CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0   Design

This is a qualitative case study of an elite English/Spanish bilingual school in Mexico. Merriam (1998) defines the case as a bound entity, "the case then could be a person such as a student, a teacher, a principal; a program; a group such as a class, a school, a community; a specific policy; and so on." (p.27). A case study approach was the selected design because it allowed me to closely observe a bounded group of participants actively partaking in literacy events. Since the participating students were five and six years old they were not able to respond to questionnaires and survey forms that are, often, part of qualitative methodologies other than the case study. When discussing the decision to choose a case study Merriam (1992) states, "The decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing"(p.29). This design provided me with the opportunity to receive rich data through classroom

observation.

A second factor in the selection of a case study was that it allowed me to focus on the literacy practices of a small group of students and their teachers with different characteristics than the Jiménez, Smith, & Martínez León (2002) study. Some of the different characteristics of this study were the socio economic status and the bilingualism of the teachers and students. The socio economic status of the participating schools in the Jiménez et al. study observed students from lower-class and middle-class families. Both schools were monolingual although one school had some students from indigenous backgrounds with families that may speak an indigenous

language. Therefore, my study differs from the Jiménez et al. (2002) study in that, (1.) my students come from middle-upper class families and (2.) students enter the school either speaking a prestigious language or are in the process of learning two languages of wider communication.

The study observed two teachers and five students in their school environment as they worked through literacy activities. The methodology of this study applies some of the methodology used in a recent study by Jiménez, Smith, & Martinez León (2002). Over a six-month period they collected data through "classroom observations, teacher and administrator interviews, school-produced documents, and publicly displayed texts" (p.2). Similar to Jiménez et al. (2002) I used the digital camara to capture environmental print in the classroom and school community. It was also used to record examples of students' work. School documents were obtained in order to understand the school's mission and beliefs about education and more specifically about literacy. Adaptations to the Jiménez et al. methodology were implemented for the purposes of this study. For example, as researchers we were different types of insiders. In the Jiménez et al. (2002) study two of the researchers were parents of students in one of the participating schools. In this study I was collecting data at the institution where I am currently teaching. A second example of a change in the methodology was the use of video footage of teacher instruction and students reading and working were also used as a tool for better understanding the literacy practices used and as a means of provoking interview questions about the teacher and students processes being observed during a lesson.

The Jiménez et al. study observed literacy practices in monolingual middle and lower class private schools in Mexico. They found that students had great amounts of freedom in spoken language, a varying degree of freedom in reading, but written

language was confined to mainly focusing on form. This study follows the same qualitative research methods as the Jimenez et al. (2002) study, however, it sought to understand the literacy practices that occurred within a different population of students and parents. The social economic status of the students in this school was middle-upper class and the setting was bilingual.

3.1   Setting and Participants

The school I chose for this study is a private bilingual immersion preschool in Puebla, Mexico. I obtained access to the school quite easily as I am currently finishing my third year as a teacher at TBS. Due to high tuition fees this particular school serves families in the middle- to upper class range, and is considered a highly prestigious school throughout the community. The school's prestige is not only related to the social economic status of the students but it is also due to the extensive English instruction and bicultural nature of the school's curriculum.

The preschool currently has approximately 600 children ages three to six enrolled in the three-year program. All grade levels are presently working to obtain international certification and are proud of the fact that as a whole school it draws from a student population of over 20 different countries around the world. However, the majority of the students are native-born Mexicans and more specifically are native to Puebla. The mission of this school is to not only provide their students with a bilingual education but also a bicultural one, taking into consideration the cultural diversity of their students and the importance of teaching students to be culturally sensitive.

Preschool students attend half of the school day in English with one teacher and then switch classrooms and have the second half of the day in Spanish with a different teacher. Unlike a great many schools in Mexico, this preschool does not have to follow

the SEP curriculum and, therefore, uses literacy materials other than those books or materials mandated by the SEP. Since TBS's preschool is private it does not have to follow the SEP policy in the same manner that the Elementary school, Middle school and the High school do. The preschool follows the same academic calendar as the SEP but the curriculum is different. The present curriculum is organized around monthly themes selected by the principals and is the same in both the Spanish and English classes. Content areas are divided between the two languages. Math and social studies are taught in English and science and history are taught in Spanish. An exception to this language of instruction allocation may be made when the English teacher is presenting a lesson on an important historical day in the United States. In such cases the English teacher may present a brief history lesson in English. Also at times a thematic activity in English may be related to science and is, therefore, presented in English. I observed a science activity in English involving students learning about the plant life cycle. They learned the parts of the flower and the reproduction process in English. Other than these exceptions, the First English teachers generally use the language that corresponds to the subject matter.

Students attending the third year of preschool called "First English" were selected as the participants of this study. The name "First English" is used to identify this as the first level of school where students are becoming literate in English. Although students have received oral instruction in English and have had contact with English texts such as, song charts, classroom labels, posters and books, the preschool considers the third year of preschool as the first concrete introduction of reading and writing in English. Therefore, the label "First English" does not refer to the concept that this is the students' first encounter with the English language but rather that it is the beginning of the development of their literacy skills in English.

3.2   Student Participants

The focal students of this case study were in their third year of preschool. The following year these students change schools from the preschool to the primary school. The third year of preschool is the equivalent of the first grade in the United States. The students are between the ages of five and six. Four of these students have been attending the bilingual preschool for two years and one began attending the year of the study, although she came from another bilingual school and has had private English classes for two years. Four of the students were born in Mexico to Mexican parents and are native speakers of Spanish. These children receive most of their English input in the classroom setting. The fifth student is a Mexican-American simultaneous bilingual in Spanish and English.

Four Mexican children and one Mexican-American child were selected from two different classrooms. Two boys and three girls were selected. The selection of these five children was based on recommendations by their current teacher with the researcher's specification that the chosen students should represent a variety of proficiency levels in reading and writing in both English and Spanish. Their proficiency levels were evaluated through the use of an English and Spanish rubric that is used by both the Spanish and English teacher. However, when teachers evaluated the students near the end of the study they did not cover a range of levels. The teachers placed the participating students under the category of either "Muy bien" (very good) or "bien" (good). A second specification was that the students were past students of mine. For this reason students did not represent all proficiency levels. See Appendix A for full version of the English and Spanish rubrics.

At the time of the study, two of the students were six years old and three were five years old. All five children come from middle-upper class families, where one or both parents have obtained their masters degree at a Mexican university.

3.3   Profile of the Case Study Students

It is important to give a brief profile of each student's background in order to provide a better understanding of their experience and knowledge of being bilingual and biliterate. The majority of the information presented here was acquired through daily contact that I have had with the students and their parents for the past three years. As the classroom teacher of four of these students, I had daily contact with the parents for one year. I also discussed their children's progress in English during parent teacher conferences. I have also had frequent contact with these children for three years and have had many conversations and interactions with them. Interviews with two of the participating students' mothers also provided additional information and insights about the students' family and academic backgrounds. In the following section I discuss the four native Spanish-speakers and the English/Spanish simultaneous bilingual.

Sara is six years old and comes from a family where the mother speaks, writes, understands, and reads fluently in English. Her parents are highly educated. Sara's mother has a masters in business administration and the father has masters degrees in finances and in engineering. Sara's mother frequently speaks English to her at home and reads to her weekly in English. Sara has been at the American school since beginning preschool at the age of three. She is an outgoing student with strong leadership qualities. Sara is always willing to help the teacher and her fellow classmates. She enjoys reading and participating in all school activities. When I asked her to describe herself she had a difficult time answering but she commented, '*Soy amigable porque tengo varios amigos y soy divertida.*" A classmate of Sara's shared that Sara "*es lista y*

buena". María shared, "*Es una niña buena, noble, atenta, bien hecha, y trabaja excelente.*"

The second native Spanish-speaker, Andrea, is also six years old and has been in the program for two years. She is a very quiet, respectful and friendly student. She often volunteers to help the teacher or takes the initiative when she sees that someone is in need of help. Andrea's academic abilities do not come naturally for her. She puts forth a great effort to learn and complete her work neatly and accurately. Her teachers described her as, "*Un líder a veces y muy buena niña*". She described herself as, "j*ugetona*" and her friends described her as "amigable y compartida". Her mother has an undergraduate degree in business administration and her father has a master degree in engineering. Both parents have a limited knowledge of the English language. In an interview the mother shared with me that neither parent is able to read to their children in English although they can both help their children with some basic vocabulary in English. However, she reads to Andrea in Spanish daily.

Alberto is a five-year-old native Spanish-speaker. He has attended TBS since the first year of preschool. Alberto is a quiet introvert. He likes to please both his teachers and his classmates by being a hard worker and a nice friend. He is very courteous and well behaved. María shared that Alberto "*es un niño muy bueno, sano, tranquilo y educado*". Alberto enjoys and excels in mathematics. Although he tries hard Alberto's reading level is much lower than his classmates in both English and Spanish. Alberto's mother received an undergraduate degree in international relations and his father is a medical doctor. Alberto's father is fluent in English but in an interview with Alberto he mentioned that due to his father's busy schedule he is rarely available for helping Alberto with his English. Alberto's mother is only able to help him with simple vocabulary in English. She admits that they rarely read stories in Spanish at home.

Marcela is also a five-year-old native Spanish-speaker. She is an extremely shy introvert and finds making friends to be a challenge. She often works and plays alone in and out of the classroom. Learning English for Marcela is very easy and seems to come without much effort. In fact, in most subject areas Marcela excels. Her one weakness at the start of this study was her inability to socialize and relate to her classmates and her teachers. This tended to be a constant struggle for her in the classroom as the teacher is incrementing the amount of time students are working in small groups. By the end of the study and the school year both teacher had noticed that Marcela had strengthened her social skills and had become a much more open and friendly classmate. This change seemed to motivate her academically. I observed that the quality of her work and her level of enthusiasm had increased as she developed social skills. Her mother has been taking English lessons for three years and can understand and carry on a conversation. She has a strong desire for her children to be able to understand, speak, read and write in English. In addition to the English curriculum at TBS, she provides private, after-school English classes with a native English speaker for her children. She reads to Marcela in Spanish and English on a weekly basis.

The simultaneous bilingual is a six-year-old boy who was born in Texas and who moved to Mexico shortly after his birth. Alex's mother is from the United States and her first language is English. His father is Mexican and his L1 is Spanish. They have been living in Puebla for the past five years. Alex has been exposed to both Spanish and English in the home since birth and at school since he entered TBS two years ago. The mother speaks only English to her son and the father mainly speaks Spanish, but has some fluency speaking and understanding English. The mother has an undergraduate degree in business and the father has a master in business. Alex is a bright student who is able to speak, understand, and read fluently in both Spanish and

English. He is also shy and friendly, however, he tends to be more dependent upon adults for attention and reassurement. He tends to interact more with the teachers than with his own classmates. He described himself as normal, athletic, fun and intelligent.

The family background is important for understanding where these students fit socially in the school and surrounding community and how their opinions about bilingualism may have been formed or influenced. All five families are middle-upper class with highly educated parents who expressed the importance of their child's learning English during interviews or casual conversation. These types of families at TBS are fairly typical in this school setting. However, there are also families that make financial sacrifices in order to send their children to TBS. These families use loans to pay for the tuition or are in debt to the school. One of the participating students comes from a family that makes these types of sacrifices for their children's education. In an informal conversation with the researcher the mother commented "*La educación de mis hijos es nuestro primer prioridad y los sacrificios que tenemos que hacer como pareja para ofrecerles lo mejor, pues, vale la pena.*"

The preschool principal recommended two Mexican teachers for this study. The selection was based on the criteria that both are considered master teachers with over fifteen years of experience in literacy teaching. Both teachers are women and native speakers of Spanish. They were educated in Mexico and one had received a bachelor degree in Early Childhood Education. They have varying degrees of spoken, written, reading, and listening proficiency in English. María has a high proficiency level in each of the previous categories. Laura has a basic speaking and comprehension ability in English. She has limited literacy skills in English. These are team teachers who work with the same two groups of 28 students daily. One teacher teaches only in English and the other only in Spanish. The study took place during their first year working together.

3.4   Reading Materials

The materials required to conduct this study were minimal. One English book and Spanish reading worksheets from each of the classrooms were used for assessing the students' reading strategies. Currently this level is not using a Spanish reading book; therefore the reading worksheets were chosen as a means for evaluating students' reading strategies in Spanish. The worksheets are focused around words and sentences beginning with a specific letter. For example, if the letter "V" was the letter of the week the worksheet would have a variety of words starting with "V" and a few sentences using those words. The last section of the worksheet consists of comprehension questions for the information read in the previous sentences. See Appendix B for a concrete example of this type of worksheet.

The English book is the first in a series of reading books used in the primary school. The title of the book is "Literature Works: A collection of readings" published by Silver Burdett and Ginn (2000) and focuses on two main themes; "Here I am" and "Let's Be Friends". This series of books was originally chosen by the Elementary school with the hope that it would spark students' interest for reading in English. However, the teachers and administrators of the elementary school labeled it as being below a first-grade reading level so the texts were donated to the preschool. During the study the textbook was used on a weekly basis and was becoming familiar to the children. The teachers have been using these materials for the past two years with their students. These two readings were chosen for this study based on the assumption that more realistic results would be produced if all participants were equally familiar with both the English and Spanish reading resources.

3.5   Interview Questions Asked of the Participating Teachers and Students

A variety of questions were developed to guide the open-ended interviews with the teachers and the children. The following is a small sample of the questions that were asked during the teacher interviews with the intention of understanding some of the literacy instruction and practices observed during the study:

1.   *¿Cuál es tu definición de lectoescritura?*

2.   *¿Cuándo y por qué usan lápiz rojo? ¿Todos los alumnos tienen que usar*

      esta técnica y es un requisito de la escuela o es la decisión de cada

      maestra?

3.   *¿He visto que copian mucho del pizarrón, cuál es el propósito de este*

      tipo de trabajo?

4.   *¿Cuál es tu propósito al corregir los trabajos de los niños?*

A variety of example questions for the children are as follows:

1.   *¿Cómo aprendiste a leer en español?*

2.   *¿En tú opinión dime un compañero que lee muy bien y por qué?*

3.   *¿Cuál es más difícil para ti, leer en inglés o español? ¿Por qué?*

4.   *¿Cómo aprendiste a escribir en español e inglés?*

5.   *¿Que significa para ti leer, escribir, y hablar en inglés?*

A full list of questions for both teacher and student interviews can be found in Appendix C. These materials were used in collaboration with the following procedures in order to obtain reliable data that accurately portrays the instructional practices and literacy strategies used by the teachers and the students.

3.6   Data Collection Procedures

3.6.1   Observations

I observed two times a week in both the English and Spanish classrooms over a six-month period. Each observation lasted between 40-60 minutes. This is a typical length of a lesson that includes an activity with the whole class and independent work time. I completed a total of 38 observations in each classroom and approximately 38 hours of data collection. All observations occurred during literacy lessons or content-based lessons where literacy practices were being implemented. During the approximately hour-long observation sessions, I created field notes on the literacy instruction and practices that were being used by both the teacher and students. During each observation I also dedicated approximately 20 minutes to directly observing the case study students as they participated and worked on activities pertaining to literacy.

I also decided to perform more intensive observations by observing the children and teachers on a daily basis for two weeks. This was done during the last phase of my observations. The purpose of this intensive observation was to see all the literacy events and practices that occurred during the study of one particular theme in both Spanish and English. I spent the first week in the mornings with the English teacher and the afternoons with the Spanish teacher. Thus, I observed the entire class day with one group of students. Three hours were spent in the English classroom and three hours in the Spanish classroom. The second week I followed the routine of the second class by observing the Spanish teacher in the morning and the English teacher in the afternoon. This allowed me to observe all English and Spanish literacy activities related to the month's thematic unit. During this two-week observation time I completed 10

observations and 30 additional hours of data collection. Overall I did 48 classroom observations involving a total of 68 hours.

During the last week of the observation period I also observed a different team of English/Spanish teachers. I performed a single observation in both the English and Spanish classrooms that are adjacent to the participating teachers. Each observation lasted one hour. During this time I took field notes about the literacy activity and instruction being implemented. I also focused on any counter examples of the data I had collected from the participating teachers. This was important in comparing the participating teachers' literacy instructional practices with that of another teacher using the same curriculum. This comparison allowed me to observe any patterns in their teaching techniques and to see in what areas there procedures were uniform and in which areas they used their own teaching style.

3.6.2   Teacher Interviews

I began piloting the interview format with other teachers in the preschool department in both Spanish and English with two purposes in mind. The first purpose was to detect any potential flaws with the formation of the questions and to add any important questions that developed as a direct result from these interviews. The second purpose was to decide if interviewing these bilingual teachers in English or Spanish would produce the same results. I found through these pilot interviews that both participating teachers, being native Spanish speakers, produced much more detailed and informative answers in Spanish. When asked in English they tended to give surface level and short answers. Only in one instance did an English-language interview produce a more in-depth look at the teachers' literacy instruction. However, this teacher

was from the United States and a native speaker of English. Thus, all interviews with native Spanish-speaking teachers and students were conducted in Spanish.

I conducted two formal interviews with each of the participating teachers. One interview took place at the beginning of data collection and the second interview was performed at the conclusion of the study. All formal student interviews were performed before the teacher interviews. The purpose of this was to use information obtained by the students for the formulation of the teacher interview questions. All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed by the researcher, with the help of a native speaker of Spanish. Teacher interviews were conducted with only the teacher and interviewer present in the participating teacher's classroom. They took place during the teacher's planning period to ensure a quiet environment with no interruptions. Each interview lasted from 25-35 minutes.

3.6.3   Student Interviews

I conducted two formal interviews with each participating student. Student interviews were conducted in my classroom on a carpet in the reading corner. I chose this location because the students were very familiar with the environment and because there was no one else present in the room at the time of the interviews. I invited students to participate in the interview in pairs with the hope that they would feel less inhibited and would more freely answer the questions. The interviews with the native Spanish speakers were performed in Spanish and the interview with the simultaneous bilingual was in English, as he tended to identify me as a native English speaker. Each interview session, lasting approximately 15 minutes, was tape recorded and later transcribed. I also jotted down any important notes as we talked.

During the observations of specific students, spontaneous informal conversations about literacy provided additional support or counterevidence for the information obtained in the interviews. An example of this type of interaction occurred as Alex worked on writing down the vocabulary from the board and I asked if he was copying the words or writing them as they sounded to him. He commented that he was writing them as they sounded. These interactions provided greater insight for data analysis.

3.6.4 Artifacts

During the spring semester of the school year 2001-2002 I obtained samples of literacy work in Spanish and English from two of the participating six-year-old students over a three-month period. These data consisted of dictation exercises; work with syllables, research questions pertaining to the content class of science, English vocabulary lists and illustrations. Over the course of the 2002-2003 school year I collected examples of each of the five students' literacy work in English and Spanish on a weekly basis. I also received one continuous weeks' worth of student documents in order to observe the students' literacy development while working on one continuous thematic unit. These documents allowed me to observe and understand some of the processes the students go through as they complete a literacy assignment as well as understand the teachers correcting process. The examples of students' work were also used as a tool or reference for asking specific interview questions of the teachers about literacy practices in their classroom.

I also obtained school documents relating to the school's mission statement and philosophy on literacy instruction and learning. For example, I obtained a copy of the updated mission statement for each level of the preschool. The principals created the

final product of these statements with the assistance and input of the teachers for each corresponding level. These documents allowed for a comparison between stated school beliefs and goals and actual observed practices. Many of these documents were created by the American School superintendent or by one of the preschool principals.

3.6.5   Video Footage and Photographs

During class observations on four occasions video footage was recorded for twenty minutes during different class activities. This included teachers' instruction of the group and students' responses during class. Video footage was also taken at the end of each child interview of the student reading from their English book and their Spanish reading worksheets. Both types of video were used as a tool for questioning the participating teachers' about their students' reading strategies and the teachers' instructional practices.

In addition, digital photographs were taken of the classroom, students working, and teacher instruction at the whiteboard. Photos of the classroom were taken as a means of providing literacy examples children have contact with and use on a regular basis. Photos of students working and students' finished products provided reminders of specific activities, as well as providing a profile of each student. Photos of teachers' instruction at the white board were used to portray the type of examples students have to follow and the type of daily work students are required to complete.

Triangulation, member checking and key informants were used to strengthen the validity of the study. Merriam (1992) defines triangulation as "using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings"(p.204). In this study triangulation occurred in the multiple use of sources of data between the use of observations, recorded interviews, students' work, photos and

video footage. The use of various means for data collection allowed for a more precise analysis of the data and results.

3.6.6 Data Analysis

Before the formal analysis began all observations were typed on the computer and then I used cut and paste to categorize each piece of information found in the observation. All observations, interviews, documents, and photos were either typed or scanned in to the computer for easier access and retrieval. I analyzed the data from the initiation to the finish of the data collection. One method of analysis used in this study was the construction of categories through the coding of data. Merriam (1998) describes the purpose of this type of analysis, "to construct categories or themes that capture some recurring pattern that cuts across… the data"(p.179). Once a variety of categories have been assigned Bogden & Biklen (1998) recommend placing "units of data" which are parts of "field notes, transcripts, or documents" in a corresponding category.

Following these guidelines, I analyzed the field notes, transcripts and documents collected from the classroom and student observations on a weekly basis and then coded them depending on specific instructional practices and strategies used by the focal students. All observational data were placed under a specific theme or various categories within the general heading of coded data. Emerging patterns in the data were found in the coded data, as well as counterexamples of these same patterns. Observations, formal and informal interviews, video footage and photo data were read, reread and analyzed in order to create, change, or refine any new or major themes that were detected in the data. These categories were eventually narrowed down to the major themes that are presented in the following chapter. The patterns that emerged

from the children's interactions with literacy and data from the formal interviews were used to infer their perceptions of their own literacy learning and the strategies they implemented during literacy events. Analysis of the two teachers' instructional practices was handled in the same manner.

Table 3.1 Coding categories and subcategories

Categories	Subcategories
Teacher guided written work	Copying
	Dictation
	Enunciados
	Red pencil
Teacher-student interaction	Teacher instructions
	Teacher error correction/Reminders
	Classroom management
Reading	Comprehension
	Choral reading
	Wall Charts & visual aids
Environmental print	Class posters
	Students' work
Student errors	Self-Correction
	Student autonomy
Student-student interaction	

Document analysis was also an ongoing process as the work was being collected on a weekly basis and then compared and contrasted with the documents of all the participating students. Analysis of the documents occurred on the spot during the direct observation of a particular participating student's work in a specific literacy activity. This analysis evaluated the specific strategies that a student may be implementing in that moment.

Member checking occurred with the analysis of students' work, photos of classroom activities and video footage. The participating teachers reviewed the ongoing analyses and their clarifications and ideas were used to accurately represent the data.

The teachers also checked the accuracy and provided feedback on my summaries of the participating students' family backgrounds.

A key informant was also consulted to gain information about TBS. The administrative principal at the preschool provided me with details about the school's history. She provided me with feedback and clarified any errors I may have made about the school in general and specifically about the preschool. Her validity as an informant stems from her years of contact and interaction with the school. She was a student at the TBS from preschool through high school, and has also been working at the school for the past 20 years. Her position for the past 19 years as the Spanish coordinator of the preschool has provided her with a wealth of knowledge about the school's history, school policy, curriculum and the teachers and staff at all levels.

The following chapter presents the results of this study.