico have been derived from studies carried out in the United States and Europe, obviously very distinct contexts. Seda-Santana (2000: 5), for example, mentions how "the discourse of official government documents and among education professionals about primary and secondary school literacy in Latin America is clearly influenced by current theories from the developed nations of the world". She likewise claims that research in and about Latin-American settings tends to be conducted for immediate and evaluative purposes, given that these types of studies are used to make important policy decisions (p. 7).

Consistent with Seda-Santana (2000), Kimbrough (2004) also argues for the need for more research on literacy practices in Mexican schools. She proposes classroom-based, qualitative studies whose main objective lies in a description and evaluation of current literacy curriculums. According to her, these investigations would ideally permit

local researchers, teachers, and policymakers to improve the instruction of reading and writing based on context-specific circumstances. Gerardo Daniel Cirianni, the official advisor to the Mexican National Reading Program, sponsored by the national Department of Education (SEP), recognizes that literacy teachers are often unaware of what kinds of knowledge and actions are necessary to incorporate diverse kinds of reading into the educational curriculum. With the explicit aim of improving current instructional practices, he suggests that teachers begin asking themselves questions such as the following: What is reading? What obstacles prevent me from reading? What are the cultural dimensions associated with reading? What types of materials can I use to teach reading? What distinguishes speaking and reading? (Cirianni, 2003: 3-4). In other words, he recommends that teachers become more reflective of their own practices.

Despite a general lack of qualitative research on school literacy practices in Mexico, there are a few important studies worthy of mention. Smith, Jiménez & Ballesteros (in press) have recently highlighted the great deal of control imposed upon writing in three Mexican elementary schools, including the school which is the site of the present study. They reveal how students' writing is frequently limited to short, simple texts, which are almost always either dictated or copied. They similarly point out the common concern with form, namely spelling, accentuation, punctuation, and handwriting. With respect to reading, they comment on what appears to be a "*doble mentalidad*" [double mentality], considering that while the government and even many teachers seemingly promote an "amor a la lectura" [a love for reading], actual reading practices for this function are rare, regardless of school type (i.e. public or private) and of the socio-economic status of the students (p. 9).

Ferreiro (1989) acknowledges this claim that literacy instruction in Mexican elementary schools tends to stress form over meaning. As she observes, "there are times when the children appear to be concentrating strictly on the formal aspects of texts, without worrying at all about their meanings" (p. 142, my translation). Accordingly, she argues that teachers should make an effort to seek alternatives for mechanical work, especially activities that contextualize reading and writing and that are likely to be interesting and meaningful for learners. De la Garza and Ruiz Ávila (1994), in their study of the production of written texts by sixth-grade elementary students, found that the children were not encouraged to draw on previous linguistic knowledge when reading or writing. Instead, these students became victims of the isolated, skill-based approach of literacy, given that reading and writing were learned separately and typically not linked to real or useful contexts. As a result, the texts they produced tended to be short and incomplete, with more attention given to written conventions and presentation (including drawings) than to actual communicative information.

Ballesteros (2003) carried out observations and interviews in a public Mexican elementary school, focusing on literacy practices in first and fourth grades. Her findings were consistent with those reported above, in that students were rarely allowed to "author" their own texts. Instead, they were usually asked to copy from the chalkboard or from other books. These children were also expected to use red colored pencils when writing capital letters and punctuation marks. Findings from all of these studies suggest that teachers have been trained to emphasize the mechanical aspects of writing in their classrooms.

It seems as though most researchers agree that literacy instruction in Mexico has not achieved the goal of generating "good readers". Carrasco Altamirano (2003) asserts that schools seldom promote reading for application in the real world, that is, at work and in daily life. She points out how the reading and writing practices inculcated as part of formal schooling are by and large limited to this context. Accordingly, she proposes several reading strategies that, in her opinion, should be taught explicitly along with reading and writing. These include selectivity, prediction, inferencing, self-monitoring, imaging, and ways to remember and recall what has been read (pp. 135-140). She claims that only in this manner will students become efficient readers capable of actively constructing and retaining meaning.

1.2.4. Methodological Precedents

This qualitative study followed the general methods proposed by Bogdan & Biklen (1998) and Spindler & Spindler (1992). As described more in depth in chapter three, data were collected primarily through observations (Merriam, 1998) and interviews (Seidman, 1998). The analysis was simultaneous with data collection, utilizing a constant comparative approach common in qualitative research.

There are four studies on which the methods of this project were modeled. The first two include Smith et al. (2003) and Jiménez et al. (2003). These publications, based on the same larger study, represent initial attempts to understand the processes and ideologies that contribute to the social construction of readers and writers in three elementary schools in central Mexico. The research design for this study drew on some of the same theoretical constructs, research questions, context, and data collection and analysis procedures underlying these studies. However, given time restraints, the project

was limited to only one of the school settings involved in the aforementioned investigations, in addition to the homes of families that send their children to this school, and the local community.

Another study that is relevant methodologically is that conducted by Rosales-Kufrin (1989), who explored factors affecting the dropout of Mexican-American students in an elementary school in a Chicago barrio. Although this topic is not directly related to literacy practices, the findings of the study are based on interviews with students, parents, and school personnel concerning their respective feelings, perceptions, and opinions on schooling. The research study likewise included interviews with these same groups, though with the specific aim of probing attitudes and ideologies toward diverse literacy practices.

The last study that influenced the research is that of David Barton (2000) at Lancaster University. He and his colleagues have initiated the "Literacy in Community project", whose objective is based on a detailed study of the role of literacy in the everyday lives of different individuals. The methodology on which their investigation is based includes observations, in-depth interviews, photography, and the collection of documents and records (p. 169). This project drew on these same instruments and techniques, in an attempt to gain a better understanding of literacy practices in the homes, schools, and communities of a specific Mexican context.

1.3.   Research Strategy

1.3.1. Assumptions

This study is concerned with two related issues. First of all, it elicited and compared teachers', students' and parents' attitudes and ideologies toward literacy and

literacy instruction in a specific Mexican context. Second, it examined the extent to which educators are aware of funds of linguistic knowledge associated with home and community literacy practices (including attitudes held toward them), and accordingly whether or not they make a conscious effort to incorporate these skills in the formal teaching of reading and writing. In order to address this last question, it was also necessary to document the ways in which home, community, and school literacy practices are both similar and different.

One of the researcher's assumptions is that individuals within the Mexican setting may perceive literacy practices in very different ways from people in other contexts, including those from the United States and Europe (Smith et al., 2003). As mentioned earlier, research carried out in these contexts has informed policies and practices in effect in Mexico. This assumption is based on the fact that Mexico has been shaped by unique historical, economic, social, and cultural factors, such as colonialism, linguistic diversity, and social injustices, which, taken together, distinguish it in many respects from the localities mentioned above. A major aim of the project is to identify and understand the attitudes and ideologies held in this environment (through observations and interviews). More specifically, this study proposes to identify beliefs and practices concerning reading and writing in a specific Mexican context, with the long-term aim of informing local and national instruction.

The researcher likewise assumes that most (if not all) of the individuals participating in the study (parents, teachers, children) have spent a considerable amount of time living and/or working in the proposed research context. In fact, many were probably born and raised in this setting. This assumption has been some what confirmed

by previous studies carried out in the same area (Smith et al., 2003; Jiménez et al., 2003; Ballesteros, 2003). This point is important given that the project plans to survey local attitudes, beliefs, and practices, and individuals who have migrated to the area from other countries or even other parts of Mexico may not hold the same opinions as local community members (i.e. transnational immigrants). For this reason, interviews with educators, parents, and students included questions regarding place of birth, former residence, and stable contact (including travel) with people outside the proposed region of study. Although participants' perspectives are likely to differ to some degree, local ideologies are expected to reveal certain patterns and similarities.

1.3.2. Expected Results

As far as the first research question - a comparison and contrast of attitudes and ideologies toward literacy practices - it was predicted that the teachers, parents, and children would respond in distinct ways. For instance, the teachers, who have completed many years of formal education (i.e. both hold college degrees), may tend to advocate dominant (school-based) literacy practices, to which they have become accustomed through their own schooling and practices. In contrast, many of the parents, some of whom have had less formal schooling, may not be aware of these standards, preferring instead local literacy practices.

Indeed, the study conducted by Rosales-Kufrin (1989), on which the attitudes portion of this project is based, revealed significant dissimilarities between the beliefs of parents and teachers (although with respect to the issue of first-language maintenance in the context of bilingual schooling). Furthermore, the children's perspectives may place them somewhere in between these two extremes, considering that they are in the initial

years of exposure to academic literacy (perhaps the first-graders more so than the fourth-graders). Lastly, many or all of the participants may be found to hold different sets of beliefs depending on domain, namely which literacy activities are acceptable at school as opposed to in the home and community.

With regard to the second research question – how home and community literacy practices are similar to and different from school practices – it was predicted that the research would reveal notable distinctions between reading and writing in the two settings. Indeed, prior investigation in the proposed context has reported that first- and fourth-grade teachers concentrate highly on the form of writing (i.e. accentuation, punctuation, spelling), while community members seem to be more concerned with the communicative function of the written language, evidenced, for example, by local signs and announcements (Jiménez et al., 2003). Moreover, the researcher expects to encounter diverse types of literacy practices in the homes and community, of which educators are not aware, or otherwise fail to recognize as "real" literacy.

Given that teachers are expected not to acknowledge non-academic forms of literacy, it is doubtful that they make an effort to teach reading and writing using these texts as a resource. Hence, in response to the third research question, concerning the integration of funds of linguistic knowledge, it was anticipated that teachers would not consider them worthy of inclusion in the classroom. On the contrary, many literacy educators probably limit instruction to the types of texts and techniques that they themselves learned to be permitted and valued as part of formal schooling; that is, they more than likely tend to utilize published materials that encourage a focus on form and style (e.g. dominant literacy practices). Another plausible explanation is that many

teachers may assume that children with limited resources are simply uneducated and should thus practice the technical and mechanical aspects of literacy before "advancing" to other activities.

Other educators may follow the recommendations of recent materials available from the Secretaría de Educación Pública [Department of Public Education], which encourage literacy learning based on children's knowledge of local texts (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2001).

Despite these predictions, it is certainly possible that the three groups' attitudes and beliefs about literacy are similar. After all, as commented above, many (if not most) of the participants have been born and raised in this specific context, and community-wide ideologies may prevail. In fact, similar schooling may have an effect on their respective opinions. In other words, local value systems may prove to be more influential than academic standards imposed by governmental agencies creating educational policies in Mexico City. Along the same lines, teachers may or may not apply, in a consistent manner, the materials given to them by these institutions. It could be that they choose to teach reading and writing using some kind of combination of published and local resources, a strategy reported by Ballesteros (2003) in some (limited) circumstances.

Likewise, although it was predicted that teachers would tend not to identify and incorporate into the classroom funds of linguistic knowledge based on home and community resources, it is probably more realistic to assume that different teachers do so in distinct ways and proportions. For instance, grade level might well be a fundamental factor. It is plausible that first-grade teachers may integrate local practices to a much greater extent than do fourth-grade teachers, perhaps in an attempt to introduce their

students gradually to more academic, abstract literacies. Another significant factor may involve the teachers' depth of knowledge of the community, especially with regard to how long they have lived in the community and how well they know their students.