

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter I return to the research questions that guided this study. I discuss the conclusions about practice and policy for literacy learning at TBS and at the SEP level. I also discuss implications for future studies of literacy and biliteracy practices in Mexico and other contexts.

5.1 Research Questions

In this section I answer the research questions and draw conclusions about the literacy practices at TBS. The first research question is as follows:

Did the English and Spanish teacher implement the same literacy instruction in their classrooms or did they differ depending on the language or an alternative factor?

The English and Spanish teacher typically used different strategies for literacy instruction. The writing activities in the English classroom were mainly copying down lists of vocabulary words and drawing illustrations representing each word. The students' written work rarely consisted of writing complete sentences. On the other hand, written work in the Spanish classroom was mainly at the sentence level. Students worked at copying into their notebooks various sentences related to the letter of the week and typically containing an average of four words per sentence. Interestingly, neither the English nor the Spanish classroom worked on developing texts in the form of paragraphs. The only observed written paragraphs that students produced were the

teacher-directed texts in the Spanish classroom, such as the paragraph about the Mexican Constitution in Figure 4.11.

Reading instruction in the two classrooms was also different. In the English classroom students typically read out loud as a group, one-on-one with the teacher and silently while completing activities in other content areas. Unlike writing activities that mainly consisted of writing vocabulary words, students in the English classroom read whole sentences, paragraphs and even complete stories. The choral reading activities involved reading short stories or poems. During these activities students generally seemed to enjoy themselves as the majority of students participated enthusiastically. Students demonstrated comprehension of these stories by orally answering questions and summarizing. Students also formed sentences at the grammar chart and read them out loud to the English teacher. Mathematics was one of the content classes where students were required to read in English silently. The math worksheet in Figure 4.8 is an example of the type of texts students were asked to read. During the math activity students had to understand the written text in order to solve the math problem. Reading in the English classroom, therefore, consisted of reading out loud, reading silently and comprehension of different length texts. These activities were not observed in the Spanish classroom.

Reading instruction in students' L2 was more complex than L1 reading instruction. Reading in the Spanish classroom was mainly at the sentence level. Students read silently while copying from the board, reading a worksheet or one-on-one with the teacher. Reading material was rarely contextualized for the students and the few comprehension questions they answered were very simple. The reading worksheets contained sentences that were not related to the students' lives or the thematic unit. Instead, the texts and sentences were only related to the letter of the week. After

reading the sentences in this worksheet, students were asked to answer the three comprehension questions with one-word answers. Students were not asked to summarize texts or re-tell stories in the Spanish classroom. Students read independently while copying from the board with greater frequency than they participated in teacher-directed reading activities. Students demonstrated well-developed reading skills in their L2. However, they were not required to use or develop these same skills in their L1.

In conclusion, the data collected in this study revealed that reading in the children's L2 appeared to be a more complex task than in their L1. In English students were asked to read longer texts and answer more difficult comprehension questions. Students were permitted to use either language when answering questions but those students who worked at answering in English were developing more advanced reading skills in their L2. Spanish reading activities were oftentimes reading isolated sentences and did not involve reading short paragraphs. These results seem to contrast with Moll & Diaz's (1987) findings. Moll & Diaz (1987) found that Spanish/English bilingual students received more complex instruction in their L1 rather than their L2 and that L2 instruction was far too simple. Moll & Diaz (1987, p.303) concluded,

“...there was no transfer from English to Spanish reading...because the organization of instruction was such as to make reading in English dissimilar from reading in Spanish. Comprehension, the key to reading, did not enter in any important way into English reading lessons. You cannot transfer what you are not allowed to display”.

Students in the Moll & Diaz (1987) study were not given the proper means for demonstrating reading comprehension in their L2. Instruction in the students' L2 limited use of L1 reading skills and thus from taking advantage of transfer to develop their L2 reading skills. Interestingly, in the current study students were using more developed and complex reading skills in their L2 than their L1. This difference in reading practices is similar to the Moll & Diaz conclusion that students cannot

demonstrate their reading abilities in their L1 or the L2 if the reading instruction or reading activities do not promote the use of these skills. The reading activities in the Spanish classroom did not allow or challenge students to use their reading skills that they had developed in the English classroom.

Reading at TBS also occurred outside of the English and Spanish classrooms. Students attended the school library on a weekly basis. The following section describes the reading that occurred in the library.

5.1.1 Reading Activities Outside the Classroom

During the study, students received outside classroom support for literacy learning once a week. Students visit the library where the librarian reads a short story in Spanish or English. Oftentimes puppets or slides are used to enhance the story. The story is frequently related to the thematic unit students are studying in the classroom. Following the story children are given approximately 15 minutes to quietly read a book of their choice individually or with a classmate. At the end of each session students may choose a book they would like to check out and take home for the week. The English and Spanish books are on opposite sides of the room. There are approximately 100 more books in Spanish than in English. Reading is treated differently in the library, as it is a more casual activity than in the classroom. Students can listen and interact with the story without pressure of having to read out loud or complete a written assignment. During my observations the librarian also asked the students to make predictions throughout the story, answer comprehension questions, summarize and re-tell the story in their own words. These were activities that were observed in the English classroom but not the Spanish classroom. In the library students also enjoyed

their time of choosing any book and sitting or lying down on the carpet to read their story.

According to the preschool principal, the Spanish textbook is no longer part of the curriculum because the teachers found that students were memorizing the text and not actually reading and understanding the texts. Therefore, the principal decided to rely mainly on the school library to fulfill the place of the Spanish textbook. I observed children checking out of the library once a week books in English and Spanish that they had individually selected. However, these texts were not incorporated into classroom instruction. Children took the book home for a week and brought it back on the day of their designated library class. The library experience was, therefore, similar to that of the English classroom but it incorporated the reading activities in both languages.

5.1.2 Possible Reasons for the differences in Instructional Practices

The comparison of texts used in both classrooms and the different literacy instructional practices lead to the question of why these two teachers working at the same school produce such different types of written texts and instructional practices in their classrooms? When I asked this question of the English teacher, her only comment was, *“Cada quién tiene su sistema. Cada quién tiene su estilo. Es la misma meta, pero cada quién tiene su estilo”*. Individual teaching styles may be one contributing factor but I believe there are other reasons for the difference in instructional practices.

One important conclusion can be drawn that the Spanish classroom dedicates a large percentage of their curriculum to the teaching of the “scribal” function of writing, while the English classroom is more concerned with the learning of the thematic vocabulary and oral production in the target language. Evidence of this can be noted in the English rubric (Appendix B) that teachers use to evaluate their students. According

to this measure, students in the English classroom are held accountable only for pre-literacy skills. The main objective for students outlined in the evaluation rubric and observed during class activities were to increase their English vocabulary and use of short phrases and develop good listening comprehension of classroom dialogue in the English classroom. Students are not required to know how to read and write in English at this grade level even though they seem to be reading at higher level than in Spanish. Both the English teacher and the preschool director commented that reading and writing in English would be the focus of instruction the following year at the Elementary school. Therefore, writing instruction in the students' L1 was the Spanish teachers responsibility. In conclusion, the difference in instructional practices and teacher-directed texts was apparently due to the differences in the pre-determined literacy objectives for the English and Spanish classrooms.

The effects of economics on TBS has aided in the development of these differences in literacy objectives. The effects of the increase in market for a bilingual education in Puebla has driven TBS to take measures to ensure their continued success as a binational school. As I commented in chapter two, TBS has plans for adding a "*maternal*" school due to the competition from other bilingual schools in Puebla. There has also been a decrease in student population at TBS due to the increase in number of competing schools. This competition has led administrators and policy makers at TBS to make changes in the school's curriculum.

The first changes began two years before the onset of the study when "*kinder*", the first year of preschool at TBS, was changed from a 50/50 English/Spanish model to 90% of the day in English. These shifts in language instruction are similar to those that occur in Dual Language programs in the U.S. TBS believes that this English program will aid in the promotion of the school by drawing more families than other bilingual

programs. In fact, the year following this study TBS plans to implement the 90/10 model in the second year of the preschool. This pattern may lead to the entire preschool curriculum relying on an all-English program in the classroom with special classes providing Spanish language support. The preschool director reflected that an all-English program allows students to acquire a better English accent. She did not discuss the importance of literacy instruction in the students L1 or learning in different content areas. This idea presented by the director reflects more importance and emphasis on students' ability to speak the L2 rather than on their development of literacy skills in both Spanish and English.

These factors suggest that TBS is continually making changes to their school policy and curriculum in order to attract clients to what they consider a "unique" bilingual environment. Since I began working at TBS four years ago, the policy makers have attempted to implement four different curriculum programs. They have also changed their bilingual model twice in four years. This is evidence that TBS tends to make curriculum changes yearly. The market forces in Puebla seem to drive TBS's curriculum and may in fact be a cause of the imbalance and differences in literacy instruction between the English and Spanish classroom.

Reading and writing activities in English and Spanish were found to be similar only in that both teachers used frequent oral and written forms of correcting students' written work and both teachers began by teaching the children to read syllabically. A third similarity is that reading activities were relatively scarce in the English and Spanish classrooms. The lack of reading instruction and practice in the Spanish classroom was also due to the majority of class time being dedicated to critique of students' use of written form. The *dictado*, *copiado*, and *enunciado* writing activities used a great deal of the class time. The Spanish teacher used the majority of time for

these exercises and for correcting students' work. Since the English teacher did not practice *enunciado* and *dictado* work in English, she had time to implement reading activities.

Asymmetry between English and Spanish reading materials was another contributing factor to the absence of reading activities in the Spanish classroom. The basic Spanish worksheets were not conducive to meaningful reading experiences in the Spanish classroom. On the other hand, the English teacher had a developmentally-age-appropriate reading book for each student in the class. These materials allowed the students to partake in a variety of meaningful reading activities in English.

5.1.3 Research Question #2

I now present the second research question and draw conclusions about teacher-directed literacy strategies.

Did the five participating students use these teacher-directed literacy strategies in the classroom?

Students implemented the teacher-directed writing strategies that focused on the "scribal" aspects of written language. This was demonstrated by the students' use of the red pencil, their frequent questions about conventional spelling, and their focus on having neat handwriting. Students were very conscious about using the red pencil for capital letters and punctuation marks and would frequently have the red pencil ready in one hand while they wrote with the other hand. Students also corrected the teacher if she forgot to apply the use of the red pencil to a text.

Students also applied the English and Spanish teachers' strategy of using conventional spelling. During writing activities students would ask if words were spelled with certain letters. For example, students would ask if '*bicicleta*' was spelled

with a “v” or a “b” or if the word *hace*” was spelled with an “s” or a “c”. Students would also call out punctuation questions. For instance, they would ask if a word had an accent and, if so, over which letter.

Students were also conscious of the importance teachers placed on neatness of written work. Frequently during *copiado* exercises, typically containing five sentences, students would use a large portion of the time erasing and rewriting letters. They would even place their finger after a word in order to leave an acceptable amount of space between words. This focus on the form of written language was explicitly taught in the English and Spanish classrooms and was implemented by the students in this study. This finding supports Edelsky’s (1986) conclusion that teachers’ beliefs and instruction effect students’ writing.

Students also applied certain teacher-directed reading strategies. Teachers began teaching reading phonetically and syllabically. These practices were observed of all five participating students. These teacher-directed reading strategies were also observed in Mulhern’s (1983) study of kindergartner’s literacy L1 learning in Spanish. Although the social economic status of the students at TBS differed from the students in Mulhern’s study, the tendency to teach reading by direct instruction of letters and syllables rather than through meaning-centered activities was similar in both studies.

An example of a different literacy strategy being used is Sara’s over use of periods and capitals in her dinosaur activity shown in Figure 4.14. She is working to understand when to use capital letters and periods, a skill that is explicitly taught by her teachers. However, Sara continues to experiment with and test different hypotheses about punctuation, which may be evidence that initial learning is developmental and, thus, instruction has no immediate and absolute effect. It is also possible that Sara

either disregards teacher instruction or she is over generalizing the explicit, teacher-directed strategies.

Alex's use of non-conventional spelling was another example of a student using writing strategies that were not teacher-directed. Alex's use of inventive spelling surprised me since both teachers seemed to disapprove of this style of writing. The teachers would consider this technique for writing to be inaccurate, producing a greater number of orthographic errors. The participating teachers did not seem to be aware of Alex's use of inventive spelling and, when I asked them about errors in copying, they did not mention his non-conventional spelling as being a possible reason for the errors. It appears that his teachers would say that Alex was distracted while doing the activity. After some probing, the English teacher commented that maybe Alex used this strategy because he is from the U.S. and English is his first language.

Children's use of non-teacher-directed strategies is similar to the results of Ferreiro's (1986) study on emergent literacy, which found that children did not always replicate the teacher-directed literacy practices. In Alex's case, he developed this technique through his own experiences with literacy outside of the classroom. Alex may have developed this practice or been encouraged by his parents to write without worrying about being corrected before receiving any formal schooling. There is no evidence that Alex applied this practice simply because he is from the U.S. In order to receive a deeper understanding of Alex's spelling technique it would be important to observe the literacy practices used in his home by his U.S. mother and Mexican father.

Students implemented the English and Spanish teachers' strategies in regards to written form simply because it was a constant part of formal instruction. The importance teachers and most parents placed on the "scribal" functions of written language seemed to be assimilated by the students in both their attitudes towards writing

and in the practices they demonstrated while writing. Writing had become a mechanical activity for these students.

5.1.4 Research Question #3

Was the students' learning affected or altered by the language of instruction or did evidence exist that the children use L1 and L2 strategies interchangeably?

The language of instruction affected students' learning due to the fact that reading and writing instruction was different in the English and Spanish classrooms. Students did not always have the opportunity to use their literacy strategies in both language settings. There were some isolated cases where students used their L1 and L2 literacy strategies interchangeably. For example, Alex used his non-conventional spelling in the English and Spanish classrooms. Although this technique was not promoted by either teacher, Alex continued this practice during most writing activities in English and Spanish. In this case Alex had discovered, without teacher guidance, how to transfer writing skills from one language to the other. Jiménez (1994) argues that this type of transfer does not always occur and that students may need to be taught how to transfer these skills. In contrast, this idea of teaching students to transfer skills was observed at TBS only during the initial stages of reading instruction.

A more common strategy employed in both the students' L1 and L2 took place during reading activities. Both the English and Spanish teachers began teaching children to read syllabically. This skill was observed of the five participating students at varying degrees. In both languages the more fluent readers reverted back to reading syllabically only when they encountered a difficult or unknown word. The lower-level students tended to read each word in a sentence phonetically or syllabically. Interestingly, students generally read unfamiliar English L2 words with Spanish L1

pronunciation. Therefore, it appeared that students were transferring their ability to read phonetically and syllabically in Spanish to their L2. This is consistent with Pritchard (1990) and Langer et al. (1990) studies that students shared reading strategies between their L1 and their L2. The use of shared reading strategies, however, did not extend beyond the use of reading phonetically and syllabically in this study. Students had developed reading comprehension skills in their L2 but not their L1. Dávila de Silva (1984) and Barrera's (1984) idea that students can "codevelop" their L1 and L2 reading abilities if reading instruction is focused on meaning was not a possibility at TBS because students were not provided with opportunities to develop or use these strategies for acquiring meaning in Spanish.

The language of instruction affected students' learning because reading and writing activities in the Spanish and English classrooms were markedly different. Therefore, activities were such that students could not transfer the skills acquired in the English classroom to the Spanish context. The Spanish teacher did not appear to consciously make learning in the Spanish classroom different from the English classroom. In fact, the reason students were not allowed to transfer skills was due to the structure of the Spanish curriculum. Children did not have the opportunity to participate in reading activities where comprehension was a main objective.

5.2 Important Questions and Issues that Developed During the Study

One characteristic of qualitative research is that new questions arise during observation and analysis of the data. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, Merriam, 1998) Apart from the previously presented research questions two other important questions and issues about literacy at TBS emerged during this study.

5.2.1 Teachers' Understanding of Literacy and Their Applied Instructional Practices

The first issue was that on several occasions teacher voiced strategies and employed teaching techniques that did not coincide with the collected data from classroom observations. In fact many of the ideas that both teachers shared with me were based on sound teaching practices, but were never actually observed in their teaching practices. For example, when I asked the English teacher about the frog story problems in Figure 4.8 where students had to solve story addition problems in English during math class, she commented that the activity was too confusing and had too many instructions for her students. She felt it was not a productive activity and she hoped that next year the First English teachers could make some changes to these types of activities. She also stated her ideas about dictation, *'Si tu vas a nada más dictarles, ¿Qué caso tiene?: Queremos más actividades de comprensión'*. Although the English teacher discussed this she did not actually perform more of these activities in her classroom.

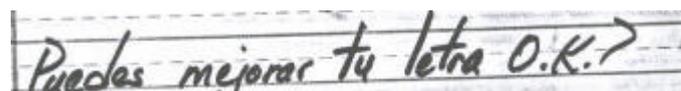
During informal interviews throughout the study the English teacher discussed her beliefs about the importance of reading comprehension and her desire to change some of the activities to coincide with these beliefs. Although she verbalized these feelings there was no evidence that she was implementing these types of activities in her class. María has a good deal of freedom in her classroom curriculum and if she so strongly believes in the benefits of less dictation and more comprehension activities, why has she not added them to her weekly routine? There are two possible answers to this question. The first is that these teachers truly believe in the methods they have been using since they began teaching. Both teachers made comments about literacy practices that they had used as a student or learned years ago as continuing to be useful teaching

techniques for their current classrooms. Their traditional perspectives on education do not allow them or make it difficult for them to change their instructional practices. The second possibility is that the teachers do not have the sufficient tools or professional development to make the changes they would like to in regards to literacy practices. Teachers that have been using the same or similar practices for years may not have the required knowledge for changing their techniques. Therefore, these teachers may have good intentions and a clear understanding of students' literacy development but they are not prepared professionally to teach these practices.

5.2.2 Teacher Corrections and Focus on Written Form

In this section it is important to return to Barton's (1999) definition of the "scribal" and "authoring" functions of written language. The first refers to the written form, including orthography, punctuation and neatness. On the other hand, "authoring" refers to the creation of meaning-centered texts by individuals or groups. The Spanish teacher made a comment about students' orthographic errors as being normal for the developmental level of the case study students. *"Todavía, todavía van a tener muchas faltas de ortografía como es lógico a su edad. Que esto se va corrigiendo poco a poco en el transcurso de los años."* This statement by Laura does not coincide with her observed actions in the classroom. The Spanish teacher is frequently reminding and reprimanding students for their written errors. Her written comments on students' work in Figure 5.1 is another example of the strong emphasis placed on orthography.

Figure 5.1 Example of Written Teacher Corrections of a Student's orthography



It is necessary to refer back to the Spanish teacher's comments about why she believes it is important to correct students written work. She stated, *"Hacerles ver el error que cometieron. Hacerles ver sus errores. Se los marco no para ponerles un tache,*

decirles esta mal sino para decirles, mira, este es tu error, para la próxima vez fíjate bien". It seems that her reasoning is that students need to be corrected for them to be able to change their orthography the next time. However, the Spanish teacher's actions demonstrate that she feels an obligation to correct students' written work.

Both participating teachers commented that the students' orthographic errors during dictation and copying sentences or paragraphs from the board occurred because students were distracted. However, the five participating students, all labeled "good" to "very good" academically, by their literacy teachers, also had frequent orthographic errors. Therefore, distraction may be one of a variety of plausible factors that caused misspelled words, inverted words or letters and punctuation errors. First of all, these students were only starting formal schooling to learn to read and write in Spanish in English. They brought only their pre-literacy skills that they had developed in the first two years of preschool and any experiences with literacy obtained in their homes. The errors of these young children are developmentally and age appropriate. Second, the children were not just looking at the letters on the board and copying them into their notebooks. For example, in English class, Alex read the word from the board and then sounded it out as he wrote it down. He had errors in words such as "shecen" instead of "chicken" because of the use of non-conventional spelling. Other students would read the entire word and then write the word as they remembered in their notebooks. The errors were not necessarily due to the students being distracted. In fact, it appears that each of the different strategies applied by the students for copying words from the board contained some margin of error in form. However, these errors are once again developmentally appropriate for these students.

The Spanish and English teachers on various occasions expressed their main literacy objectives as a student's ability to freely express oneself and to be able to

comprehend and fluently read texts in both English and Spanish. However, the practices they used in the classroom generally did not reflect these goals. It seemed that good handwriting with few or no spelling errors is regarded as more important than the students being able to create texts with their own ideas and words. Practices such as use of red letters, small gridded paper, constant copying and constant correction all reflect the importance that these teachers placed on the scribal aspects of writing. However, it does not reflect an environment that promotes “authoring” or creative writing. The English and Spanish teachers commented that creative writing would begin in February after students had learned all the letters of the alphabet. Creative writing would begin only after students had mastered the scribal functions of written language. The excessive focus on form or the “scribal” functions of writing more accurately describes the type of writing the students were required to complete.

The findings at TBS in regards to writing exercises were very similar to the findings in the Smith, Jiménez & Martínez León (2003) study. The study observed two different participating schools, one was a lower class school and the second was a middle-class school.

“...student writing centered on short, discrete texts, typically dictation or copying teacher-produced models. Students were rarely given the opportunity to write texts longer than the sentence level, with notable exceptions including paragraph-length texts copied off the board” (p.6).

Smith et al. (2003) did not find examples of authentic student-created texts. Barton’s idea of “authoring” was not observed in the Smith et al. study and a limited amount of “authoring” was observed in this current study.

5.2.3 Teacher Controlled Writing

The majority of the writing at TBS was teacher controlled causing the focus to be mainly on students’ written form. Students did not have the freedom to express

themselves through written language. In fact, what they were asked to write was either isolated sentences or teacher-produced texts. Students were not permitted to use their imagination to create their own texts. Teacher controlled writing was also found in Ballestero Pinto's (2003) study in a public elementary school. She made the following comment about writing in the two fourth grade classrooms she observed:

"...la forma de corregir, el uso de los colores, las libretas cuadriculadas y la importancia de forma de escribir eran una forma de controlar y regular la escritura por parte de los profesores. Esto significa que los profesores hacían gran énfasis tanto en la forma de escribir como en la presentación de los trabajos escritos." (p.82)

In fact, Ballesteros Pinto's (2003) study contained teachers' comments made during writing activities that were very similar to those made by the participating teachers in this study. In both studies the teachers made comments to the students about having nice handwriting and reminders to use proper punctuation.

The study by De la Garza & Ávila (1994) on the production of written texts by sixth grade Mexican students also revealed similar results. De la Garza & Ávila (1994) discuss the reoccurring literacy practices of the sixth graders,

"...nos llamó la atención el uso recurrente de lo que hemos llamado "convenciones escolares": el cambio de color para escribir mayúsculas y signos de puntuación, así como para distinguir líneas, ideas o párrafos". (p.168)

However, one difference was present with this study. De la Garza & Ávila (1994) found that students at a private upper-class school did not use the same literacy practices as a lower-class school. This difference in literacy practices according to the social economic status of the students and the school did not appear to be a factor at TBS.

The Smith, Jiménez, & Martínez León (2003) study shared similar conclusions about the use of written language.

"Perhaps the most striking feature of the use of written language had to do with an overall concern for correctness of form, in spelling, accent marks and punctuation, as well as in actual quality of student

handwriting, the “scribal” aspect of written language in Barton’s (1999) terms...students and teachers alike seemed more concerned with the form of the work rather than the content or meaning it conveyed” (p.6)

These similar literacy practices appear to be evident throughout a variety of grade levels and across a range of socio-cultural contexts. The studies used in the previous examples range from preschool through sixth grade. The similarities in results found by these studies suggest that in local Mexican schools more emphasis is being placed on written form than on students’ ability to create authentic texts.

One reason for teachers’ focus on the written form is because of parental pressures. The idea of change at TBS is easy to discuss, however, putting these new ideas into practice is difficult. Parents demand stability and consistency in teaching and new teaching practices tend to draw away from the stability that TBS parents want. Many of the TBS parents are alumnae of the school and their expectations of the preschool is that it will provide their children with the same system of education they had received in the past. This leads to a certain degree of pressure from parents in regards to writing. Parents are very occupied with their children’s use of written form. They appear to place more importance on this aspect of their education over all others, including English instruction. When I asked a TBS parent in a formal interview about the greatest weakness of TBS, she responded, “*Una desventaja es que en la primaria cuidan muy poquito la gramática y spelling*”. She felt that more lessons on spelling and handwriting were necessary. This parental pressure may cause teachers at TBS to work on written form and student error correction daily.

Internal pressures from teachers at the Elementary school also affect literacy practices. Teachers at the Elementary school place pressure on the preschool to focus on producing students with neat handwriting and very good spelling. Frequent comments by the Elementary school teachers reflect apparent feelings that the preschool

teachers are not dedicating enough time to students' use of written form and, therefore, students are arriving to their classrooms unprepared and with "poor" writing habits.

In summary, teachers under this type of parental and school pressures feel that in order to escape this pressure they must produce students who produce conventional written forms. There is evidence that teachers are conscious of these parental pressures found in the two participating teachers' comments made during formal and informal interviews throughout the study. I have also heard comments by other preschool teachers about the existing parental pressures they feel in regards to writing instruction. In order to produce students with conventional written forms, teachers use hypercorrection and other literacy practices that are mainly focused on improving form.

A second reason for the focus on form may be due to TBS teachers' traditional perspectives and the use of culturally situated literacy practices. The majority of the teachers at TBS have been teaching in the preschool between 10-50 years. A good number of these teachers were also students at TBS from preschool through high school. Although educational change is often slow, this type of tradition and stability creates an environment that is especially resistant to change. Teachers and parents alike appear to want to continue with the same teaching techniques that they believe worked for their own education years ago. This may be one of the reasons teachers are still using literacy practices that have been reflected in their culture for many generations. The English teacher commented in an informal interview that she really does not want to start using the new lined notebook paper. She would much prefer the small-grid paper that she has used at TBS since she began teaching. Her comment for not wanting to make this change was, *'Soy tradicionalista. Creo que los niños pueden ubicarse mejor con el cuadriculado'*. These types of attitudes and teaching techniques can be extremely difficult to change. This may also be one reason why the Spanish and

English teacher's voiced beliefs may contradict their behavior in the classroom. The teachers understand and may even agree with the required adaptations to the literacy instruction but they have a hard time applying the changes due to their traditional perspectives and the extensive use of these culturally situated literacy practices. Ferreiro (1989) commented that teachers take more time than students to adapt to changes in the school and classroom. Ferreiro states,

“Los niños asimilan estas propuestas educativas mucho más rápidamente que los maestros; sin embargo, para que haya un cambio perdurable es preciso que haya profesores y maestros convencidos.” (Ferreiro, 1989, pp.21)

These teachers may have good intentions and believe in their methodology but the strategies they used for teaching writing did not seem to be effective as students continued to commit the same errors while copying from the board, dictating or writing independently. Students also appeared to be bored and restless when participating in these daily exercises. Writing was not an activity that students were enthusiastic about like singing, drawing or sculpting did.

5.3 Implications for Practice at TBS

Using my authority as a teacher of the students at TBS and as a researcher I now discuss possible implications for literacy practice at TBS. My first recommendation is that teachers at TBS focus on finding a balance between instruction that focuses on the “scribal” function of writing and “authoring”. It is important that students enjoy writing and are willing to take risks while learning to write. Students may not take these risks if the form of their writing is under frequent scrutiny and correction by the teacher.

In order to successfully complete the stated goals in the TBS's mission statement of creating confident, capable and literate students, I recommend that the school make some changes to their current literacy practices and policy. First, teachers need to relinquish some of the control they have over written language and give students

freedom to express themselves. To accomplish this, creative writing should be implemented as a daily writing exercise that is initiated from the start of the academic school year, instead of beginning during the second semester. The value of creative writing activities, such as the dinosaur activity in Figure 4.14, is that the teacher can learn a great deal about the children's theories and understanding about written language. Students' authentic texts will reflect the strategies they use for writing, the hypotheses they may be testing, and any applied teacher-directed strategies. This is important for understanding students' developing theories about literacy throughout the year. These creative writing exercises also help to teach students to take risks in their writing and develop their ability to express themselves using written language.

Second, I recommend that teachers at TBS reflect on their oral and written hypercorrection of the students' work. Teachers need to allow students to make mistakes and focus more on the content of the students' texts by providing students with more creative writing assignments where orthographic features are not corrected. It is important that students gain an understanding that the meaning they are conveying is equally if not more important than the form.

I also recommend that the English and Spanish teachers select developmentally appropriate reading activities. Students should feel challenged in both their L1 and their L2. The focus of reading activities must be based on more meaningful texts with high levels of student comprehension. Therefore, appropriate reading texts may be adapted to relate to the students' daily lives and their interests and more relevant comprehension activities can be added to the curriculum. In order to accomplish this the books in the classroom and in the library could be categorized into various levels of difficulty. This would allow students to progress at their own rate and gain a sense of accomplishment as they pass through each reading level. Students would be able to appropriately choose

and read books that would challenge them but also allow them to be successful readers. This would require TBS to invest in better-developed reading resources for the Spanish and English classrooms. It would also require teachers to dedicate more class time to reading.

In regards to the focus on students' written form I recommend that teachers monitor the pressure they place on students and allow a margin of orthographic errors. Teachers should accept students' efforts without constantly correcting their work. This will help to teach students to take risks in their writing and develop a sense that the written language can empower students through the expression of their ideas and opinions in a meaningful way. In order to accomplish this objective it is important that students are not afraid that the teacher will correct their ideas and opinions.

The English and Spanish classrooms may want to reduce the amount of *copiado*, *dictado*, and *enunciado* activities. These activities limit student creativity and are capable of provoking negative students attitudes towards written language. These types of activities can remain as one element in the development of students' literacy learning, but should not be the central focus.

It is important that students make a connection between reading and writing (Freire & Macedo, 1987). These processes should not be taught exclusively as separate or isolated activities. In fact, they are necessary components for all content areas. This can be accomplished if the teachers are reflecting and modeling this connection between reading and writing daily.

My last recommendation is that TBS involves the parents in the decisions regarding the changes in policy and literacy learning at TBS. If they are not involved in the process it is important to inform the parents of these policy and instructional changes and clearly present the reasons for the changes to the literacy practices.

Parental support will be one key factor in the successful implementation of these literacy practices at TBS.

5.4 Implications for Future Research

Implications for continued research at this site include four different possibilities. First, this study could be continued as a longitudinal study observing the same five students as they begin primary school at TBS. It would be interesting to observe literacy practices at the primary school and the possible changes or new developments in students' theories about literacy. It would also allow researchers to observe any congruence that exists between the Preschool and Elementary School's literacy practices. This type of research would aid TBS in providing students with a more developmentally appropriate literacy program. I predict that literacy instruction at the Elementary school would be comparably different than at the preschool and that teacher expectations would differ to a certain degree. My predictions are based on the SEP influences in the Elementary school. The Elementary grades must use the SEP mandated texts and they must complete the SEP curriculum as well as the English curriculum. The strains and the nature of the curriculum in the Elementary school may influence teachers' literacy instruction and reflect different expectations in their classrooms. Teachers in the upper grade levels may focus even more on orthographic features in students' writing while at the same time expecting that their students will be able to produce longer texts.

Second, the TBS Preschool could also benefit from a follow-up study observing the effects of the new literacy policy that is to begin during the 2003-2004 school year. The changes to the literacy curriculum include a new phonics reading book and students will be learning to read first in their L2. These changes are important to study and

comment on the possible alterations in teacher instruction and how students' developing theories about literacy may be different.

A third option would be to observe literacy practices during the second and first year of preschool at TBS to see when teachers begin teaching the literacy practices observed in this study and when students start implementing these practices. A case study design could be used to observe the literacy practices during the entire academic school year. Frequent interviews with the teachers of these two grade levels would be an important aspect of the case study design. If students arrive at TBS with different literacy skills it would be important to note the students pre-literacy skills that were developed outside the classroom.

A fourth study observing two First English Spanish classrooms with one classroom being the experimental group and the other the control group could provide further insight into the effects of this literacy program on the students' literacy development. The experimental group would receive literacy instruction in Spanish that differs greatly from their current literacy practices described in this study. Students could be taught to read longer texts, to summarize and to answer more complex and open-ended questions about texts. They could also participate in daily creative writing exercises and be explicitly taught to use non-conventional spelling. In contrast the control group would continue to receive the current literacy instruction and curriculum. The resulting data would be analyzed to observe if students in one of the two classrooms were developmentally better prepared for reading and writing, or have acquired more literacy skills than their peers in the comparison group. It would also be important to describe any differences in the two groups' developing theories of literacy. Such a study would provide a data-based comparison to allow TBS to adapt their literacy program to better meet the students' needs.

Implications for research on a broader scale could extend the study to include three contexts of schools with differing student populations. For example, a comparison between public monolingual Mexican preschool, binational schools (such as TBS) and U.S. Kindergarten may present interesting similarities and differences in regards to literacy practices that could be used to better education for Mexican students in Mexico and the U.S. I predict that Mexican schools and Binational schools in Mexico or Latin America would present similar results in regards to their approach to the “scribal” function of writing. Possible results from this type of study may present that these form based literacy practices are uniform amongst most Mexican schools regardless of their socio-economic status. However, U.S preschools and binational schools in other countries may present different literacy practices. These differences may be present because the literacy practices in Mexico may have become an integrated part of Mexican culture and, therefore, encompass the general population. Where as, these culturally situated literacy practices may not be present in U.S. schools or other binational schools.

The previously cited studies, Jiménez et al. (2003), Smith et al. (2003) and Ballesteros Pinto (2003) observed literacy practices at a range of public and private schools, and differing socio-economic status. The similarities found by these studies contribute to provide a basis for understanding literacy instruction and learning in Mexico. The fact that teachers of these students implemented similar teaching strategies and methods of correcting students’ literacy work demonstrates that a pattern may exist amongst Mexican schools. However, these studies represent a small region of the country. An extension of my study would be to continue observing and working with literacy practices in schools in other areas of Mexico including both urban and

rural populations. If these schools reveal similar or different literacy practices more profound conclusions could be made about literacy instruction and learning in Mexico.

Another possible future study could compare biliteracy instruction and student biliteracy learning in other bilingual and binational schools in Mexico and different countries and contexts. Since the results of this study seemed to contrast with the results of Moll & Diaz's (1987) study that students were completing more complex reading activities in their L1 than their L2, it seems that more research is needed in this area of biliteracy learning. Research in the area of biliteracy is needed in order to create a biliteracy program that accurately develops students' literacy skills according to their individual abilities in their L1 and L2.

More research observing Barton's (1999) "scribal" function of written language in Mexico may be useful for developing a deeper understanding of the culturally situated literacy practices that seem to have been developed years ago and continue to remain a constant part of literacy instruction. It would be important to observe the "scribal" function of written language throughout the Mexican Republic in order to reveal any existing patterns within the Mexican school system.

A case study observing students' home literacy would provide researchers with insight into when these culturally situated literacy practices begin. Do students develop the literacy practices observed in their homes? Do Mexican children begin to focus on the "scribal" function of written language at home or is this developed in school? A study in the area of home literacy may provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of the current literacy practices in Mexico.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

It is important to note that this study does not attempt to generalize the findings beyond this particular site. It also only reflects a brief snapshot of students' literacy theories developed during the two-year study. A longitudinal study with a wider range of sites and contexts would be necessary to draw conclusions outside of this site, and a study of the same participating students as they start Elementary school would provide more insight into students' developing theories about literacy.

One limitation of this study was the relative lack of input by the participating students. Children at this age are often shy or more reserved when separated from the group. Although they felt comfortable with me they still hesitated when answering my questions. One technique that could be used in future studies is to have interviews with the children with greater frequency. This would be beneficial for two reasons. First, students will begin to feel more comfortable and share more willingly if they have had practice at being away from the group and being interviewed. Secondly, children are changing and growing rapidly at this age and a series of interviews would provide the researcher with a more accurate picture of their development in regards to literacy.

At the start of the study a few assumptions were made that possibly weakened the study. One broad assumption for this study was that the selected students' literacy's would provide outcomes that will be useful for teachers working with Mexican children in the U.S. Two more narrow assumptions for this study were that a students' possible third language would not be relevant for this research as literacy instruction at TBS is only in English and Spanish. This possibly weakened the study because students' developed literacy skills in a third language may influence literacy learning in English and Spanish. The second assumption is that the teachers' selection of the participating students was accurate in accordance with the desired student profile provided by the researcher. If the teachers did not select students with varying literacy abilities the

participating students may not be an accurate representation of the general student population in the two classrooms.

5.6 Conclusion

TBS serves an elite group of students and families that are willing to pay high tuition fees for a bilingual education. As TBS may not be a typical Mexican school the results of this study may not be representative of Mexican schools. However, the results found by Jiménez et al. (2003) in a semi-private lower-class school and a private middle-class school and Ballesteros Pinto's (2003) work in a public working-class school are important for considering implications of this study. It may in fact be evidence that TBS is a somewhat typical Mexican school in regards to its treatment of literacy learning. If this is the case then the patterns observed in these studies may reflect the culturally situated literacy practices used throughout the Mexican school system. Therefore, I recommend that the SEP continues researching in the area of literacy and analyzing the literacy traditions that have been in existence for many generations and continue to evaluate the effectiveness in today's educational system.

TBS has provided the middle-upper class community of Puebla with a unique bilingual and bicultural environment for over 60 years. It is a school that has won awards internationally for its academic excellence in English and Spanish. As competition between private bilingual schools increases in Puebla, TBS is taking certain measures to ensure their own success as a bilingual school. One measure policy makers at TBS are taking is to revise current literacy curriculum. With this in mind, I would like to conclude by returning to Dyson's words about what we can achieve through case studies.

“Case studies offer educators in these places no specific laws of causation, no precise predictions of the outcomes of one teaching

strategy or another. But they do offer a means for identifying and talking about the dimensions and dynamics of classroom living and learning.” (Dyson, 1995, p.51)

I have presented various conclusions about literacy practices at TBS and my hope is that this study reveals the literacy learning “dimensions and dynamics” at this particular site and can aid in strengthening biliteracy instruction and learning at TBS and perhaps beyond.