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# RURAL VOICES WINDING THROUGH THE ANDES MOUNTAINS: A COLLECTIVE CREATIVE LITERACY RESEARCH PROJECT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy


Gerardo A. Contreras E.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania


August 2007

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This dissertation was a collective creative literacy research study of a rural community in the Western part of the Venezuelan Andes. First, this study aimed at portraying the meanings attached to some forms of "vernacular literacy" (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) embedded in people's everyday lives in the community of St. Isidro and in the learning of St. Isidro children in a nearby school. Second, a literacy workshop project was developed for a group of sixth graders to fuse both community and school related literacy practices.

This dissertation followed a qualitative approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) and made use of ethnographic and image-based research methods. To document people's uses and meanings of literacy, the study relied on the following data collection methods: participant observation, informal interviews, field notes, research journal, visual methods, personal narrative, interpretation of documents and other cultural artifacts. This study offers several insights regarding: (1) the connections between people's religious devotional practices in the community of St. Isidro and popular literacy forms, (2) the study of three generations to document literacy over time under a new kind of research

method for studying literacy, one that embraces a multilayering of the visual and textual to offer what Garrett-Petts (2000) calls “rich perceptual experiences” as a methodological pathway to literacy studies, (3) the use of stories as a powerful tool to connect home and school literacy learning and development, and (4) the role women play to support their children’s literacy learning and education in the community of St. Isidro despite the women’s very limited literacy skills and the lack of family literacy preparation programs sponsored by educational or governmental institutions.

Finally, the ideas of collective and creative for the title of this dissertation come from Enrique Buenaventura (1985), a very well known dramatist, poet, and painter from Colombia, who contributed a new approach for the production of plays. Buenaventura coined the term “*Creación Colectiva*” for his approach. It adds the notion of creative because it offers the idea that a research project is an artistic endeavor that needs to be enriched by the field of arts and literature.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation emerges from all the people who were participants of this collective creative literacy project.

To my dissertation committee who guided, supported, and trusted me to finish this dissertation study: Dr. Gian Pagnucci, Dr. Lynne Alvine, and Dr. Maurice Kilwein-Guevara. Their ideas and classes inspired me to make narrative research, literacy workshops and literature part of my life. I have been fortunate to have these outstanding teachers and scholars in my dissertation committee. Their scholarly work also encouraged me to experiment with alternative ways to do qualitative research along with Dr. Donald McAndrew's qualitative research classes.

I would like to thank the IUP faculty whose classes helped me shape this dissertation study. All of them have also facilitated my growth as a person, teacher, and researcher: Dr. Ali Aghbar, Dr. Mark Hurlbert, Dr. Ben Rafoth, Dr. Patrick Hartwell, Dr. Mary Jalongo, Dr. Kathleen Hanrahan and Dr. Miriam Chaiken. I want to thank faculty staff at IUP: Cathy Renwick at the Graduate English Department and Beverly Obitz at the School of Graduate Studies and Research.

I am very grateful to my participants in this study whose voices wind through these pages—families and children from St. Isidro—thank you for making this research dissertation possible. Special thanks to Melissa Scott

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Literacy and oral portraits of St. Isidro by Ana V. Casique (2007).

# CHAPTER ONE

# THROUGH MY OWN EYES AND EXPERIENCES: LITERACY PORTRAITS OF AN ANDEAN COMMUNITY AND PERSONAL TESTIMONY

## Introduction

*Figure 1*. The Rosary Rock/*Piedra del Rosario.*

*In May 1987, I arrived for the first time in St. Isidro, an Andean 'aldea' in the western part of Venezuela, located in the municipality of Andrés Bello, Táchira State. The memories of this visit have always lingered in my mind since then, but it wasn't until many years later while working on my doctoral degree*

*courses that I was able to understand the trip's significance. I discovered that these mental images were somehow connected to my memories of growing up in an Andean family.*

*All of this happened on a windy morning with a blue sky and a wonderful view of all the lush green mountains that surround the community. As I continued walking on the unpaved and steep road with an older man from the community, we came across a big rock. The old man—who was the only person I knew from this place—began telling me a story. I recall him saying that this rock was known as 'Piedra del Rosario,' a petroglyph in the form of an altar that looks like a sacred place with highly detailed drawings carved on the big rock. From its position on the hill, the rock overlooks the valley ahead and it seems like a ceremonial stage. As we continued the journey to the nearest house, the old man told me that Father Reyes, the first priest who arrived in the community, gave the rock its name, 'Piedra del Rosario,' because of the faces and the carved holes that resemble a rosary.*

*After a half an hour walk, we arrived at a very old tile house—later I learned it was over 120 years old—and an intense, black-eyed woman with an amused facial expression came out to greet us. She asked us to come into her kitchen where she offered us a hot drink prepared from sugarcane—aguamiel—right from her warm stove. After a little while, she invited us to pass to the living room and to sit. I settled back in a wooden chair. This cozy room was filled with interesting things: a lunar calendar; obituaries; an Andrés Bello Municipality fair*

*calendar; old photographs on the wall; and a high shelf displayed at the center of the room with an altar. Placed across this altar were a cross, a little sculpture in a finely worked wooden box protected by a glass cover, and very old lithographs of several religious images of virgins and saints (Figure 2). “That one at the very center in the wooden box is Saint Antonio,” the woman explained proudly. “And it has lots of votive offerings. See the tiny gold and silver figures of people, legs, arms, and cows hanging in the box.” She said that this statue was over 150 years old and that she had heard family stories passed down through generations about people coming to her house to thank the saint for a miracle, a healing, or a blessing and also stories of young single women who found husbands because they believed that Saint Antonio would help them.*

*Figure 2*. Bernarda’s home altar.

*In recent visits to families in this 'aldea,' I realized that home altars were–and still continue to be—a common practice and an important symbolic element for the memory and identity of this community and families. Families are proud to keep the altars. They have for generations, told and retold stories connected to these altars and the altars hold meanings for the people who have come to offer thanks to these religious images for miracles received.*

*That visit in May 1987 stayed in my mind and I realized that the images resonated so strongly because they connected not only to my childhood and adolescent memories, but also to my identity. I am an Andean—with all the meaning that this ancestry implies—I feel the need to speak from multiple voices: the voices of an Andean, an educator and a researcher. Growing up offering prayers and reading "novenas" and "estampas" (low-priced religious booklets of prayers and images) in front of an altar at home continues to be a devotional religious practice in my family. The intermingling of these collective memories and experiences at my home and in this local community speak of community, of my identity and of what Trimbur (2001) terms "popular literacy."*

## Community Literacy

The purpose of this dissertation account is to offer a portrait of the meanings attached to some forms of "popular literacy" that are embedded in people's lives. Too often we teachers and scholars have dismissed such acts of reading, writing, and speaking because they do not fit the standards forms of literacy taught by the academy.

In *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*, Barton and Hamilton (1998) write that

> there are also other senses in which home literacy practices are integrated: in home literacy events, written and spoken language are often integrated; different media are integrated; literacy is integrated with other symbolic systems, such as numeracy, and visuals and different topics and activities can occur together. (p. 252)

Similarly, Chalfen (2003) presents the home mode of visual/pictorial communication describing it as “a process of interpersonal and small group communication that focuses on *family life* mostly at home but occasionally away from home” (p. 215, emphasis added).

Barton and Hamilton’s as well as Chalfen’s ideas illustrate how language functions in a community under a multiplicity of conditions entangled in the countless acts of telling, reading, writing and viewing. These forms of language often occur at the margins of sanctioned or instutionalized literacy practices in schools and the academy. My intention in writing the above account is to provide a point of view from the margins that illustrates the need to bring together “the word and the world” (Freire and Macedo, 1987), to show how literacy and orality are enacted in communities. But to recognize the unofficial—home and community modes of communication—as a researcher, I felt the need to frame this study in what Denzin (1997) calls “a new language characterized by

personal, emotional and biographic dimensions that will allow ordinary people to voice and to articulate the interpretive theories that they use to make sense of their lives" (p. 26). That is why throughout this dissertation I present each chapter through a myriad of ways—words and images—that aim to illustrate community understandings of language learning.

## Study Goals

In this qualitative dissertation, I have attempted to document the multiplicity of literacy practices being used by community members in their day-to-day lives in St. Isidro and those by St. Isidro children at a nearby school. I carried out this qualitative study over a period of four years in two phases. First, I identified and examined community-based family literacy practices in St. Isidro. Second, I developed a literacy project in a close by school named *El Fical* Bolivarian School. The purpose of this study was to fuse both community and school literacy practices to find ways for promoting new understandings and relationships of a rural community language practices, needs and interests and school related literacies. It is my hope that writing a dissertation about this literacy project can contribute to the field of literacy studies in four key ways:

1. This project offers a window to an understanding of family literacy practices in a local community (St. Isidro) and a public school (*El Fical* Bolivarian School).

2. This project describes state of the art literacy teaching and learning practices for developing students' literacy learning, values, needs, and expectations.
3. This project aims to contribute to theoretical, researched, and pedagogical understandings of literacy in rural areas.
4. This project offers an opportunity to re-imagine collaborative possibilities among rural schools, universities, and communities.

Because this dissertation's scope and methodological insights draw on disciplines and fields outside literacy, I hoped my research would prove valuable, not only to me, but also to children, families, curriculum and policy makers, university educators, and other literacy researchers. This dissertation can hopefully provide a springboard into further studies and efforts to reexamine and rethink traditional notions about the nature of literacy learning in rural Andean schools. This dissertation can also help develop new methods for documenting this type of field literacy research. For elementary school teachers in rural areas, this study can help them to understand the role that children's home language experiences play in the process of literacy learning. Furthermore, insights gained from this qualitative study can offer new methods for the professional development of rural teachers who require support in implementing innovative literacy teaching methodologies. This can help open channels of communication between home and school, what Taylor (1997) explained as the need to "encourage families and communities to create their

own community-based family literacy activities" (p. xx) which can complement school literacy activities.

On the whole, I was influenced by the following theoretical views that analyze the micro and macro forces which compose literacy and orality practices.

## Theories of Social Construction of Knowledge

The groundbreaking works of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), Michelle Foucault (1980), and Karen Burke LeFevre (1987) served as the founding pillars for my dissertation work. In their book *The Social Construction of Reality*, Berger and Luckmann state that "all human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations" (p. 3). In the same way, in *Invention as a Social Act*, Karen Burke LeFevre takes a related position when she states that "the thinking and inventing of any man or woman happens in large part because of the ways each has interacted with others and with society and culture" (p. 139). The work of Berger and Luckmann and also LeFevre argue that human learning and understanding is rooted in social acts. If we wish to understand how people develop literacy, then, we must study that development in the social spheres in which that literacy is practiced. For the Andean people in my study, this meant looking at literacy as it is enacted in the social setting of their small mountain community.

## Theories of Social Construction of Language

Other theoretical insights that are essential to this dissertation come from the works of Lev Vygotsky (1986) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). Both Russian language theorists advance a view of language learning as a socially situated activity. Vygotsky's contributions have pedagogical implications for the acquisition of literacy in school and family. Vygotsky argues that language, and thus literacy, can only be learned through social interaction. Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia" offers a window to an understanding of language as infused with multiple voices. Building on Bakhtin we can see that to study one person's language development, we must gather the voices of the social community surrounding that person.

## Theories of Narrative Knowing and Language

The role of story is also central to this dissertation work. The contributions of Jerome Bruner (1986), Robert Coles (1989), W. J. T. Mitchell (1981), Gian Pagnucci (2004), Vivian Paley (1990), David Schaafsma (1993), and Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings (1991) illustrate the possibilities of story and narrative as tools for literacy teaching and research. Storytelling is one of the primal ways people come to know about the world. People's stories become a bridge for building community.

## Sociocultural Perspectives on Literacy

My views on language and literacy are oriented by the works of David Barton and Mary Hamilton (1998), Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987),

Shirley Brice Heath (1983), Eugene R. Kintgen, Barry M. Kroll, and Mike Rose (1988), Andrea Lunsford, Helen Moglen, and James Slevin (1990), Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole (1981), Brian Street (1993), Denny Taylor (1997), and John Trimbur (2001), among others. For decades these scholars have explored the role of social and cultural meanings of literacy in people's lives, the value of home and community languages and literacy practices, and the relationship between school literacy learning and students' everyday lives.

## Study Limitations

This study, like any study, has its limits. This is one small study that looks at literacy in context. As such, the study values popular literacy practices such as writing and reading for religious observation. While a key element of people's lives, popular literacy can also be problematic to study. Literacy practices in the home do not always assist children in learning required school literacy practices (Heath, 1983). This disjuncture can even lead students to be labeled as remedial learners. Thus while potentially very useful as a means for understanding why students develop particular literacy abilities, a study which celebrates home literacy also can provide only a partial view and understanding of people's social literacy needs. Yet at the same time, because home literacy practices have received only limited scholarly attention, there is a great need to add to our basic picture of home literacy despite the partial image this may provide. Thus studies of home literacy, especially in the Andean mountains

where literacy researchers have not gone before, are valuable even as they are also limited in their scope.

## Overview of Dissertation Chapters

Chapter two of this dissertation offers an overview of the theoretical and practical ideas that serve as the groundwork for this dissertation study. In this chapter, I examine broadly the notions of knowledge, reality, learning, and language in light of social constructionist theories. Then, I shift the focus to provide an account of groundbreaking studies, both theoretical and practical, in the field of narrative that support the power of stories in shaping our everyday lives. Finally, the chapter concludes with the contributions of literacy scholars of the last three decades, and how my study is situated within these theoretical perspectives that view literacy practices within the boundaries of home, community and school settings.

Chapter three lays out the qualitative research design and methodology used for this dissertation study, and aims for a multidisciplinary approach that encompasses both the visual and the textual for studying literacy. The first part of the chapter describes my strategies of inquiry along with the philosophical and epistemological standpoints I take as a qualitative researcher, and then I move into a description of my research sites, the rationale for choosing my participants, and the methods I used for collecting and analyzing data. I used a variety of data collection methods, including field notes, participant observation, informal conversational interviews, and artifact documents, records, and

analysis (of students' written products). I also gathered visual data and recorded in a field research journal personal reflections on my data collection process. Finally, this methodology chapter moves to issues related to the interpretation and representation of the collected literacy materials. Particular attention is given to validation and ethical issues of importance to this literacy study.

Chapter four offers readers a portrait of family language and literacy practices in the community of St. Isidro. Via a combination of visual and textual materials, I offer readers the opportunity to experience the interweaving of religious beliefs and literacy practices in this community and the role these practices play in people's lives.

Chapter five develops a view of literacy over time—how three generations have used literacy in the community of St. Isidro. Using memoirs, images, poetry, personal writing and other artifacts, I work to re-present emerging literacy themes within these three generations.

Chapter six aims to fuse the oral and written language practices of a local community together with new understandings of literacy and the language arts, in order that these ideas may be used to design and implement a school literacy project with a group of sixth grade students in *El Fical* Bolivarian school.

Finally, chapter seven offers insights related to the major themes that emerged from the community literacy practices and the school literacy project. It also presents research methodology findings and provides implications to

different people—literacy teachers and researchers, teacher educators and raises some questions for future research.

# CHAPTER TWO

# OVERVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents a framework that attempts to pull together many ideas from different scholars. Although the task of this chapter was not to find “a research gap” (Pagnucci, 2004), it was a difficult journey to decide among many works from different fields to show how this dissertation might be better understood. As I was reflecting on what I came across in this dissertation study, I wanted to integrate conceptual issues grounded in my beliefs about teaching, learning and research on literacy. After hours of revisiting the works of philosophers, sociologists, historians, anthropologists, literary critics, literacy ethnographers and theorists in other fields, their voices little by little illuminated and provided reassurance of my initial thoughts that there was a need to draw on ideas from a diverse repertoire of multidisciplinary fields to enlighten many of the emerging issues throughout this dissertation study. The pages that follow provide a wide spectrum of scholars in terms of key concepts and ideas that contributed to the theoretical framework that guides this study.

## Theories of Social Construction of Knowledge

The works of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), Michelle Foucault (1980), and Karen Burke LeFevre (1987) provide the initial stage for framing and understanding the interweaving of social, cultural and language issues that arise in this dissertation study. Berger and Luckmann (1966) in their

groundbreaking work *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* contend that “all human ‘knowledge’ is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations” (p. 3), but they move beyond this initial argument to put forward a more fruitful insight that has to do with the value of knowledge produced by people in their everyday lives. This view connects to the issue presented in this study that calls for the need to recognize popular ways of knowing and the unofficial literacy practices that take place in out-of-school environments—in communities and families. Along these lines, Berger and Luckmann argue the following:

> To exaggerate the importance of theoretical thought in society and history is a natural failing ….The theoretical formulations of reality, whether they be scientific or philosophical or even mythological, do not exhaust what is “real” for the members of a society … the sociology of knowledge must first of all concern itself with what people “know” as “reality” in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives. In other words, *commonsense “knowledge”* rather than “ideas” must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. It is precisely this “knowledge” *that constitutes the fabric of meanings* without which no society could exist. (p. 15, emphasis added)

Briefly Berger and Luckmann contribute to the understanding of issues in this study in three specific ways. First, they argue that the study of official and unofficial language and literacy practices should be framed within social

contexts. Second, we must provide space for what it is termed as ‘common sense knowledge’ that academicians and researchers often underestimate. Third, a felt need exists to embrace a multidisciplinary research approach to this dissertation study because as Berger and Luckmann argue “the sociology of knowledge, along with the other epistemological troublemakers among the empirical sciences, will ‘feed’ problems to this methodological inquiry. It cannot solve these problems within its own proper frame of reference” (p. 14).

In the same vein, Foucault’s work (1980) speaks of a similar concern in relation to popular ways of knowing or “subjugated knowledge” when he emphasizes the value of popular knowledge:

> It is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges, these unqualified, even directed disqualified knowledges ... and which involve what I will call a popular knowledge … a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it—that is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work. (p. 82)

Furthermore, Foucault (1972) in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* seems to argue we need to study language in context since language does not take place in a vacuum as a nameless and isolated

event. Meaning is constructed via a process of interaction. In one of his many lectures, Foucault emphasizes that

> at the moment of speaking, I would like to have perceived a nameless voice, long preceding me, leaving me merely to enmesh myself in it .... There would have been no beginnings: instead speech would proceed from me, while I stood in its path—a slender gap—the point of its possible disappearance. (p. 215)

Clearly, Foucault's words illuminate how meaning resides in social interactions rather than in a depersonalized isolated individual where speech has not beginnings or endings, but it takes place in a continuous and endless happening.

Finally, Karen Burke LeFevre (1987) in *Invention as a Social Act* contributes to this dissertation study on issues of invention, language and how people construct reality. She affirms that language plays a central role in the meaning making processes where people interact and invent their own worlds. LeFevre also argues that an individual's invention results from a social act through language and other socially shared symbols in a given culture. LeFevre writes that "the thinking and inventing of any man or woman happens in large part because of the ways each has interacted with others and with society and culture" (p. 139). This means a questioning of a simplified and dogmatic view of language which denies its power "as an active force in the ways we constitute reality and invent material for discourse" (p. 97).

Throughout the chapters in this dissertation, we encounter how people, children and adults, use language privately or socially in their daily lives as an inventive or creative element and how language affects and changes what people perceive or see. Language allows people to create their own worlds; language—spoken or written—becomes a link between what people perceive in the world and the concepts they accumulate in their heads. Relating to this study, for example, home altars as religious icons constitute a blend between actions, speech and culture. As LeFevre affirms:

> Reality is constituted through a dialectic between subject and object that occurs by way of language and that we think of this process of constituting the world through language as something we do both together and alone, socially as well as individually. Language plays an active role in the generation of what we come to know and say, and in that role, it demonstrates the inextricable involvement of social elements in invention. (p. 120)

As suggested in LeFevre's view, a social perspective on the creation of reality, knowledge and discourse challenges the conception of language as individualized and decontextualized. In my dissertation, religious beliefs, funds of knowledge and cultural practices are defined through the oral and literate practices of the community.

## Theories of Social Construction of Learning and Language

Many scholars contribute to this idea of learning as socially and culturally embedded, but the works of Russian theorists Lev Vygotsky in psycholinguistics (1986), Mikhail Bakhtin in literary theory (1981), and North American Jerome Bruner in social psychology (1990) are vital. Their studies of how language is permeated by people and the sociocultural contexts in which the language is spoken or written provide support for examining literacy issues contextually as I do throughout this study.

Social constructionists view knowledge learning and language as a product of social collaboration that depends on culture, context and customs. A learner's language has its roots within the community where people live. Bruner (1990) in his notion of scaffolding states that language learning requires interaction and that it is "context sensitive." He adds "language is acquired not in the role of spectator but through use" (p. 70). Likewise, Lev Vygotsky (1986) asserts that learning is a social activity and that language learning is fostered through social interaction. Vygotsky argues that "the individual response emerges from the forms of collective life" (pp. 164-165).

Additionally, Bakhtin's (1981) writing expands on Vygotsky's contribution to incorporate the idea of conflicting or divergent voices (heteroglossia) in a dialogic situation, where any utterance takes its meaning depending on a given context or situation. Furthermore, he adds "language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word

in language is half someone else's" (p. 293). Bakhtin's theory of language offers literacy scholars an avenue for research on language because everyday literacy practices are the result of one's interactions with others in a social world, this is a key perspective from which I pursued this research study.

Vygotsky's Key Concepts on Learning, Thinking and Language

Vygotsky (1981) maintains that from the beginning, all of children's thinking and learning depends upon sociocultural environments:

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First, it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological (interpersonal) activity and then within the child as an intrapsychological (intrapersonal) activity. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts and the development of volition. (p. 163)

Within this sociocultural framework, children learn along with a more experienced member of the culture, slightly more capable peer. According to Vygotsky, learning is in essence a social process that happens throughout the interactions between children and others in their social environments. In language learning, children's literacy growth depends on the interactions with adults or more capable peers. These significant others provide children with the support that they need to communicate or express themselves. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that children learn through exchanges that take place in what he calls

the “zone of proximal development.” In Vygotsky’s words, the zone of proximal development is “the distance between actual developmental levels as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Vygotsky’s theoretical views have important implications for the field of language learning. He argues that in its very nature learning is a social event and is in consequence reinforced through social interactions. The literacy practices in this dissertation study benefit from the Vygotskian argument that language growth is essentially embedded in particular social contexts.

Bakhtin’s Social Theory of Language

Like Vygotsky, Bakhtin’s work (1981) emphasizes the socially created nature of learning and language as he argues that

> form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon—social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning. (p. 259)

His argument helps us understand that the study of language does not take place free of the social conditions in which it occurs. In other words, language used to learn and to communicate—spoken or written—does not occur free of cultural values and beliefs, but instead is embedded within sociocultural contexts—families and communities. Bakhtin points out that

> everything that pertains to me enters my consciousness, beginning with my name, from the external world through the mouths of others (my mother and so forth) with their intonation, in their emotional and value-assigning tonality. I realize myself initially through others: from them I receive words, forms and tonalities. (p. 138)

In addition to the social construction nature of knowledge and language, Bakhtin asserts that tensions and conflicts permeate the use of language. Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia" offers a window to the understanding of language as a social event that is charged with conflicting voices. Bakhtin states that "every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear" (p. 272). To dismiss what he calls the centrifugal forces has been a common practice of some literacy perspectives as Bakhtin remarks that

> linguistics, stylistics, and the philosophy of language that were born and shaped by the current of centralizing tendencies in the life of language have ignored this dialogized heteroglossia, in which is embodied the centrifugal forces in the life of language. (p. 273)

In regard to this dissertation study, a literacy study grounded on Bakhtin's "heteroglossia" praises difference and finds ways that accommodate or negotiate the myriad of voices working from this Bakhtinian perspective, for

literacy research. There is a need to create spaces for celebrating unofficial literacy voices that respect difference without domination.

Another contribution to this dissertation study comes from Bakhtin's notion of "speech genres." He insists that when people interact, they adopt various speech genres or communally accepted conventions that organize forms of speech—spoken or written—for particular purposes and situations—stories, novenas, personal letters, land property documents, cattle negotiation, local market produce.

To summarize, theories of social construction of learning and language center on the manners in which learning and language use take place within sociocultural circumstances. Both theorists—Vygotsky and Bakhtin—can be used to support the view that language researchers need to look beyond the classroom to consider institutions and people that may influence classroom language learning experiences and to root literacy studies in explorations of meaningful social contexts.

## Theories and Practices of Narrative Knowing and Language

The writing of theorists and practitioners in the area of narrative knowing and language provides a rich body of ideas for considering the power of stories for knowing and understanding our everyday human lives. In *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education*, Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings (1991), explain that "the story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known" (p.

1). They also illustrate how through stories and conversations among disciplines, professions, and cultures it is possible to offer new ways for approaching educational practice.

Harold Rosen cited in Zipes (1995) neatly summarizes the role of stories in building bridges for language learning and meaning making between communities and schools. He contends that "if the culture of the community is to enter the culture of the school, its stories must come too and, more profoundly perhaps, its oral story-telling traditions must become an acknowledged form of making meaning" (p. 1). Similarly, Jerome Bruner (1986) explains how stories become a powerful tool for knowing. In his book, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, he affirms that stories become one of the ways people understand both the self and the world because they "provide, so to speak, a map of possible roles and of possible worlds in which action, thought, and self-definition are permissible (or desirable)" (p. 66). In my dissertation study, I found stories saturated every aspect of people's daily lives in the community of St. Isidro, and stories functioned as a vehicle to incorporate students' home and school literacy learning.

In the field of language use and literacy learning, several educators talk about the power of story as a teaching and learning tool. David Schaafsma (1993), in his book *Eating on the Street,* tells the story of a literacy project in one of Detroit's communities. He states that "story is one key component of the art of conversation which is community making" (p. xxiii). Schaafsma's literacy project

speaks of how stories of students, teachers, and researcher provided opportunities for collaboration, building community and sharing knowledge. In the same vein, Vivian Paley (1990), in her wonderful book *The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter*, writes about the importance of stories in her teaching life and experiences with teachers and children in the Chicago area. She explains that "a day without storytelling is, for me, a disconnected day. The children at least have their play, but I cannot remember what is real to the children without their stories to anchor fantasy and purpose" (p. 4). For the school literacy project, I proposed a model where stories were at the heart of every classroom activity as in Paley's and Schaafsma's classrooms, and children were able to write stories that incorporated both real life experiences and their imagination.

It would be a disservice to the power and importance of storying in our own lives as language teachers and researchers to leave out the voices of those who are both storytellers and teachers. Their ideas contribute with their wisdom and experience to offer their unique insights of how stories build communities, change our lives and are at the heart of the teaching and learning process. University teachers and storytellers, Rives Collins and Pamela J. Cooper (1997) express in *The Power of Story: Teaching Through Storytelling* that "storytelling is the commonality of all human beings, in all places, in all times. It is used to educate, to inspire, to record historical events, to entertain, to transmit cultural mores" (p. 1). They also argue that storytelling offers people a myriad of ways to approach the self and the world. It is through stories we discover who we are,

make sense of our world, enrich teaching and learning, and entertain. Similarly, Jack Zipes (1995) in his book, *Creative Storytelling: Building Community, Changing Lives*, expresses clearly the role stories can play in children's lives based on his own experiences with storytelling while visiting schools. He writes:

> I do not believe it is too idealistic to ask schools to open their doors to storytellers and to the possibility of introducing innovative programs for students at all levels. I have seen it work, and, of course, I have experienced setbacks. But never have I thought that a session was a failure or not worth the effort, nor do I believe that the children felt that way. What I have seen in schools, however, is death. Death in the form of discouraged faces, helpless grimaces, fear of something new, and intimidation. I have also seen frustrated teachers who are overworked and exploited. I have seen crowded classrooms, boredom, and wild behavior. *However, whenever I have begun a storytelling session, I have seen curiosity, hope, and possibility for change*, and I have seen that whatever the eventual response to a session may be, the storytelling has made an incision. (p. 10, emphasis added)

Zipes' work became an inspirational model for my dissertation study because it talks of the promises and perils of storytelling in the classroom. Too often classroom environments dissipate all the creative energies and power of both teachers and children for imagining what Bruner calls "possible worlds" in

our classrooms. For language teachers and researchers storytelling becomes an opportunity to explore new and unimaginable territories, and as Zipes advises, schools should open the doors to storytellers for enhancing language growth and propose alternative ways for teaching and learning. Perhaps this call for stories is best echoed in the title and in the stories of Ann M. Trousdale, Sue A. Woestehoff and Marine Schwartz' (1994) edited book, *Give a Listen: Stories of Storytelling in School.* They write that

> today in the teaching of language arts we are breaking new grounds as we build classroom communities in which readers and writers engage with language in personally significant ways. We look for means of making our classrooms learning environments in which language is used for authentic purposes—to explain, to persuade, to entertain, to report, to teach, to discover .… It is time we looked more closely at storytelling as an *important and revitalizing* component of our classroom environments. (p. ix, emphasis added)

"To give a listen" to storytelling is a call for teacher educators, researchers, policy makers, school administrators and classroom teachers to join that growing community who believe and practice the art of storytelling. This impetus for a rebirth in the art of storytelling in schools and communities will work against those institutional forces in the academy that continue to devalue the role of stories as a natural and an essential component for extending

bridges between schools and communities, for curriculum planning, and above all “as a tool for meaning making.” In his engaging book, *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*, Gian S. Pagnucci (2004) argues on how the academic world continues to resist the inclusion of narrative voices in schools in favor of a rigid standardization of curricula, teaching methods and academic research. Perhaps the literary critic Benjamin Walter (1968) was right when he warned decades ago about the dangers of losing storytelling and how this falling in disfavor of orality was connected to a disregard for people’s experiences in their daily living in a world dominated by the age of information and objectivism. He concludes that

> the art of storytelling is coming to an end. Less and less frequently do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly. More and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed. It is as if something that seems inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences. (p. 83)

For this dissertation I draw from these voices of narrative theorists and researchers, language teachers and storytellers, in order to structure my study through narrative, stories provide a powerful way to frame, in terms of both personal and social dimensions, the oral and literate lives of the participants in this dissertation study. The stories of participants in this study are highly

significant because they have helped me generate theoretical and practical insights about literacy.

## Cognitive and Sociocultural Perspectives on Literacy

In this last section of chapter two, I offer a review of some significant theoretical concepts and research practices that have shaped the field of oral and literacy studies. I also cover some literacy views which provide the insights and the foundations that underlie my research. The following voices of Beth Daniell (1986), Shirley Brice Heath (1990), and David Barton and Mary Hamilton (1998) summarize nicely and clearly some of the important issues literacy theorists and researchers have been discussing regarding literacy and orality in the last four decades:

> In my attempt to point out the weaknesses of the Great Leap Theory, I have argued that its seemingly inevitable dichotomy or continuum between literacy and orality simply fails to explain actual human discourse; that its assumption that literacy *per se* causes abstract thinking is unsupported by recent field research; that its emphasis on the cognitive level neglects crucial social and political issues involved in literacy. What emerges, it seems to me, is a theory not just flawed, but indeed riddled with ethnocentrism and used to justify the status quo. (Daniell, 1986, p. 189)

Daniell argues that a view like the one proposed by the Great Leap Theory fails to capture the richness and complexity of people's acts of

communication, both spoken and written which are embeded within a social context. She also states that this view of literacy as a neutral and technological skill that produces cognitive consequences denies the role of social context in literacy learning.

> Being literate means being able to talk with and listen with others to interpret texts, say what they mean, link them to personal experience and with other texts, argue with them and make predictions from them, develop future scenarios, compare and evaluate related situations, and know that the practice of all these literate abilities is practical. (Heath, 1990, p. 298)

According to Heath “being literate” means that people are able to engage in both oral and written acts of communication, and they are conscious that literacy learning is a practical matter.

> The vernacular literacy practices we identified are rooted in everyday experience and serve everyday purposes. They draw upon and contribute to vernacular knowledge. Often they are less valued by society and not particularly supported, nor regulated, by external social institutions. (Barton and Hamilton, 1998, pp. 251-252)

Barton and Hamilton argue that there are some literacies that people use in their day-to-day lives for different purposes, but because these literacy

practices exist outside the educational system, they are not recognized by dominant institutions.

The above quotes synthesize various controversies and understandings regarding language and how these forms are ingrained in people's different cultural and social practices.

## The Great Leap Literacy Theory

In the first quote, Daniell (1986), in her seminal work entitled *Against the Great Leap Theory of Literacy*, dismantles the arguments put forward by proponents of the "autonomous model" of literacy (as coined by Street, 1984) or the "great leap theory" (as coined by Daniell, 1986). Goody and Watt (1963), Olson (1977), and Ong (1982)—proponents of the Great Leap model—argue that literacy in itself works independently from cultural, social and ideological issues in daily life—as something essentially asocial. That is to say, they view literacy as a decontextualized, individual, technical, neutral and universal set of skills with important consequences for people who use it. Much of the research and policy making worldwide in the field of literacy continues to privilege the cognitivist models although an increasing amount of research evidence in the last forty years shows the political, cultural and social implications involved in literacy use.

In *The Consequences of Literacy*, Goody and Watt (1963) affirm that literacy produces cognitive, economic and social consequences. They also claim that the invention of alphabetic literacy produced major differences

between “simple and complex societies” as well as great benefits to individuals’ mental structure and to society’s progress. Years later, David R. Olson (1977), another proponent of the ‘autonomous model’ reinforced his predecessors’ perspective when he affirmed that “speech makes us human and literacy makes us civilized” (p. 175). But this time, Olson, although following the same line of thought, put forward an argument based on a historical analysis of the evolution of Western civilization—from the Greeks’ written language system to the British essayists. Olson conceived this as

> a transition from utterance to text both culturally and developmentally and that this transition can be described as one of increasing explicitness, with language increasingly able to stand as an unambiguous or autonomous representation of meaning. (p. 176)

Olson’s view focuses on the “exemplar written text,” his argument to an extend disregards the reader and the social context of the literacy event in the construction of meaning. According to Olson, autonomous meaning resides objectively in the text and individuals cannot participate in the construction of based-text meaning. On teaching children to read in schools, Olson additionally suggests a decoding approach and conceives of reading as “the critical process in the transformation of children’s language from utterance to text” (p. 189). Under this perspective, there is limited respect for what children bring from home—their rich oral traditions, experiences and funds of knowledge. Oral

language offers children a restricted ability for exploring abstract thought and as a result orality undergoes a process of devaluation under the supremacy of the written word.

A decade later, in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Walter J. Ong (1982) deepens Goody and Watt's initial work and Olson's by expanding both synchronically and diachronically on issues related to the differences between oral and literate societies. Ong argues that "more than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness" (p. 78), and that writing as an autonomous form of discourse "cannot be directly questioned or contested as oral speech can be because written discourse has been detached from its author" (p. 78). He goes further to separate writing from its collaborative aspects and social contexts when he states that "words are alone in a text; moreover, in composing a text, in 'writing' something, the one producing the written utterance is also alone" (p. 101). Ong expands on Olson's argument by stressing that literacy learning does not take place within a collaborative framework. In contrast to Olson's and Ong's decontextualized views of literacy learning, my study views language learning as a product of social colaboration that depends on culture.

As a reaction to the "autonomous model" or "great divide" theories of literacy, scholars from different quarters—history, sociolinguistics, cultural psychology, and anthropology among others state that most of the arguments of the "Great Leap Theory" rely on cognitive conceptions of literacy rather than

cultural and social ones. In his mid-19th century study of social mobility in three towns, social historian Harvey J. Graff (1979) offers a controversial analysis regarding the socio-economic benefits of literacy. He concludes that

> systematic patterns of inequality and stratification … were deep and pervasive and relatively unaltered by the influence of literacy. Class, ethnicity, and sex were the major barriers of social inequality. The majority of Irish Catholic adults, for example, were literate … but they stood lowest in wealth and occupation as did, laborers and servants. Women and blacks faired little better, regardless of literacy … social realities contradicted the promoted promises of literacy. (pp. 320-321)

Furthermore, Graff (1988) questions the “tyranny of conceptual dichotomies” in the study and interpretations of literacy and orality. His contributions on historical literacy move him to coin the phrase of the “literacy myth” because it is a fallacy to assume and then generalize that literacy automatically launches social and economic changes. Graff’s ideas about the “literacy myth” found echo in my study because even though many people did not attend school, they were able to suceed in life.

## Sociocultural Literacy Theories

In their classic work *The Psychology of Literacy*, two psychologists, Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole (1981) approach the study of literacy from a multidisciplinary perspective combining methods of experimental psychology

and anthropological field research. Their study among the Vai people of northwestern Liberia offers another perspective concerning issues linked to the cognitive and social implications of literacy. Their experimental research leads them to the conclusion that literacy in general cannot explain the changes in individual's cognitive functioning. In "Unpacking Literacy," Scribner and Cole (1987) affirm:

> There is nothing in our findings that would lead us to speak of cognitive consequences of literacy with the notion in mind that such consequences affect intellectual performance in all tasks to which the human mind is put …. This outcome suggests that the metaphor of a "great divide" may not be appropriate for specifying differences among literates and nonliterates under contemporary conditions. (p. 70)

Theoretically speaking as well as in ethnographic field research, Scribner and Cole's contribution grounds the seeds for a shift from a cognitive to a sociocultural perspective of literacy. The works of Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) *Ways with Words* in three communities in the Carolinas in the United States, Brian Street's (1984) *Literacy in Theory and Practice* based on his initial work in Iran in the 1970s, and Scribner and Cole's work in Liberia provide a new look to the notions of literacy from a cross-cultural context. These sociocultural literacy scholars share the view that it is not possible to make general statements about literacy and its social and cognitive consequences. Collectively these scholars

argue for the existence of multiple literacy practices and for disregarding the "great divide" notion of a single literacy with similar applications across contexts and cultures.

Heath's ethnographic work in the Piedmont Carolinas documents the very different ways in which people from two communities—Roadville and Trackton—use language embedded in cultural contexts. She writes that adults in both communities interweave the use of written and oral language in different ways for negotiating meaning or taking actions. For example, in her study people read newspapers for social purposes combining both oral and textual forms. In regard to children from Roadville, Heath concludes that children learn to use respect when they participated in their family conversations and interacted with adults. The adults taught children to name objects and pronounce words as a way of language learning. By contrast, Trackton children had ample opportunities to engage in conversations with adults and the literacy events were communal in their culture, but adults in this community did not try to teach children language as in the other two communities, the Roadville and townspeople.

Heath's findings also suggest that these forms of learning and using language and literacy practices at home created problems for the Trackton children attending schools. Children from the working class communities were labeled as poor academically because they brought from their homes other social practices, language values, cultural views, and skills different from school

expectations and standardized views about literacy learning. Based on her extensive ethnographic work, Heath's research also aims to find bonds between children's home experiences, cultural values, ways of talking and knowing and schools ways of learning in order to benefit all students from these communities. Following Heath's ideas, my study connected both home and school related literacy practices to promote literacy learning. I also made use of stories as a powerful tool for children's literacy development.

The inspiring fieldwork of Street (1984) in many parts of the world constitutes an illustration of his struggle against the reductionistic view of literacy that still pervades schools and literacy campaigns around the world. Street's story of his visit to a village in Iran to carry out anthropological field research reveals the richness and complexity of day-to-day multiple literacies. Street is one of the first to invoke this view of multiple literacies. He narrates:

> I went to Iran during the 1970s to undertake anthropological field research …. I had not gone specifically to study “literacy” but found myself living in a mountain village where a great deal of literacy activity was going on: I was drawn to the conceptual and rhetorical issues involved in representing this variety and complexity of literacy activity at a time when my encounter with people outside of the village suggested the dominant representation was of ‘illiterate’ backward villagers. Looking more closely at village life in the light of these characterizations, it seemed that not only was there

> actually a lot of literacy going on but that there were quite different ‘practices’ associated with literacy–those in a traditional ‘Quranic’ school, in the new state schools, and among traders using literacy in their buying and selling of fruit to urban markets. (p. 6)

Street’s field research provided him the opportunity to live through the experience of communities who use multiple literacies. His extensive work for years in different countries allowed him to challenge what he calls the “autonomous model”—a singular view of literacy that when applied across diverse contexts produces similar results. Additionally, he introduced an alternative view—“the ideological model.” According to Street, it is not possible to make sweeping generalizations regarding literacy across different cultures and contexts because it “disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it and that can be presented as though they are neutral and universal” (p. 7). In opposition to the autonomous model, Street proposed the “ideological model” which centers on the meanings literacy takes on in particular sociocultural contexts in time and space—literacy as social practices. Drawing on Street’s ideas, my study did not have the intention to make generalizations, as it has been the practice of traditional empirical forms of research in literacy. For example, my dissertation study in chapter four looks at popular literacy practices such as reading and writing for religious observation.

The contributions of the sociocultural writings on literacy have large implications for both the researching and the teaching and learning of literacy

because they hold that to understand literacy implies an exploration of the sociocultural context to see how reading and writing (and I would add speaking) function within families, communities or institutions. Heath's ethnography in the Piedmont Carolinas and Street's pioneering ethnographic research across cultures prompted a number of important literacy studies by others who have been frustrated by culturally insensitive standardized views of literacy based on statistical results and characterized as individualistic. As a result of this resistance to what Denny Taylor (1997) calls "the unjustifiable generalizations about literacy derived from positivistic science" (p. xv), an important number of studies have grown from the sociocultural perspectives on literacy and language under the umbrella of New Literacy Studies (NLS) in recent years.

Those who follow this NLS line of research come from the fields of sociolinguistics and anthropology among other traditions and make use of ethnographic methods. Their language and literacy studies take an interdisciplinary approach to cover a wide range of contexts and everyday life uses of literacy from schools, communities, families, workplaces, the internet and institutions. In *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, David Barton, Mary Hamilton and Roz Ivanič (2000) gather a diversity of studies from several disciplines that include theories of globalization, media and visual design and social semiotics with the purpose of exploring the relationships among these studies to enrich and promote literacy studies.

New Literacy Studies often focus on the unfair results when some forms of literacy practices are devalued by school and government ‘official’ forms of literacy. By focusing on different literacy and language practices outside the school sites, this new trend of research hopes to help teachers, school administrators and designers of official curricula to become familiar with and value other out of school literacy practices. My study also centered on the New Literacy Studies’ view that promotes the value of popular literacies rooted in people’s everyday lives regarding religious devotional practices as a source of literacy learning.

Similarly, the work of Barton and Hamilton’s *Local Literacies* (1998) offers a theory of literacy as social practice based on six tenets concerning the nature of literacy as seen in the following figure:

**Literacy as social practice**

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

*Figure 3*. Literacy as social practice. Source: Barton and Hamilton, 1998

I draw on these principles to illuminate some of the issues I encountered in my research study, but I also find this set of principles limited to reading and writing as literacy practices ignoring ways of speaking that still are much entangled with literacy practices in many communities where people use both oral and literate practices simultaneously. Juan C. Guerra (1998) in *Close to Home: Oral and Literate Practices in a Transnational Mexicano Community* finds

himself in a similar situation. Following Street's (1993) view, Guerra writes the following:

> I believe that research on literacy must make use of Grillo's concept of communicative practices in order to ensure that the uses to which a group of people put oral and written language are understood within the context of their personal and cultural lives. It is only by engaging in research that values and appreciates the circumstances under which different groups of people use oral and written language that we can begin to move beyond the inherent limitations of a perspective that identifies discontinuities among different kinds of discourses and inadvertently blames groups of people with the so-called nonstandard forms of language for the educational and economic circumstances of their lives. (p. 49)

This concept of 'communicative practices' encloses and values both uses of written and spoken language by people in different contexts without overemphasizing either form.

Barton and Hamilton also develop the concepts of "vernacular knowledge" and "vernacular literacies" to explain some emerging themes in their research. These two notions of the vernacular are very connected to what the participants in my dissertation study draw on to make sense of their world. Regarding the use of "vernacular knowledge," Barton and Hamilton found similarities between their research site findings and what Louis Moll (1994)

encountered in his research of Mexican-American homes in the United States. Moll calls this form of knowledge “funds of knowledge.” He found this in areas connected to agriculture, economics, religion, construction, art and repair. Barton and Hamilton define funds of knowledge as “the practical exchanges and responses to needs for information and resources shared across families, between siblings, neighbours, and friends” (p. 242). Many scholars have written about this type of knowledge and they refer to ‘subjugated knowledge’ (Foucault, 1980), ‘common sense knowledge’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), ‘local knowledge’ (Geertz, 1983), ‘personal knowledge’ (Polanyi, 1962) and ‘folk wisdom’ (Bruner, 1986). Although each scholar refers to it with different terms, there is a common thread that characterizes this form of knowledge. In this view, knowledge and the process of meaning making developed from people’s everyday lives.

Barton and Hamilton also tied this notion of “vernacular knowledge” to non-dominant literacies that are overlooked by literacy views and practices coming from dominant institutions. They refer to “vernacular literacies” that they observed and found in their research site, and define “vernacular literacies” as those literacy practices that “are rooted in everyday experience and serve everyday purposes. They draw upon and contribute to vernacular knowledge. Often they are less valued by society and are not particularly supported, not regulated by external social institutions” (p. 252). In my dissertation study, I

found that there are different literacies associated with different domains of life like in the case of the Moncada family that I will discuss on chapter four.

Miriam P. Camitta (1990) also conducts research on this theme, but she defines ‘vernacular writing’ as “traditional behavior that proliferates throughout culture, is integral to cultural process, and is organized by conventions and aesthetic judgments that derive from cultural experience and social life” (p. 262). Camitta’s definition of ‘vernacular writing’ was present in several ocassions in one of the participants in my study. Don Emiliano’s story of his literacy practices for personal and social purposes resulted from his cultural and social experiences in the community where he lived. Camitta then asserts that “the forms, styles, and uses of vernacular writing are expressions of literacy, although they do not enjoy the same standing as standard or official literacy” (p. 262). Don Emiliano’s vernacular writing does not subscribe to standard literacy practices because his vernacular writing has its origins in his everyday life experiences. Moreover, Camitta talks about Ivan Illich’s views of vernacular culture as “nonhierarchical” and “nonhegemonic,” which is intimately tied to the local, familiar and everyday and not to the institutional.

For Camitta, it is not sufficient for academia and official institutions to recognize and value vernacular literacies; they must take into account the theory and practice of both formal and vernacular uses of language in a nonhierarchical and mutual dialogic process to enrich theories of language and culture for a better educational practice. Studying vernacular literacies will lead

to an appreciation and a coupling of both the vernacular and official forms of language to the process of literacy education.

Denny Taylor (1997) thinks similarly by saying that "local knowledge is not always appreciated and local literacies are not always recognized" (p. 4). Her outstanding work with families provides rich ideas for this dissertation study because it not only crosses the boundaries of official institutions and academia, but also reaches across borders worldwide to value and recognize the funds of literacy knowledge within families and communities. Taylor's edited collection, *Many Families, Many Literacies: An International Declaration of Principles*, provides a clear path for a culturally sensitive and ethical research with and within families and communities. Her ideas enrich and extend the previous works mentioned on the vernacular forms of literacy when she asks for a more inclusive view for literacy programs. She writes about the need to "recognize and honor not only the diversity of literacies that exist within families, but also the communities and cultures of which they are a part" (p. 4). A view like this allows researchers and teachers to encompass and value a greater range of literacy uses that are somehow connected to families and the cultures of communities. Taylor's work is basis for this dissertation because it helps show how to implement sensitive sociocultural literacy programs for schools and communities.

## Summary

John Trimbur's (2001) edited collection, *Popular Literacy: Studies in Cultural Practices and Poetics*, summarizes ideas discussed in this chapter, and it moves the argument in favor of how people make literacy popular by using the existing means of communicative practices for their everyday purposes. It is a view that places oral and written discourse within the realm of the popular. The book's different authors look at a great number of acts of reading, writing and speaking that happen out of the institutionalized literacy practices. It has also been the goal of this literature review to offer a multidisciplinary theoretical overview by generating a dialogue between academic and vernacular uses of literacy. It is my hope that this review has shown how literacy cannot be reduced to a decontextualized set of technical skills with only cognitive consequences that ignores the social, cultural and political dimensions of written and spoken discourse.

Finally, the diversity of voices that compose this literature review hopefully demonstrate for literacy scholars, policy makers, and literacy practitioners the need to learn from those whose literacy experiences and ways of being in their world are different from ours. As literacy researchers our quest is to value and develop culturally sensitive pedagogical practices that include both institutional and the popular forms of communicative practices within the domains of home and communities.

# CHAPTER THREE

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to map the research methodology that guided this study. The chapter covers all phases of the research: conceptual framework, data collection, analysis, interpretation, triangulation, study setting, participants, researcher's role, ethical considerations and presentation of this dissertation study.

This dissertation research sought to identify and examine multiple literacy practices in a local community and its school. The assumptions made regarding literacy as a socially situated practice demand a research methodology and particular data collection methods that are appropriate to this view of literacy. Therefore in terms of research methodology this dissertation draws upon a qualitative approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and makes use of ethnographic research techniques. My decision to employ a qualitative paradigm of inquiry and ethnographic methods for collecting and interpreting data rests on the premise that this dissertation studies the literacy practices of people in their natural settings—school and community. To document people's uses and meanings of literacy, this research relied on the following data collection methods: participant observation, informal interviews, field notes, field memos, visual methods, personal narrative, interpretation of documents and other cultural artifacts.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) offer a glimpse of what they call an “initial,” “generic” definition that helps provide an understanding of what qualitative research entails. They write:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Additionally, this definition provides several elements that are essential to frame my study within the realm of the qualitative paradigm. First, it explains how this standpoint sees the researcher as a socially situated person who creates realities through interactions with other people in their everyday world. And second, it honors the meanings that research participants offer to the phenomena at hand. This view of qualitative research departs from a more positivist approach. In a positivist approach, the social sciences are viewed as value-free; a concrete reality waits “out there” for discovering; and participants are subjects not people (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I believe that to gain an

understanding of the complexity and multifaceted dimensions of the human, social and cultural issues intertwined in people's literacy practices, we cannot rely on the positivist tradition which largely requires researchers to reduce everything to discrete and neat categories and to position researchers as detached "loners." In contrast, qualitative research views the researcher as a *bricoleur* because the researcher may assume different roles, employ several research methods (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), and understand the nature of the emergent design that characterizes the qualitative approach (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Therefore, multiple approaches to human inquiry guide this dissertation study.

## Interpretive Inquiry

Qualitative researchers who subscribe to an interpretive view challenge traditional assumptions about neutral social research. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argue that "all research is interpretive, guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (p. 4). Moreover, Denzin (1997) states that "qualitative researchers can no longer directly capture lived experience. Such experience … is created in the social text written by the researcher" (p. 3). Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul's (1999) book, *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research* summarize nicely the major assumptions regarding interpretive inquiry. Interpretivist researchers hold the cultural beliefs and meanings noted in the following figure:

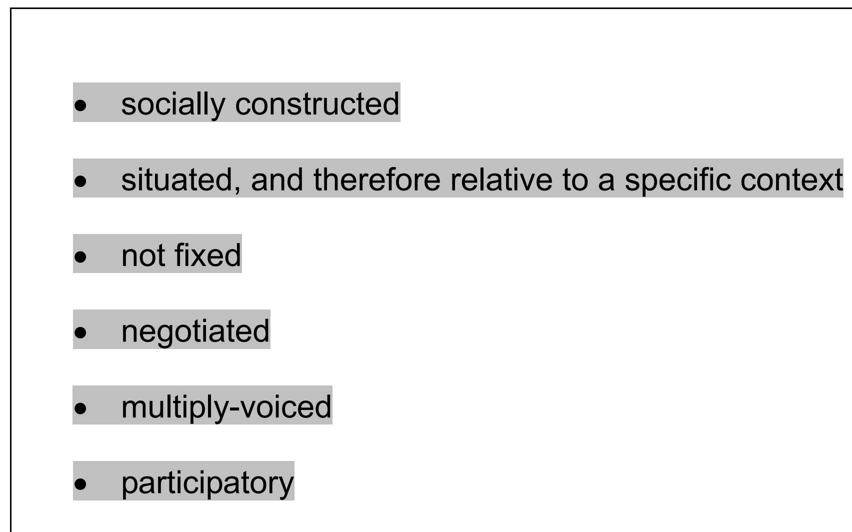


*Figure 4*. LeCompte and Schensul, 1999, p. 50.

The interpretive approach considers that all social research involves issues of power and representation. Thus, interpretive inquiry moves beyond traditional practices of social science that silence disenfranchised groups in society by devaluing their ways of knowing and cultural repertoire. In this dissertation, my beliefs and understandings regarding literacy practices question institutional practices that downgrade vernacular forms of literacy even though vernacular forms are influential on people's everyday lives. This dissertation values participants' literacy views and practices and conceives the research process as an interpretive and interactive process between the researcher and the participants—*a communal endeavor.*

Participative Inquiry

This view seeks interactive collaboration between the researcher and participants who commit to work on local projects together rather than to search

for “Truth,” “generalizations,” and “findings.” Schratz and Walker (1995) explain the reasons that led them to frame their research within a participatory framework because they “were tired of following sterile patterns of delivering research results in which the voices of the people involved no longer appeared” (p. 7). Favoring a participatory approach means that as a researcher, I need to be equipped with greater sensitivity to what participants or community members can contribute to this literacy study and see them as co-constructors of meaning and knowledge in my inquiry.

In this research, I call attention to the importance of having participants act as my partners in almost every stage of the project, from data collection to interpretation and beyond. My belief is that for qualitative researchers to honor issues of representation of the “Other;” researchers need to encompass the views of participative inquiry because as Reason (1998) asserts “this worldview sees human beings as co-creating their reality through participation: through their experience, their imagination and intuition, their thinking and their action” (p. 262). In this dissertation I work to move beyond traditional perspectives of research on literacy that still regard research participants as merely informants and the research mission as an interventionist practice.

## Narrative Inquiry

The need to move from traditional research methods on literacy to embrace a participative inquiry stance also raises the need to collect stories as

part of the researcher's endeavor. Storytelling is at the heart of our exchanges with people in local communities and

> leaving stories out of an account would mean renouncing the best clues about why people act as they do, since there are no uninterpreted data. Every phenomenon social scientists investigate arises out of a web of communication that, in turn, depends largely on personal and social narratives. (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997, p. xiv)

Ignoring and devaluing stories as a source of knowledge mean losing the opportunity to capture the richness and complexity of local popular literacy forms entangled in the daily lives of families and communities.

Linda Brodkey (1987) says that "narratives are one way to study how people imagine life to be, for themselves and for others" (p. 46). As a researcher, it is through narrative that I make sense of my own past and current experiences and life as well as the experiences and lives of those who are participants in this study. In narrative inquiry, these participants are not perceived just as sources of data. Instead, they "become central audiences and co-constructors of accounts" (Nespor and Barber, 1995, p. 49). Citing the Popular Memory Group, Nespor and Barber share this group's claim that "an adequate politics of popular memory must involve, at one moment, the production and circulation of first accounts with a direct popular authorship" (p. 49). Narrative inquiry thus urges the use of stories to report on research.

In my dissertation, I make use of narrative approaches and personal experience methods because these approaches also view lives holistically and claim that a person's realities are created through the narration of his or her stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995; Pagnucci, 2004; Riessman, 1993). It is therefore also the goal of the present study to learn about the literacy stories of members of a particular community. Enriching this dissertation study with a narrative approach aims to gain a contextual understanding of literacy practices and to recognize the meaning that individuals and communities attribute to the complexity of issues—religious, cultural, social and economic—connected to written and spoken forms of language. Adopting a narrative approach also relates to my theoretical concern with literacy as a social process grounded on people's daily experiences. D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2000) in *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* assert that "narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively" (p. 19). Jerome Bruner (1990) in *Acts of Meaning* also affirms that "the typical form of framing experience (and our memory of it) is in narrative form" (p. 56).

Finally, in this dissertation, the researcher and participants convey their literacy lives through their stories as a tool for meaning making and for expressing their understanding of beliefs, events, and experiences. In *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*, Gian Pagnucci (2004) reaffirms my stance. He says we need to make research relevant to the people

with whom we are working, not some abstract audience of academic journal readers: “rather than constructing research for how it might be directly *relevant to the people living in it*, we frame research for how it fits within a field that doesn’t actually exist” (p. 20, emphasis added).

## Research Sites: *Aldea San Isidro* and *El Fical* Bolivarian School

Nested in the Andean uplands that overlook the immense valley of “*El Río Torbes*” (Torbes River) and the “Carretera *Trasandina*” (Trans-Andean Road), Saint Isidro is a small Andean community surrounded by high mountains at some 1500 to 1600 meters above the sea level. The community and the school where I conducted the study belong to the municipality of Andrés Bello in Táchira State in the western part of Venezuela (Figure 5).

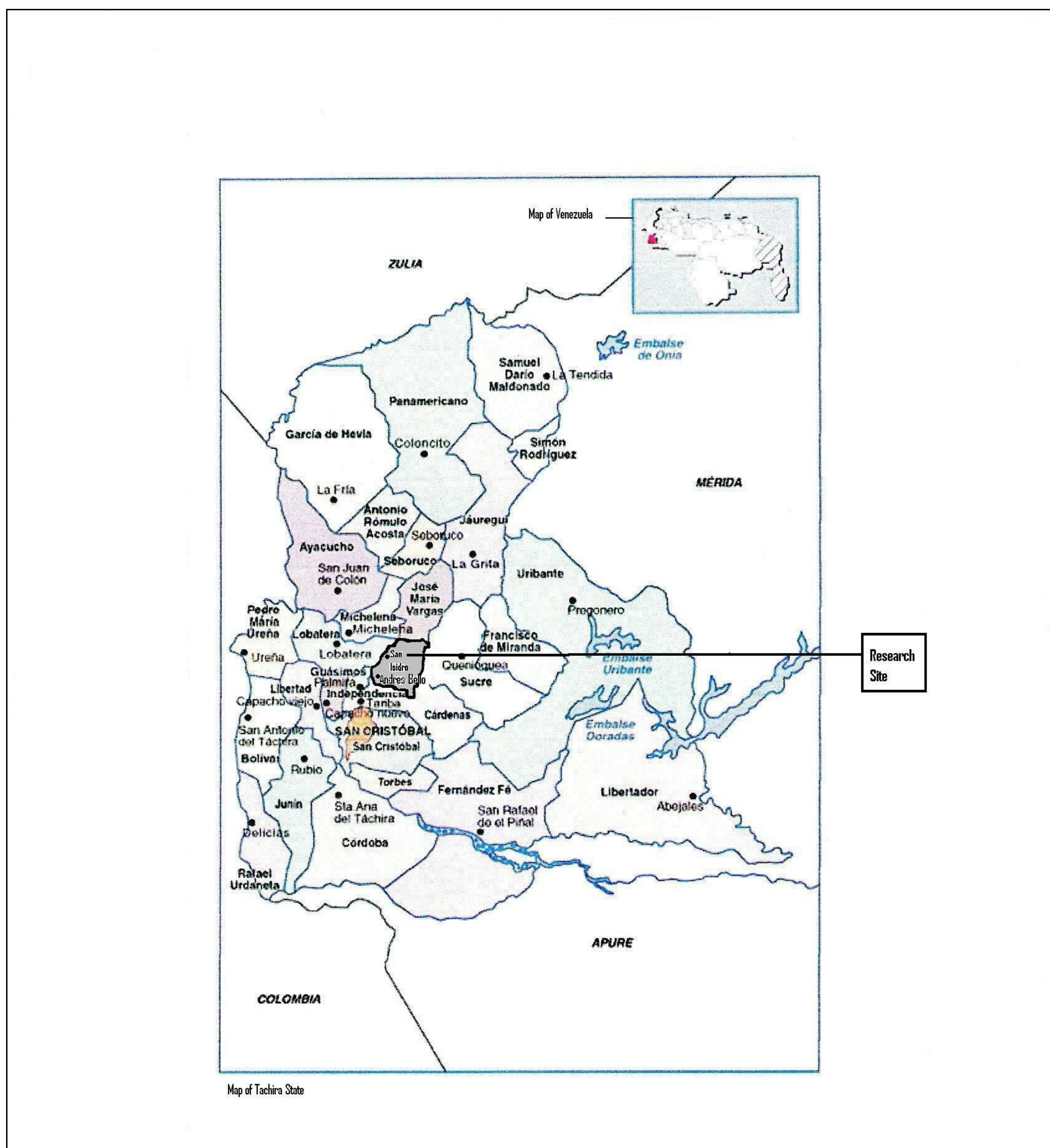


*Figure 5*. *Aldea* St. Isidro, Municipality of Andrés Bello in Táchira State.

## The Community of St. Isidro

This community has a population of approximately 180 people. Farming is the main source of income. Community members grow corn, beans, coffee, vegetables and other produce in small amounts. They usually sell their products

for the local farmers’ markets in the closest towns on Saturdays and Sundays. Most of the families own from one to three cows for their dairy products. Some family members also raise and sell small amounts of cattle and are very good at making good deals. Women also often keep a corral with a few chickens, hens, turkeys, and hogs. Most of the adults did not attend school, and some of those who had the opportunity did not finish elementary school because they instead had to help their family with the farm laboring. The more recent generations attend elementary school, but just a few of them continue with high school. Girls may continue their schooling, but boys usually remain working in the fields helping their families with the chores. Some adolescent boys at a very early age begin to buy and sell cattle and work the fields where they grow their own crops.

In the St. Isidro community, there is a small Catholic chapel in the shape of a circle, and on the top of the roof there is a cross. There are several religious statues inside, but the most popular icon in the community is the one that depicts Saint Isidro Labrador, patron of farmers, plowing the field with a set of oxen (Figure 6). A priest from a nearby church (*Iglesia de Monte Carmelo*) usually visits the community to celebrate mass the second Sunday of every month and on special religious holidays like for the patron’s day–Saint Isidro Labrador.

*Figure 6*. St. Isidro Labrador.

During this celebration, people decorate the chapel with flowers, make arches with flowers and palm leaves at the entrance of the *aldea*, and bring baskets with food to pay respect and thanks to the patron. They also pray for troubles concerning farm animals, farming and good weather conditions for their crops.

*El Fical* Bolivarian School

According to old documents in the school archives, this school was founded in 1947 by the national government as a model school for rural areas where the teacher lived and shared with the community during the week. The school is placed in a community known as *El Fical* foothills alongside the *Carretera Trasandin*a (Figure 7). This road leads to the beautiful and colorful

landscapes up in the mountains which offer visitors a friendly atmosphere and comfortable weather.

*Figure 7*. *El Fical* Bolivarian School.

The location of the school is to the left of a small forest with very tall eucalyptus trees planted about the same time of its construction. It is a one story building and in its entrance there is a small square with seats and a bust of Simón Bolivar, Venezuelan Liberator. There is a small front yard where the agricultural teacher and the students grow vegetables, corn and beans, and this garden is guarded by a big colorful scarecrow which has served as a symbol to identify the school for many years.

*El Fical* Bolivarian School offers classes for kindergarteners as well as for

elementary students from grades first thru sixth. The school population is 95 students and they come from the nearby communities of *San Isidro* and *El Fical*.

## Participants

For this study, there were several participants—eighteen sixth graders, one sixth grade language teacher, a group of six students' parents, and the researcher. The age of students ranged from eleven to fifteen. The students belong to the educational setting where this study was conducted—*El Fical* Bolivarian School. The role of the teacher and the parents was limited to interviews. As a researcher, I ran the literacy workshop, but I am not a teacher in this school. The workshop was held after school and all the sixth grade students participated in the project even if they didn't want to be a part of the research. Students' participation was completely voluntary, and participation was not tied to school evaluation in any way. For selecting parents for the interviews, this research followed purposeful sampling strategies. As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985), purposive or naturalistic sampling is very different from conventional sampling procedures. Lincoln and Guba write that conventional research relies on statistical analysis with the goal of making generalizations; quite the opposite, purposive sampling responds to an emergent design and the need to seek specific information.

## Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

To answer the questions proposed initially and those that unfolded on site, I chose multiple methods for pursuing this study following an emergent

design approach (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This open stance facilitated the gathering of different types of information, events and practices regarding literacy in school and community. Lincoln and Guba affirm that the qualitative researcher often supports an emergent design rather than a prefigured or a priori one,

> because it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise design adequately; because what emerges as a function of the interaction between inquirer and phenomenon is largely unpredictable in advance; because the inquirer cannot know sufficiently well the patterns of mutual shaping that are likely to exist; and because the various value systems involved (including the inquirer's own) in unpredictable ways to influence the outcome. (p. 41)

Lincoln and Guba's words echo what I lived through during my research journey in this local literacy study. As I was collecting data, new questions and ideas emerged from the home, community and school domains. In addition, my own views changed as a result of my research. That is to say, I had to rethink and refine the shape of some phases of the study as additional information surfaced from my interactions with the context and with my own beliefs. As an illustration of an emergent design, an unexpected event took place when I interviewed the first group of families in St. Isidro. During the interviews, some family members talked about their religious literacy practices, others talked

about their home altars, and many of their stories related to their personal religious devotional purposes. This unexpected event became so consistent throughout my interviews and observations with some families in the study that I eventually made religious literacy practices a part of my study, a topic I never planned to research initially.

Triangulation or the use of multiple methods for gathering data (observations, interviews, photographs, document collection) and the use of two sources of data (places, people) helped me to build new understandings of the social context in an interactive way. But beyond this, the decision to use varied data collection methods and different data sources helped to provide several sources of evidence and to increase the credibility of the study (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Denzin (1978) proposes four types of triangulation: (1) data triangulation: the use of multiple data sources in doing research; (2) investigator triangulation: the employment of various researchers and evaluators; (3) theory triangulation: the use of various perspectives to interpret a particular set of data; and (4) methodological triangulation: the use of multiple methods to study a single event. In my study, I draw on some of Dezin's categories for triangulation to build the credibility of this study, but I also decided to add what Valerie J. Janesick (2000) recommends as an alternative view to triangulation, crystallization. Crystallization means that the concept of mixed-genre texts offers new ways to look at validity issues for triangulation in

qualitative research. This new look at triangulation comes from the work of Laurel Richardson (2000) who believes:

> [T]he central imaginary for "validity" for postmodernist texts is not the triangle—a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach …. In postmodernist mixed-genre texts, we have moved from plane geometry to light theory, where light can be both waves and particles. (p. 934)

To include this view does not mean to disregard the value of triangulation, but rather to enrich this study with the view of "mixed-genre texts." I have worked in my dissertation to achieve some sense of crystallization combining into the final product: poems, academic writing, photographs, drawings, short stories, self-reflection and autobiography, and collage. By incorporating the notion of 'mixed-genre texts,' Richardson states that there are more than "three sides from which to approach the world" (p. 934). In other words, the researcher gets the opportunity to re-present data in a variety of ways and points of view.

As it was mentioned earlier, to answer the questions that guide this study, my researcher's toolkit includes several methods:  interviews, observations, archival strategies, visual methods, researcher's field notes, students' written products (students' stories and drafts used to create them), and other artifacts

associated with multiple literacy experiences from home and school. In using these sources of data collection, I am also following Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) recommendation. They ask researchers to

> choose techniques that are likely to (1) elicit data needed to gain understanding of the phenomenon in question, (2) contribute different perspectives on the issue, and (3) make effective use of time table available for data collection. (p. 24)

## Informal Conversational Interviews

Informal interviews were one of the primary methods of data collection for this study. Rubin and Rubin (1995) view interviewing both as an art and a science. According to them, theories that guide qualitative interviewing maintain that "knowledge is contextual and that it often does not make sense to look for abstract rules of behavior that are not grounded in the context in which they occur. Stripping away the context is stripping away the meaning" (p. 15). Similarly, Mishler (1986) challenges traditional interview stimulus-response models in the social and psychological sciences that use decontextualized forms of interviews. He proposes a contextualized approach of interviewing that encompasses different modes of narrative analysis and alternative forms for interviewee-interviewer relationships. Patton (1990) classifies interviews in three types: the informal conversation interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview.

For the purpose of this qualitative dissertation, I found most convenient the use of the informal conversation style interview. In this type of interview, the researcher and the participants talk in a manner that is a combination of conversation and embedded questions or issues to explore. I always respected how the interviewees structured the responses; I tried to let them talk about their literacy practices and beliefs, and to convey the attitude that his or her information was very helpful, something I genuinely felt. I conducted several conversation-style interviews with the adult participants (sixth grade teacher and students' parents) and children. I taped and took notes at the same time.

In the school site, I conducted two interviews with the 6th grade teacher before and after the study. In the first interview, the teacher (Alberto, a pseudonym) talked about his language courses as an undergraduate student, his in-service preparation, and about his twelve years of experience as a language teacher. He also conversed about his beliefs regarding language teaching and learning. In the post study interview, the teacher expressed his opinions and experiences about the literacy project and his students' progress.

For interviewing children, I followed Fine and Sandstrom's (1988) advice. They write that interviewing children encompasses two characteristics: "(1) the extent of positive contact between adult and child, and (2) the extent to which the adult has direct authority over the child" (p. 14). Fine and Sandstrom offer several roles for the researcher: supervisor, leader, observer, and friend. Their recommendation is to take on the role of the friend because this role is the most

productive since the researcher gets the opportunity to relate to the children "in the most trusted way possible—without any explicit authority role" (p. 17).

Before I began with the research study, I visited the school to request permission from the school coordinator to carry out the project. In this initial visit, I had an invitation to attend a meeting with the school teachers and parents. I had the opportunity to meet the sixth grade language teacher and students' parents. In this meeting, I informed them about the entire research project. I provided a letter of consent to explain the purpose and importance of my research in a language comprehensible for parents and students. With the school and parents' consent, eighteen students in the sixth grade class participated voluntarily in interviews before the implementation of the language arts project, and fifteen after finishing the project. Before the study interviews, students talked about their language habits and experiences at home and in school. After the study, the students talked about their learning and experiences in the project.

On my first visit to the sixth grade classroom, the classroom teacher introduced me to the class, and I offered students an explanation of the research project and extended to them an invitation to participate on a voluntary basis with their parents' consent. I developed relationships with all the participants over the course of the project through individual and collective exchanges. Janesick (1998) writes that "access and entry are sensitive components in qualitative research, and the researcher must establish trust,

rapport, and authentic communication patterns with the participants” (p. 40). One aim of this research project was to study participants’ culture over a period of time. To do this, I needed to create a close working relationship with participants to generate the kind of “cultural knowledge” (Johnson, 1975) needed to learn about every-day life and language practices. I therefore took on the role of an “active participant” to build trust and rapport among the community, the school and myself (Adler and Adler, 1987). In order to do this ethically, I needed as a literacy researcher to make my research agenda clear to participants before beginning my research project because the children at the center of the project were a vulnerable population.

Holding that the first meeting with the sixth grade teacher and students’ parents offered me the opportunity to start building what became a long, wonderful, and trusting relationship with families from the community. This sort of collaborative research relationship became an eye-opening experience to me that reinforced my interest in vernacular forms of knowledge and literacy. I realized the value participants placed on literacy and numeracy practices when I began to collect and analyze data through interviews and observations in my several encounters with the families in the community of St. Isidro. I think that trust and cooperation from the families were possible because I was born and raised in an Andean family in a nearby town, and I am familiar with the beliefs, customs and ways of being of Andean people. Furthermore, as a researcher, I always displayed a genuine sensitivity and skills to understand their beliefs,

ways of being and behaving. This speaks to a need for researchers to be linked to and invested in the communities they which to study. It also argues for research being conducted by native members of a community.

In the informal conversational interviews I conducted at the homes of students' parents, we talked about their literacy uses at home and in the community and traced some of their memories of learning to read and write. The participants were very helpful and generous to the point that some parents offered me documents and artifacts related to their learning to read and write—books, personal writing, notebooks, and other artifacts. Furthermore, some children's mothers talked about the time they take off from their regular household chores to help their kids learn to read and do their school assignments.

## Observations

Since this research took place in two different sites—school and community and it required access to several events and people—observations depended on my relationship to each one of these settings. In regard to researchers' observations, Patton (1990) offers helpful advice about one's role for conducting qualitative research. He classifies the roles depending on the degree of participation in daily life or social routines—from full participant to complete observer. Along this continuum, there are various combinations available to the researcher.

With conversational interviews, participant-observation became one of the primary data sources for my dissertation study. In *Participant Observations: A Guide for Field Work*, Kathleen M. Dewalt and Billie. R. Dewalt (2002) define participant observation as “a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture” (p. 1). In my research dissertation, I observed, interacted and took part in both study sites in different events and activities to learn about the literacy lives and the cultures of school, family and community. Dewalt and Dewalt also assert that participant observation is a means to collect data in naturalistic settings used by qualitative researchers who observe or participate in the daily social and cultural activities of those being part of the study. Participation also provided me with the opportunity to enrich the information gained through the conversational interviews and other methods of data gathering.

Furthermore, I came to recognize that actively observing and participating in some of the community events, and interacting with people at their homes offered me the opportunity to engage in new questions and reflections in relation to the everyday uses of literacy by adults and children. Dewalt and Dewalt write that participant observation “encourages the continual reassessment of initial research questions ... and facilitates the development of new questions … as new insights occur as a result of increasing familiarity with the context” (p. 13). What I learned by means of observing and being part of some of the community

literacy events and from participants' uses of literacy and oralicy in their life routines find support in some of the theoretical insights that frame this dissertation study, but I will present more of these issues in the following chapters. My observations enabled me to visualize the complexity of local and everyday literacy practices in the community of St. Isidro.

In *Literacy Research in the Next Millennium*, Dillon, O'Brien and Heilman (2000) also talk about three roles for literacy researchers: (1) the researcher who plays the role of a "lone researcher" to gain a reputation as an "expert" in the academic field, (2) the researcher who follows uncritically the "bourgeois model" based on decontextualized academic paradigms, and (3) the researcher who has personal, philosophical and ethical commitments and works for the development of collaborative agendas with participants to build theories and understandings that work toward solving problems in a given local project. I identified partially with this third role because I view my role as a researcher with personal, philosophical and ethical commitments to local educational literacy research. In addition, I believe in the need to enable participants to act as co-researchers in local research projects. However, I do not feel comfortable with Dillon, O'Brien and Heilman's argument that narrows down any research endeavor within the framework of "problem solving." Writing about a similar issue in the Dewey Center Community Project in Detroit's inner city, Schaafsma (1993) states:

> I hope that in the process of telling my story that my own commitments to educational change—informed by my colleagues' stories—will be clear. But I also think that our stories may indicate *the need to reconsider our unwavering dedication to those commitments in the process of discovering "solutions" to particular problems*. Hearing the voices of my colleagues helps me to work against the authoritarianism of certain kinds of educational discourse, whether those are "progressive" or otherwise. (p. xxii, emphasis added)

Although the Dewey Writing Center Project in inner city Detroit and my dissertation study represent very different and unique literacy research enterprises which are far apart by geographical, cultural, political and social boundaries, it is nonetheless true that the discussion of literacy matters across nations and responds to the same rhetoric of politicians, policy and curriculum makers, and conventional literacy experts, among others. These groups often view literacy as a problem that calls for "solutions" through top-down standards, testing and scientific replication procedures; thus divorcing literacy issues from the complex and situated cultural and social issues in and out of schools. It is not surprising that many voices are left out in sometimes heated debates over literacy education—the voices of the disenfranchised and powerless. In this sense, I find troublesome mainstream notions in the field of literacy studies whose only aim is to investigate literacy problems (i.e., deficit models like E. D.

Hirsch) rather than to understand the complexity of personal, cultural, geographical, social, and political issues intertwined in everyday uses of literacy in communities and in their teaching and learning in schools. Under this deficit view of literacy, communities that rely on non-mainstream forms of discourse are conceived as problematic since they do not fit into standard forms of literacy practices in schools and society (Heath, 1983).

Finally, in *Membership Roles in Field Research*, Patricia Adler and Peter Adler (1987) also oriented me in regards to my membership role in my literacy dissertation study. They speak of three different kinds of membership roles for field research—peripheral, active, and complete membership. In my case, most of the time, I took an active membership role. Adler and Adler write in the following about researchers who take an active membership role:

> Researchers who adopt an active membership role do more than participate in the social activities of group members; they take part in the core activities in the group members. In so doing, they generally assume functional, not solely research or social roles in the settings. Active-Member-researchers (AMRs), therefore, relate to the members of the setting in a qualitatively different way than do researchers in the peripheral membership roles: Instead of merely sharing the status of insiders, they interact as colleagues: *co participants in a joint endeavor*. (p. 50, emphasis added)

Since I am a researcher as well as a native of the Andean region, my role as a participant observer took multiple forms. I found myself moving in different roles between participant and observer in the school and community settings. In some instances, such as when I carried out some of the interviews in the community, I sometimes observed more than participated or vice versa. This was a choice that I could not determine ahead of time since it was dictated by the circumstances at hand. In the school literacy project, I played more the role of the participant because I was responsible for the project.

## Fieldnotes and Research Journal

During my participation and observation in school and in the community, I also kept field notes based on descriptions of the interactions, behaviors, attitudes and reactions from the students while working in the project or visiting the families in the communities. Goodall (2000) writes that "fieldnotes are generally intended to capture and represent the lived experiences of *others*" (p. 90, emphasis in original). Moreover, I wrote journal entries right after the sites visits; the journal was a place to write questions, reflections, and issues that emerged during my observations and participations at the site. Spradley (1980) defines a research journal as "a record of experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork" (p. 71).

## Image-Based Research Methods

Image-based research methods are techniques that come from the fields of sociology and anthropology and their subdisciplines of visual anthropology

and visual sociology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Ball and Smith, 1992; Prosser, 2003). Researchers in these fields of study use film, video, photography, and images to document social life and to enhance understanding of human beings and their cultural surroundings. In my study, I found very helpful the use of photography, images, drawings, maps, diagrams and symbols because they offered alternative forms for collecting information and representing my research project. Before using this method, I made sure to obtain permission for taking photographs of the research sites and on some occasions of the participants without threatening their comfort. For instance, in my visits to the families in the communities as I conducted my conversational interviews, observations, and participation in some of their activities, I took photographs and scanned documents that participants offered. I used this visual data, creating a kind of visual narrative—as a way to explore and develop what participants were telling me during the interviews (Figure 8).

*Figure 8*. St. Isidro collage.

Image making has spanned the evolution of humankind from ancient cave drawings to photographs of distant galaxies. Technological improvements are reflected in everyday visual communication, beginning with the use of natural dyes of limestone walls to illustrate a hunt to a single camera capable of making both still photographs and videos of family events. (Prosser, 2003, p. 1)

[Images] encompass a wide range of forms including films, photographs, drawings, cartoons, graffiti, maps, diagrams, signs

> and symbols. Taken cumulatively images are *signifiers of a culture*; taken individually they are artefacts that provide us with very *particular information* about our existence. Images provide researchers with a different order of data and, more importantly, an alternative to the way we have perceived data in the past. (Prosser, 2003, p. 1, emphasis added)

In his edited collection, *Image-based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*, Jon Prosser (2003) offers both theoretical as well as practical insights about the benefits of using images and interpreting data in qualitative research. I found Prosser's work very supportive about some of my fears during the initial phases of my research. One of my doubts related to the relevant role played by the visual in the lives of participants where I conducted my dissertation—school and community settings. I was unsure how I could bring into my dissertation the use of images that are significant manifestations of literacy practices in the culture of the study settings. Prosser argues the visual gets neglected in most qualitative research because language dominates what gets published. I think that there is much to gain from the use of images that help qualitative researchers to document participants' lives and to enhance the understandings of people's daily routines related to language and culture. Additionally, the use of images stimulated the telling of stories during the interviews. In my dissertation study, family members who participated in the interviews attached personal meanings to photographs, images and documents.

Finally, I used photography and other images along with observations and interviews to interpret and present participants' and my own experiences, reflections and memoirs in my research process. The use of visual methods always has played a secondary role in the research process in the field of education. Yet with the advent of new visual technological developments in this computer age and the "pictorial turn" as coined by Mitchell (1994), visual data needs to become a primary source of data collection and representation not only in academic journals and books, but also in dissertation studies. As Harper (2000) asserts, the value of visual methods with "new technologies promise myriad ways to bring changing visual experiences into the production of social science and the understanding of the visual dimensions of society" (p. 730). New forms of representation of research projects demand a move from a print-centered discourse to academic works that combine both image and text (Contreras, Petrucci, and Pagnucci, 2000; Petrucci, 2005).

## Documents, Records and Artifacts

In both research settings—school and community—with the participants' written permission, I collected data from records, documents and artifacts to supplement my other data gathering techniques. Lincoln and Guba (1995) offer a distinction between documents and records. Records refer to official texts organized for formal businesses or transactions and documents refer to texts prepared for personal reasons. With my portable computer, scanner and digital camera to use while interviewing or doing other research activities, I scanned or

photographed records of marriage certificates and title deeds, teachers' reading materials, as well as documents, for example, personal notebooks, books, letters, poems, religious booklets (*novenas*), and estampas, students' stories, and the sixth grade language teacher's lesson plans.

Artifacts

The construction of meaning from "material culture" is of great importance in relation to individual interpretative processes and also to interpretive communities. Qualitative researchers who also focus on "material culture" from the past and the present in their study settings as Kyvig and Marty (1982) assert have the opportunity to value and understand human beings' funds of knowledge, beliefs, values, actions and goals. In *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You*, Kyvig and Marty state the following:

> TRACES OF HISTORICAL EVENTS ARE FOUND IN THINGS AS well as in words. Taken together, things are labeled "material culture" but are in fact only the creation of culture. The inspiration for making them comes from the bundle of knowledge, beliefs, norms, and values that compose a culture, and they therefore represent events and ideas in the lives of people …. To understand human action and human purposes in a community, it makes sense to look carefully and in many different ways at things—artifacts from the past and *the present*. (p. 149, emphasis added)

Kyvig and Marty distinguish written materials and pictures from artifacts. They define words and pictures as abstractions that represent ideas and images in our minds and artifacts as something tangible. According to Kyvig and Marty, artifacts have to do with the perceptual world:

> they can be seen, heard, touched, smelled, and tasted. They are real things that can be weighed and measured and counted. If artifacts are to be more than merely perceived and appreciated, they must be understood in words—that is, handled conceptually. (p. 150)

Kyvig and Marty recommend organizing artifacts following Robert Chenhall's ten categories and an eleventh one for unclassifiables. Of those categories, families shared with me different artifacts: (1) altars and votives which they have for their use in religious activities at home; these correspond to Chenhall's category of societal artifacts, (2) miniature boards used by students in schools and at home during the 1940s and 1950s to learn to write, read and count; this corresponds to school artifacts and it is Chenhall's eleventh category for those artifacts that are unclassifiable. The study of these artifacts helped me to understand the literacy experiences of early generations in the community of St. Isidro. The religious artifacts speak of the symbolic meanings of altars and votives and how they were and are still connected to literacy activities and stories in this community.

Kyvig and Marty also affirm that researchers who work with artifacts "come to see the past in different ways, but their sensitivity to the importance of *things as carriers of meaning* will help them see their own environment as a living museum" (p. 161, emphasis added). Through the examination of records, documents and artifacts, I was able to gain an ample perspective on participants' literacy events related to culture, religion, interests and daily routines.

Finally, out of the image-based data collection methods several questions and ideas crossed my mind as I came to know and to learn more about this community. I recorded these questions and ideas in my research journal. For example, I felt the need to find ways to thank this community their continuous interest and collaboration throughout all the data collection processes for my dissertation research. I envisioned the idea of creating a museum for displaying the collective memory of the people of St. Isidro. As researchers, we need to view the qualitative approach as a solidarian enterprise and this stance carries ethical implications. What do qualitative researchers offer in terms of benefits for the community? Or how do researchers continue their collaboration in the research once the research project comes to an end? In my concluding chapter, I will expand more about this topic and the potential benefits for the community of St. Isidro.

## Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

I followed two data analysis strategies that provided me with valuable help for analyzing data as well as organizing the writing of the final product of my main dissertation research report. The first strategy followed David Barton and Mary Hamilton's (1998) useful methodical procedures offered in their book *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*. Their data analysis strategies represent the tradition in most qualitative research design projects. The second strategy is modeled after the work of H. Lloyd Goodall, Jr. in *Writing the New Ethnography* (2000). Goodall's work offers artful ideas and insightful ways to "experiment with forms of *communication* to create meaningful relationships with readers" (p. 14, emphasis in original). These forms of communication combine both text (stories, poetry, autoethnography, academic writing) and image (collage, photo narrative, drawings) to exploit the intersections between the visual and the verbal and to make my research more meaningful to a diverse audience.

For the first analytical procedure, Barton and Hamilton offer various strategies, including: (1) reading and re-reading; (2) selecting; (3) coding; and (4) linking and sorting. My data analysis was a continual process from the initial stage of data gathering to the final stage of analysis proper. Lincoln and Guba (1985) write that "data analysis must begin with the very first data collection, in order to facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases" (p. 242).

Following the first strategy based on their model of analysis, I read and re-read the transcripts of the conversational interviews, my observation fieldnotes, research journal, documents, and artifacts and made notes on them. Barton and Hamilton refer to this process as “memoing” (p. 69). As I proceeded with this plan of action, I became more familiar with the data in personal ways. I looked over and over at my theoretical framework to make comparisons and connections and decide which information in my data was more meaningful. This decision-making process and interpretation about what data seemed more relevant led to the reduction of the data and the identification of significant themes. Coding my data facilitated this process of interpretation and reduction. For example, I used abbreviation of key words for coding literacy events and experiences in different areas of participants’ lives: religious, educational, domestics, personal and social.

Because I am a very visual person, I found the use of charts, diagrams and concept maps very useful because they provided new ways to consider and connect or complement information that I couldn’t perceive through the use of codes or just by looking at interview transcripts and field notes. In his condensed but practical book, *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, Harry Wolcott (1990) writes:

> Charts and diagrams offer other ways to give out thoughts embodiment. They invite us to sort and categorize data, to explore what goes with what and to contemplate how seemingly discrete

> data may be linked in previously unrecognized ways. Researchers who think spatially work through their charts and diagrams in order literally to "see" their studies before them, whereas more of us are constrained by the regimented vision of prose. (p. 63)

The use of concept maps, tables, diagrams, and photographs help "not only to provide valuable supplements to printed text but can condense and expedite the presentation of supporting detail" (Wolcott, p. 63) for data reduction and analysis. Finally, organizing all the information into folders facilitates easy retrieval of data; and additionally, approaching data analysis following different formats eases and allows for visualizing the presentation of the last three chapters of my dissertation.

The second strategy, the new ethnographic writing, comes from innovative writing practices and interpretation styles "that follow from the narrative, literary turn in the social sciences" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 873) and the "pictorial turn" Mitchell (1994) in the study of culture intended for creating new understandings in qualitative inquiry. Goodall argues this new approach is a way to think about the artistic nature of research. These forms of communication combine both text and image to make the research available to a diverse audience.

As mentioned earlier, the new ethnography offers qualitative researchers many forms to interpret and re-present research studies. These forms include but are not limited to poetry, short stories, autoethnography, readers' theater,

polyvocal texts, performance texts, collage, photo narrative, and mixed genres. There are several exemplary works that support and illustrate this ethnographic writing and visual style. For example, Ann Banks and Stephen P. Banks' (1998) *Fiction and Social Research: By Ice or Fire*; Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner's (1996) *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*; Gian Pagnucci's (2004) *Living the Narrative Life*: *Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*; and Laurel Richardson's (1997) *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. Several academic journals display this new ethnographic writing and the visual turn in rhetoric and composition studies: *The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, Qualitative Inquiry, The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, Enculturation, Journal of Visual Literacy, Invisible Cultures,* and *Revista Chilena de Antropología Visual*. These are just a few of those exemplary works that combine both theory and practice to demonstrate alternative formats for writing qualitative studies in the fields of the social sciences, and especially for the purpose of my study in the literacy field.

The second strategy offered by Goodall helps researchers move from fieldnotes, observations, and interview transcripts to stories. The first part is quite similar to the first strategy suggested by Barton and Hamilton. There is coding, analysis and connections, but this time these strategies do not remain limited to the search for and interpretation of relevant themes or categories to present the results or conclusions. Instead, the use of analysis and coding of interview transcripts, fieldnotes, personal journals as well as the interpretation

and reflection become part of the process of generating and grouping recurrent patterns to suggest, for example, an “emerging” story or a poem that becomes the researcher’s interpretation of the culture of the participants in the study. This is a process that Goodall’s portrays as the work of “a *new ethnographer* to get from writing and interpreting fieldnotes to constructing a *story*” (p. 120, emphasis in original).

Goodall explains that the work of the traditional ethnographer “tips toward a representation of the field work experience” (p. 121), but for those who write new ethnography, the work “tips toward an *evocative representation* of the fieldwork experience” (p. 121, emphasis in original). This means that interpretative ethnographic writing in the form of “interpretive tales of the fieldwork tend more often to read like good short stories or novels than like standard research reports” (pp. 121-122).

## Summary

Finally, through working and reflecting on methods of data analysis and forms of representing qualitative studies, I have come to the following conclusions that I think are the heart of the work of my dissertation: (1) the need to value the use of both textual and visual representations. That is, narrative and visual turns in the study of local cultures; (2) the combination of conventional and new ethnographic ways for analysis and representation of literacy studies; and (3) the opportunity to reach a diverse audience in qualitative studies. In

turn, this ensures Richardson’s idea of mixing genres that combines “creative and analytic” practice, to warrant the trustworthiness of the study.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## ALTARS, *NOVENAS*, AND MIRACLES: THE INTERSECTIONS OF POPULAR RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY AND VERNACULAR LANGUAGE FORMS

It's been a hot and humid night as in every March. I spent all night long looking through stacks of notes, photographs, and revisiting readings on religious issues. Sweat still runs down my body and heat permeates our little apartment. It's 5:00 am and I begin to feel the early morning hours' breeze coming through my study room window. The aroma of *café* tells me that the coffee maker is on. I sit in front of my computer and look at my little portable altar on the top of my computer desk. I say my early prayers and entrust my work to God. My altar has been traveling back and forth with me and my wife for the last six months, a journey from our little apartment to our farm house and then back. I spread the books with clipped notes onto the floor and kneel down with Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands: The New Mestiza*. I feel relief because I could find a very touching passage I remembered reading months before.

Journal entry from March 2, 2007

*Figure 9.* My portable altar.

I sit here before my computer*, Amiguita,* my altar on top of the monitor with the *Virgen de Coatlalopeuh* candle and copal incense burning. My companion, a wooden serpent staff with feathers, is to my right while I ponder the ways metaphor and symbol concretize the spirit and etherealize the body. The Writing is my whole life, it is my obsession. This vampire which is my talent does not suffer other suitors. Daily I court it, offer my neck to its teeth. This is the sacrifice that the act of creation requires, a blood sacrifice. For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth's body—stone, sky, liquid, soil. This work, these images, piercing tongue or ear lobes with cactus needle, are my offerings, are my Aztecan blood sacrifices. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 75)

The worship of a household god or image representing supernatural powers is as old as man himself. Logically, then, the replacement of the New World's native gods with Christian religious personages was an obvious step in the conversion of the Indians. Catholicism supplanted an already deeply ingrained image-worshiping tradition with a new set of holy persons, often strikingly similar to the old gods. The desire to possess an image to ensure health, fertility, and abundance of crops often led to a simple transfer of beliefs from a pagan image to one of the Catholic hierarchy of saints. (Giffords, 1992, p. 1)

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Photo Poem of the Rosary Rock

*Figure 10*. The Rosary Rock.

I don’t know who gave me this name.

All that I know

*La Piedra del Rosario* is my name—the priest says.

Indoctrinated, converted and vanished,

who gave me this name?

I don’t know who changed my name.

All that I know

petroglyph is my name—the anthropologist says.

Observed, preserved and registered,

who gave me this name?

I don’t know who carved me this way.

All that I know

altar is my name—the elders say.

Mythologized, sacred, and enchanted,

who gave me this name?

One thing I heard:

Long time ago

the natives used to come to my place

because they had gods to pray,

promises to pay and stories to share.

---

“The Rosary Rock” is a photo poem I created from the conversational interviews, field notes, and stories I gathered in St. Isidro about the most important religious icon for the community—*La Piedra del Rosario*. This photo poem, as well as my introductory journal entry and the two preceding quotes from Anzaldúa and Giffords have several themes that resonate throughout them. One theme relates to altars as a popular religious space in many communities in different spaces and times; another common refers to stories, writing and images. Yet an even more powerful topic suggests the connections and the dissensions among various voices in Mikhail Bakhtin’s term (1981) “heteroglossia” where language is shot through with elements and voices of the popular, the personal, the gender, the literary, the academic and the spiritual.

Anzaldúa’s and Giffords’ quotes, my account, and the photo poem certainly speak of literacy acts, popular religious beliefs and issues of power and how throughout history—from colonial times to the present—those who have exercised power still continue to undermine and stigmatize people’s popular cultural and religious ways of being such literacy forms seem forever to be labeled as nonstandard, irrational and superstitious. Given that popular religious practices have not been welcomed within the boundaries of the institutional; people always find ways to substitute their “image-worshiping tradition with a

new set of holy persons, often strikingly similar to the old gods" (Giffords, 1992, p. 1).

The community of St. Isidro is one of the sites where I conducted part of my research study, and residents perpetuate their popular "image-worshiping" in many ways that entwine visual, textual and oral forms of communication—altars, miracles, *novenas*, *novenarios,* stories of saints, and religious events. These acts of communication through images, storytelling and written texts permeate people's religious beliefs, and they speak of the intersections of popular religious iconography and vernacular forms of language.

In this study site, the multiplicity of data gathering methods, and the many voices and faces that express the confluence of the religious and the vernacular forms of language ask for alternative ways to (re)present data to honor participants' voices and their worlds. Gubrium and Holstein (1995) call for a "new ethnography" that is imbued with multivocality; one that reflects both participants' and researcher's worlds. Furthermore, reporting research in conventional ways does not offer the flexibility to reach audiences beyond academia because as Pagnucci (2004) asserts, researchers "rather than constructing research for how it might be directly relevant to the people living it, we frame research for how it fits within a field that doesn't actually exist" (p. 20).

## Mixed-Genre Research

This chapter also builds on some of the ideas in Gregory Ulmer's (1989) *Teletheory*. His project rests on three modes of discourse—orality, the written

text, and the videotext—that constitute our current discourse. I will substitute "visual" for the third mode, because it opens the possibilities to include other forms of visual representation. Ulmer's work introduces a new genre of discourse; "mystory" which he asserts is "always specific to its composer …. It brings into relation your experience with three levels of discourse—personal (autobiography), popular (community stories, oral history or popular culture), expert (disciplines of knowledge)" (p. vii). This is what I attempted to do in this chapter to blend together textual and visual forms of representation. That is to say, to mix the three modes of discourse: the personal, the popular and the academic combined with visual representations.

Some examples of such mixed-genre writing that inspired me for creating this chapter come from the following academic and literary works:

- Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner's (1996) *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. The contributors to this edited book tell their stories through memoirs, poetry, and photography.
- Michael Ondaatje's (1970) *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. This literary piece combines images and text mixing different genres—poetry, accounts, reworked prose from archives, comic books, dime novels, and photographs.
- Gian Pagnucci's (2004) *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*. In his book, Pagnucci argues for alternative ways to write research and dissertation studies by means of stories, and at the

same time, his work also illustrates a blending of story, poetry and theory.

- Mariolina Salvatori's (2001) *Porque no Puedo Decir mi Cuento: Mexican Ex-Votos Iconographic Literacy* is one of the very few works which I found that deals with popular religiosity and vernacular forms of literacy. Her work also narrates her story in Italy when as a child she went with her mother on pilgrimage to several shrines and experienced her first contact with ex-votos. Salvatori also demonstrates her investigation of the literacy practices of Mexican ex-votos through personal stories, academic prose and photographs.

Finally, in creating mixed-genre texts for this chapter, I have been also moved by my personal quest to acknowledge the use of the visual and oral as forms of representation for the Andean people throughout history. As Norman K. Denzin (1992) writes, the challenge for qualitative researchers "is to learn how to write visually, in a way that reflects how what is seen is felt, knowing then that seeking is feeling" (pp. 24-25).

A Visit to a Family in the *Aldea* of St. Isidro

One clear August Friday night under a starry sky, the Moncada family gathers for supper time in their large smoky kitchen warmed by a firewood stove. Doña María, the head of the family gets ready to serve the bowls of *atól de maíz*, a roasted corn grind mixed with milk and served very hot. The Moncada family consisted of Don Juan and his wife Doña María, but she

widowed in 1997 when her husband passed away at the age of 83. They had twelve sons and daughters. Three of their sons and one daughter still live with Doña María while the others married and left. We are sitting at a very long wooden table warming ourselves by sipping spoonfuls of *atól de maíz*, and Juan the son in charge of the farm, talks about the happenings at the meeting held with the major and the communities in the municipality of Andrés Bello. Juan currently serves as the *Corregidor,* a sort of authority named by the municipality to represent the community of St. Isidro.

After much talking and listening to the last cracking sounds of the wooden sticks being consumed by the flames in the stove, Doña María breaks into the conversation and says "*Bueno, mis muchachos. It's Friday and it's about time for praying the Novena de la Sagrada Pasión before going to bed*."

We leave the kitchen and walk slowly through a very narrow and low thick wooden door that connects with the living room. The framing of the door and how we have to slip through our bodies to pass are part of the popular interior design of very old houses still found in some Andean *aldeas* (small villages) in Táchira State. In the bright blue living room, we sit on iron frame chairs, laced with colorful plastic threads, right in front of an altar with a little statue of St. Antonio and other religious images (Figure 11). Juan, the *rezandero* (a person who prays at funerals), in the family lights a *velón*—a thick tallow candle—and places it on the altar.

*Figure 11.* The Moncada's family home altar.

Silence fills the room, and Juan makes the sign of the Cross to indicate: "*Por la señal de la Santa Cruz, de nuestros enemigos libranos, Señor Dios Nuestro*." Juan prays for the peace of the world, his family's health and for those who are in need. After a pause, he begins to read *La Novena de la Sagrada Pasión* (The Novena of the Sacred Passion). As Juan is reading the *novena* and we are answering in chorus, I cannot stop thinking about the long-time devotion that still keeps this family together every Friday night. This religious act is filled with spirituality, but demonstrated through the act of reading a very old booklet that has a priceless value for this family (Figure 12). This literacy practices of reading *novenas* in front of an altar teach children about the importance of religious readings in their lives and this type of reading becomes a source for literacy learning.

*Figure 12*. Novena de la Sagrada Pasión (1948).

A Typical Day in the Literacy Life of the Moncada Family: "*And Every Friday We Knelt Down on a Rush Mat in Front of the Altar*"

It is with this family—The Moncadas—that I first learned to acknowledge the act of reading *novenas* beyond the religious domain. Having the opportunity to be with The Moncadas that Friday night to gather information about language uses—both oral and written for my study—it was like opening Pandora's box. What I experienced that night was not a strange event to me; I grew up being part of the same religious practices of offering *novenas* in front of an altar in my family. Yet an eye-opening event was the story of how Don Antonio Moncada

learned to read and write by drawing letters, words, and short sentences with pieces of charcoal on a rock with the help of a *contrabandista* (someone who used to smuggle clothes and medicines from Colombia to the Andes in Venezuela), and then how he practiced reading and writing with *The Novena de la Sagrada Pasión*. In the retelling of her father's story, Carmen offered the following account:

> *Hace muchos años en la casa de nona, allá en aquella montaña llegaba un viejito que era contrabandista, y entonces el veía que a papá le gustaba mucho las letras y quería aprenderlas. Entonces el viejito empezó con un tizón a enseñarle sobre una piedra a papá como hacer las cosas, las letras. ¡Ay papá como aprendió! Y en esta novena viejita de la Sagrada Pasión (Carmen me muestra la novena) que era de nono fue que él practicó la lectura y escritura. El aprendió a leer y a escribir porque no tuvo escuela. Es que papá nos enseñó las letras a nosotros y a dividir cuando niños. Papá fue el que nos enseñó a leer y él fue quien enseñó a mamá a leer porque ella fue por solo seis meses o algo así a la escuela. Así que papá cuando se casó, se trajo la Novena de la Pasión de nono y la Novena de San Antonio de la abuela y esa pequeña estatua de San Antonio que está en el altar la cual también pertenecía a ella. ¡Este San Antonio tenía un viaje de milagros! Mi papá contaba que llegaba mucha gente en Semana*

*Santa a pagarle promesas que le debían. Y cuentan que a no sé quién se le perdió una vaca y le ofreció una promesa a San Antonio y cuando vieron fue que la vaca apareció. Entonces esa persona le trajo un milagrito con la figura de una vaca para darle gracias a San Antonio por el favor recibido. ¡Ah, pues ahí está la vaquita! (Carmen me muestra los milagros que cuelgan de una cinta). Bueno pues esta novena yo la pasé a mano porque está muy viejita. Yo la escribí aparte porque perteneció a nono y luego a papá. Papá nos reunía todos los viernes por la noche a rezar la novena frente al altar. Todos los viernes, nos hincaba, ¿verdad? A nosotros cuando estábamos chiquitos en una chingalea—una estera de junco. A los que estábamos chiquitos nos hincaba y los que estaban grandes se sentaban en una silla. Si, a oír la Pasión y nosotros ya sabíamos como contestar. Y esta novena siempre la rezó mi papá y cuando enfermó y no podía leer, él ponía a leer a Juan y ahí fue donde Juan aprendió a leerla. Ahora Juan continúa rezándola todos los viernes por las ánimas, los enfermos, los pobres, la salud de la familia y la paz en el mundo.*

[A long time ago, an old man who was a *contrabandista* used to come over my grandmother's house, on that mountain over there. He realized that my father really liked learning the letters and he

was eager to learn them. Then, the old man began to teach my dad with a piece of charcoal how to make things, letters on a rock. Ah! Dad learned a lot! And in this very old *novena* of *La Sagrada Pasión* which belonged to my granddad (*Carmen shows the novena to me*), he practiced reading and writing. He learned to read and write because he didn't have schooling. And he even taught us the alphabet and how to divide when we were little. Dad taught us how to read and also he taught my mom because she went to school only for six months or so. So when dad married my mom, he brought with him grandpa's *Novena de la Pasión* and my grandma's *Novena de San Antonio* and that little statue of St. Antonio on the altar which also belonged to her. This St. Antonio got lots of *milagros*! My father said that many people used to come on Easter Time to pay promises (vows to a saint) to St. Antonio. And there is a story about someone whose cow got lost and that person offered a promise to St. Antonio to help him find the cow, and then the cow appeared. So that person brought a miracle with a figure of a cow to give thanks to St. Antonio for the favor granted. Oh! You can see the cow here in this ribbon with miracles (little figures of animals or human beings made of gold, copper or silver) that people brought! (*Carmen reaches out for the miracles hanging on a ribbon to show them to me*). (Figure 13)

*Figure 13.* String of miracles at the home altar of The Moncadas.

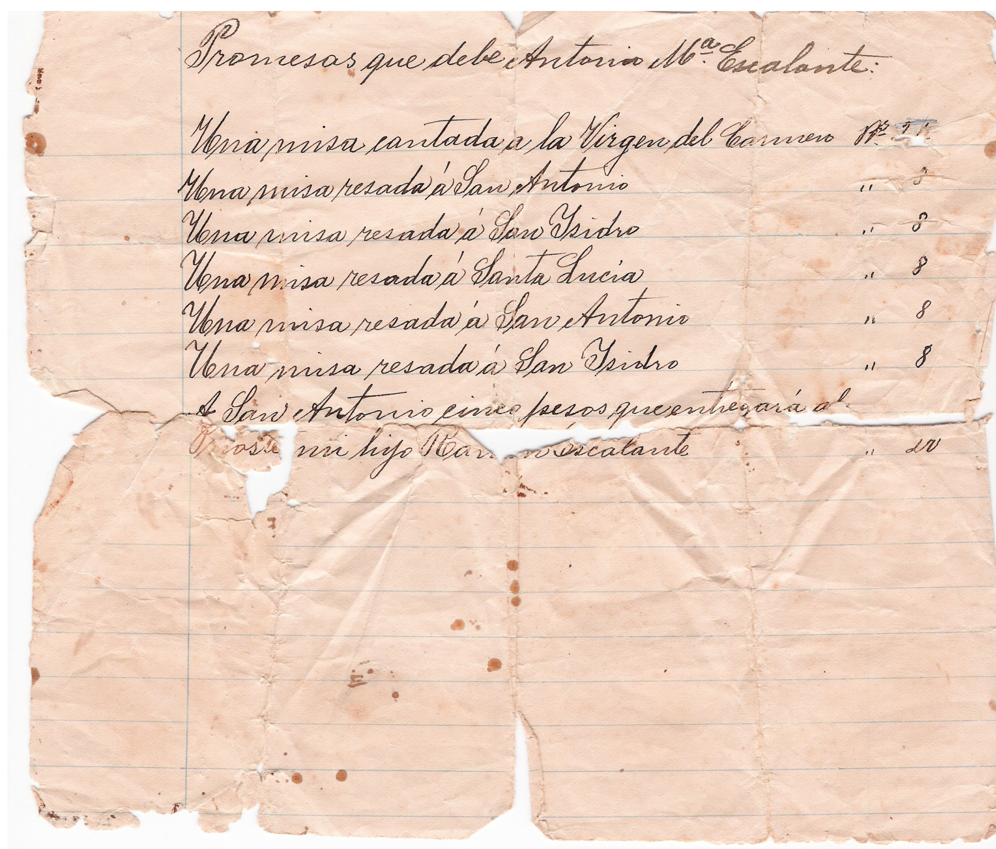
> Well, I handwrote this *novena* because the booklet is very old. I wrote them again because it belonged to my granddad and later to my dad. Every Friday night, dad used to get us together to read the *novena* in front of the altar. And every Friday, he used to make us kneel down on a rush mat in front of the altar. The little ones had to kneel down and the grownups sat on the chairs. Yes! To listen to the *Pasión* and we knew how to answer back. And my dad always read this *novena*, and when he got sick and couldn't do it anymore, he asked my brother Juan to read it. That's how Juan learned to read the *novena*. Now, Juan continues reading it every

> Friday and he pleads for the souls in the purgatory, for the sick, for the needs of people, for our family health, and for the peace of the world].

Carmen's story is useful for illustrating some issues about literacy learning in this family. It also tells us about the type of texts which have been used regularly through different generations by some members of the Moncada family. First, this story exemplifies the social constructionist view of language learning as a product of social collaboration which depends on culture, context, and custom (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986). Don Antonio's language learning was fostered through his interaction with the *contrabandista*. Therefore, language learning for him did not happen within the four walls of a classroom, but in a very informal open space with the help of someone. Second, this story also illustrates Barton and Hamilton's (1998) contention that in every culture, there are different literacies associated with different domains of life. In the case of the Moncada family, the Friday night tradition of reading *novenas* aloud offers a glimpse of the acts of literacy connected to the religious domain. Literacy is learned to fulfill the need of religious purposes rather than school. This story also exemplifies the interplay between the role of religious texts and local religious practices.

A Researcher’s Note: Self-Portrait

After this wonderful time spent with this family, I returned to my apartment, and began to write in my journal with energy that I have in no way known before. It was as if I had been transported once again to my childhood and adolescent years at my grandparents’ farm once again. I went to bed very late that night and awoke around five in the morning to continue thinking, connecting and writing about all those religious memories and experiences with my family. Memories of reading *novenas* for nine days in front of the altar at my grandparents’ home, visiting shrines, and listening to the story about a miracle people believe *La Virgen del Carmen* performed during the flooding of El Cobre, my hometown in 1942. I also searched for a wooden box in my library where I keep some legal and religious documents from my grandfather and great grandfather from the 1930s. These documents provide an illustration of my family’s uses of reading and writing in the home. For example, one of these documents shows how their literacy acts of reading and writing were connected to their religious devotion to different saints: *La Virgen del Carmen*, St. Antonio, *Santa Lucia*, and *San Isidro* (Figure 14). For each one of these saints, my family offered a mass celebration and paid an amount of money to the priest for the service. They requested a favor related to their health, well-being, crops and good weather. My grandparents sent their requests to the members of the *cofradias* (lay brotherhood) to put the notice in the parish register.



Promesas que debe Antonio Mª. Escalante:

Una misa cantada a la Virgen del Carmen [illegible]
Una misa resada á San Antonio " 8
Una misa resada á San Isidro " 8
Una misa resada á Santa Lucia " 8
Una misa resada á San Antonio " 8
Una misa resada á San Isidro " 8
A San Antonio cinco pesos que entregará al
[illegible] mi hijo Ra[illegible] Escalante " 20

*Figure 14.* List of promises of my great grandfather, Antonio María Escalante.

But this religious fervor connected to the act of reading still continues to be part of my family's daily living; my mother always reads *novenas* during different times of the year and some of us in the family join her frequently. Reading *novenas* was also a religious literacy practice that was always performed by my grandmother in her room altar on a daily basis until her death in 2001. We even keep a photo of my grandmother doing her daily religious readings of *novenas* booklets in front of her altar. She did this every day around three in the afternoon (Figure 15).

*Figure 15.* My grandmother's daily religious reading.

These popular religious beliefs and practices were part of me, and I could connect it easily to the first family I visited in the community of St. Isidro, but this time my interest went beyond the religious. Having the opportunity to visit this family and remembering my own family's religious practices offered me the chance to see how these oral and literate practices connect to popular religion. Yet the academy still continues to overlook these popular forms of literacy practices because they do not fit within the frameworks of the institutional or school-related standard literacy practices. The desire to fulfill religious devotional practices moved people to learn to read, and this literacy practices of reading *novenas* contributed to their literacy development.

Initially, I felt that it did not make sense to connect the experiences in the community where I was doing my research with my own religious experiences at home. Perhaps this happens because scholarly research has taught us to keep

the personal self apart from the research self, but as Lincoln and Guba (2005) say qualitative researchers have to inscribe and connect their subjective self as part of their research. There is a need to go beyond the chasm that separates the personal and the academic within us. Writing about this issue Gian Pagnucci (2004) says:

> That's another problem with the way we've designed our academic world. We've tried to be so distanced and critically reasoned that we've taken ourselves right out of the picture. We've made the academic experience so alienating that even we don't really belong, at least not as persons with all our personal idiosyncrasies. (pp. 28-29)

Similarly, Ruth Behar (1993) in *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* writes that "we ask for revelations from others, but we reveal little or nothing of ourselves; we make others vulnerable, but we ourselves remain invulnerable" (p. 273). Somehow academia has taught us to give up our personal experiences in favor of a neutral stance as researchers. This chapter attempts to create a balance between participants' and researcher's representations, a heteroglossic textual form as a way to represent the "Self-Other" bond. This linking of the "Self-Other" also speaks of the connections of the researcher's and participants' home and school literacies.

## Home Altars, Sacred Shrines and Holy Icons Mediated by Popular Religious Oral and Written Forms of Language—*Novenas*, Plates, and Stories of Sacred Images

What I experienced in my visit to the home of the Moncadas was just the beginning of studying a very common devotional practice also observed by most of the families in the community of St. Isidro. As I continued visiting other families, I found how for this community, home altars, worship of religious images, and *novenas*, along with stories of miracles, dwell in their homes. Additionally, families talked about their occasional pilgrimages to the shrine of *El Santo Niño de El Llanito* and the Chapel of *La Virgen de Monte Carmelo* in the municipality of Andrés Bello.

In what follows, I offer a photo narrative of other home altars that belong to two families in the community, and one of the shrines where people from St. Isidro go occasionally to pay promises offered to *El Santo Niño de El Llanito*. These photographs offer powerful visual statements about the household worship of religious images and how people in the community manifest their spiritual devotion by reading *novenas* and offering *milagros* and narrative renditions on plates.

Based on my exchanges with members of the families who own these two home altars (Figure 16), I learned that they represent a place where the family and friends can pray for protection or ask for miracles. Both altars are set

as the central feature of the living rooms, and they function as places of worship, petition and pray for the families and their friends.

*Figure 16*. *San Alejo's* and *San Antonio's* home altars.

The first little statue represents *San Alejo* and the two booklet *novenas* that members in the family or visitors read during nine consecutive days asking for a favor or thanking the saint for a miracle granted. These are the primary texts they have used and continue to use as a tradition in the family. The second statue represents *San Antonio*, and the amount of *milagros* in both altars serves as a record of all the favors granted by the saints to members in the family or outsiders. These home altars are also imbued with stories and *milagros* which hang in their small wooden boxes as records of public meaning shared by the community. For the people of St. Isidro, these popular religious beliefs involve literate and oral practices that are represented through material culture in the form of home altars and small statues. These home altars have become

vehicles for the representation and transmission of memories through several generations. Furthermore, home altars also represent a space where the act of reading *novenas* aloud for devotional purposes takes place for family and visitors in the St. Isidro community.

## The Shrine of *El Santo Niño de El Llanito*

The municipality of Andrés Bello is home to the shrine of *El Santo Niño de El Llanito*. This sacred image is a popular religious icon but one that is not officially recognized by the Catholic Church in Táchira State. This shrine belongs to the family who found the little image of baby Jesus and built the shrine with the support of pilgrims ( Figure 17). Salvatori (2001) writes that “these representations of local apparitions are neither officially recognized nor accepted by the Church” (p. 34). In the case of *El Santo Niño de El Llanito*, the local Catholic Church does not approve officially this popular cult because the Church as an institution does not receive any economic profit. The money collected stays with the family who owns the shrine.

*Figure 17.* Shrine of *El Santo Niño de El Llanito.*

For some families in the community of St. Isidro, this is one of the centers of pilgrimage where they come to give thanks or ask for a favor. The overflowing of this room with burning candles, flowers, small toy cars and trucks, houses, military symbols, prints, photographs, plates with brief messages represent a record of people's petitions and public thanks to *El Santo Niño de El Llanito*. Writing about a similar phenomenon in regard to shrines, but related to Mexican ex-votos, Gloria Fraser Giffords (1992) in her book *Mexican Folk Retablos* writes that

> ex-votos are of great importance as sociological studies. An examination of all the ex-votos in any one shrine or church would

> produce a fascinating record of the people's hopes and fears, their thoughts and lives, and experiences, a record more honest that the fullest statistical study. (p. 147)

In the shrine of *El Santo Niño de El Llanito*, I found different religious artifacts that people left to offer thanks. For example, a handmade picture engraved on wood with a brief text thanking for a favor received, a print image of baby Jesus and three different photographs of *busetas*, small buses for public transportation (Figure 18). These forms of writing preserving a record in a text illustrate acts of writing for religious purposes.

*Figure 18.* Photographs of *busetas*.

Other people expressed their thanks for a favor received in a literary way composing a song in the form of popular verses to *El Santo Niño de El Llanito* (Figure 19).

*Figure 19*. Song to the divine baby Jesus of *El Llanito*.

*Canto al Divino Niño Jesús de El Llanito*

*Coro*

*Divino Niño Jesús*

*bendícenos te lo ruego*

*tu que estás allá en el cielo,*

*hijo de Dios eres tú*

*para ver de nuevo luz*

*dadnos la gracia ligero.*

*I*

*Hijo de María y José*

*por el mandato divino*

*mi niño Jesús ya vino*

*hagamos acto de fe (Bis).*

*II*

*Aquí estoy frente a tu altar*

*humilde y arrepentido*

*gracias por haber venido*

*y podernos ayudar.*

*III*

*Con todo el amor profundo*

*te venimos a implorar*

*cuídanos de todo mal*

*que haya paz en este mundo.*

*Por un favor recibido:*

*Juan José Duarte*

Song to the Divine Baby Jesus of *El Llanito*

Chorus

Divine baby Jesus

bless us I beg you

you who are in heaven

son of God you are

to see light again

give us grace soon.

I

Son of Joseph and Mary

for the divine order

my baby Jesus already came

let's make an act of faith (Bis).

II

I am here in front of your altar

humble and sorrowful

thank you for coming

and for helping us.

III

With all our profound love

we came to implore you

save us from evil

and give peace to the world.

For a favor received:

Juan José Duarte.

This narrative content appears in the form of popular verse, and it clearly demonstrates how people appeal to aesthetic ways of representation to express their gratitude to a sacred image leaving this as a public manifestation for a

favor received. This popular verse is an impressive literacy work that requires developing writing skills.

## Final Note: The Need to Recognize Vernacular Literacies Mediated by Popular Religious Practices

This chapter portrays how popular forms of religiosity expressed through altars, shrines, stories and the act of reading *novenas* are forms of community and home based literacies. These vernacular forms of literacy expressed through the religious domain merit recognition because as Barton and Hamilton (1998) affirm "the home is often identified as a primary domain in people's literacy lives" (p. 9). Popular religion plays a major role in the lives of this community of St. Isidro and many religious events are associated with literacy practices embedded within the social context of home and community. This supports Barton and Hamilton's contention that "within a given culture, there are different literacies associated with different domains of life" (p. 9). Barton and Hamilton also state that "literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts" (p. 8). The event of gathering together as a family in front of an altar to read aloud *novena* booklets on a given day by members of a family or visitors is a clear demonstration of what Barton and Hamilton identify as vernacular literacy practices. These practices "are rooted in everyday experience and serve everyday purposes. They draw upon and contribute to vernacular knowledge. Often they are less valued by society and are not particularly supported, nor

regulated, by external social institutions" (pp. 251-252). Literacy learning, as in the case of Juan, is here directly linked to religious practice.

To conclude, these kind of religious oral readings are particularly important to the community of St. Isidro; reading practices that become a primary source of literacy learning for most of the households. These popular literacy experiences are often unknown to or ignored by schools or researchers because they do not fit into mainstream forms of literacy. In my family as well as in the families of St. Isidro where I conducted part of my research, reading *novenas*, going to *novenarios* (funerals), listening to stories about miracles and saints or apparitions of religious images are part of the family traditions that are expressed through "vernacular literacies."

In other words, these literacy practices are integral to the lives of families in this community, and they are mediated by oral and written forms of popular religion and functions as pathways to literacy learning. Yet as Porfirio Loeza (2002) writes in his dissertation work, *The "Retablo" Practice in Mexican Votive Art: An Ethnographic Study of Life, Literacy and Meaning Making*, there are popular literacies beyond the classroom and those literacies pedagogically speaking work as didactic tools. Loeza makes a call for "a unification pedagogy" that honors both standard literacies as well as community-based literacy practices. There is a need for literacy teachers to familiarize themselves with vernacular literacies, but Loeza says this only happens if teachers recognize

"that there are genres that are preferred outside of school, genres that are personally as relevant to each other of its practitioners" (p. 164).

As literacy teachers, we need to inform ourselves of the written and oral language forms that adults and children bring with them into the classroom, their cultural identities and ways of being in their social world where oral and written language is produced. In other words, as educators we need to create a dialogical relationship for students that acknowledge both academic and vernacular ways of reading, writing and speaking.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# LITERACY OVER TIME: PORTRAITS OF THREE GENERATIONS AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S LITERACY IN THE COMMUNITY OF ST. ISIDRO

In this chapter, I illustrate the literacy learning and practices of three generations using words, poetry, short stories, *testimonios* and image-based research to enhance understanding for readers. Then, I move to discuss families' involvement in their children's literacy learning. The formatting of the chapter presents themes that emerged from participants' conversational interviews and my researcher's field notes.

## Don Emiliano's Story

*"What a hard time back then! Nowadays, it is not as difficult as when I was raised."* These were the first words that Don Emiliano expressed during his interview. He removed his hat, and sat on a wooden chair framed with leather that he had made himself.

My first conversational interview took place in a cool October evening. I visited Don Emiliano at his house located in the middle of a small coffee plantation shaded by *guamo* trees—a tall tree with many branches that produces a sweet seed fruit—to protect the coffee plants from sunlight. In his own words, Don Emiliano's initial paths to literacy learning were rough because there were not many public Federal schools in the rural Andean areas in the1930s and 40s; therefore, children had to walk long distances and their

economic circumstances often led them to quit school early. Additionally, books to read and notebooks or paper to practice writing on were scanty. Parents who wanted to buy books or notebooks had to ask the schoolteachers to buy them. This usually happened when the teachers went to town to visit their families every fifteen days. Don Emiliano remembered how he used to imitate his older siblings doing their school assignments. It was common for kids going to school to first practice their writing assignments on *tampaco* or banana leaves before copying out them to their notebooks or white paper (Figure 20).

*Figure 20*. Writing on *tampaco* and banana leaves.

“It was hard then because people did not have much money, and it was difficult for some families to afford books and notebooks,” he explained. Moreover, school teachers were very strict and students could not erase or dirty the pages in the *Tinco* writing notebooks. According to Don Emiliano, his first teacher Doña Alicia used a *palmeta* (a wooden ruler used in the 1930s and 40s

for physical punishment in schools) to punish students who did not keep their notebooks neat and clean or who forgot their homework. He said:

> Doña Alicia was very strict and if we did not hand in our homework neat and clean, we had to stand in front of her and extend our hands so she could hit us with a *palmeta* (see Appendix A). And it was painful! We got small blisters in our palms. And we could not say anything to our parents because the teacher's word was sacred and teachers were like our second parents.

This anecdote depicts two features that deserve notice. First, teaching carried a component of corporal punishment as part of the school discipline during those years. Second, the role those teachers played in children's education was seriously appreciated among families and community members; teachers were respected and trusted for their teaching and the discipline they imparted. Thus literacy education had an important school/home link through shared valuing of teachers.

As the interview continued, I was very interested to find out more about Don Emiliano's writing on leaves because I learned from my father who did not attend formal school that his best friend taught him writing using agave leaves, too. I inquired why they used those leaves and Don Emiliano told me the following: "With the *tampaco* leaves, you write with a small pointy stick, and then the letters turn red like if you were using a red pen," he explained. He continued, "The banana leaf's back is tinted with a gray substance resembling ash and has

many lines similar to a notebook. When you write something, you can notice the writing like on a notebook because it has line after line. Let me show you!" He cut down a banana leaf and demonstrated how he used it to learn to write (Figure 21).

*Figure 21*. Don Emiliano demonstrates using a banana leaf for writing.

As I continued with the interview, I noticed Don Emiliano's enthusiasm to talk about his literacy experiences as something he cherished. He recalled his first encounters with literacy watching his father:

> I remember seeing my father writing *escrituras* [land deeds] and other people's receipts for loans from St. Isidro and neighboring communities. I was so enticed with my father's wonderful and neat handwriting that I always wanted to watch him doing that.

Don Emiliano recalls that although his mother was not literate; his father modeled for him his first paths toward literacy. As an example of how much he

valued his father's writing, Don Emiliano still keeps business records of his father's documents (see Appendix B).

At the age of seven, Don Emiliano's family sent him to the only one-room Federal schoolhouse nearby in a community called *Las Guamas*. He attended this school for two years. Don Emiliano's anecdotes about those years are rich descriptions of literacy experiences. Artifacts from these experiences have been stored for decades in a wooden box that he keeps like a treasure. There, Don Emiliano preserves his personal writing, old documents, and records of his old grocery store, notebooks, books, a Palmer method handbook and a very small blackboard about the size of a notebook. The small blackboard is very old and it has two sides; one side for practicing handwriting and the other for arithmetic operations (Figure 22).

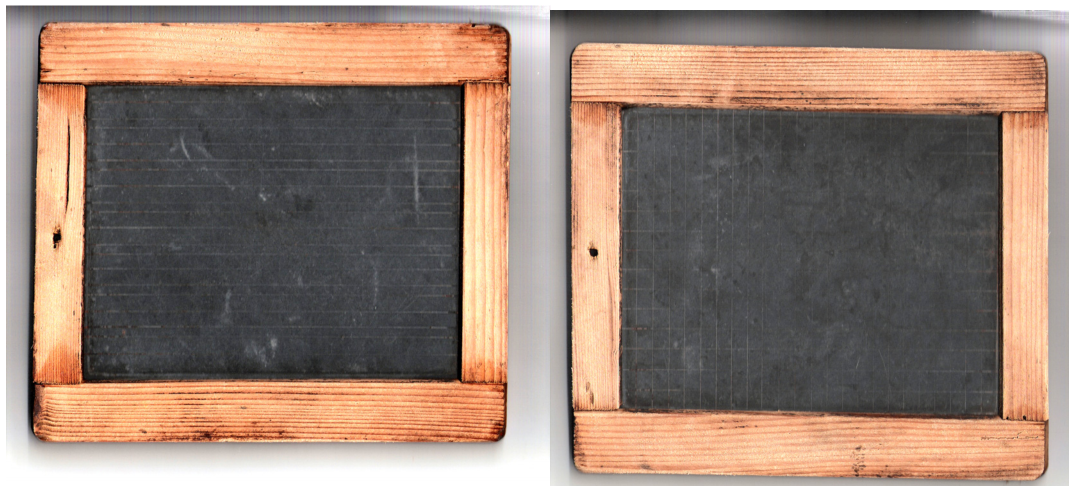
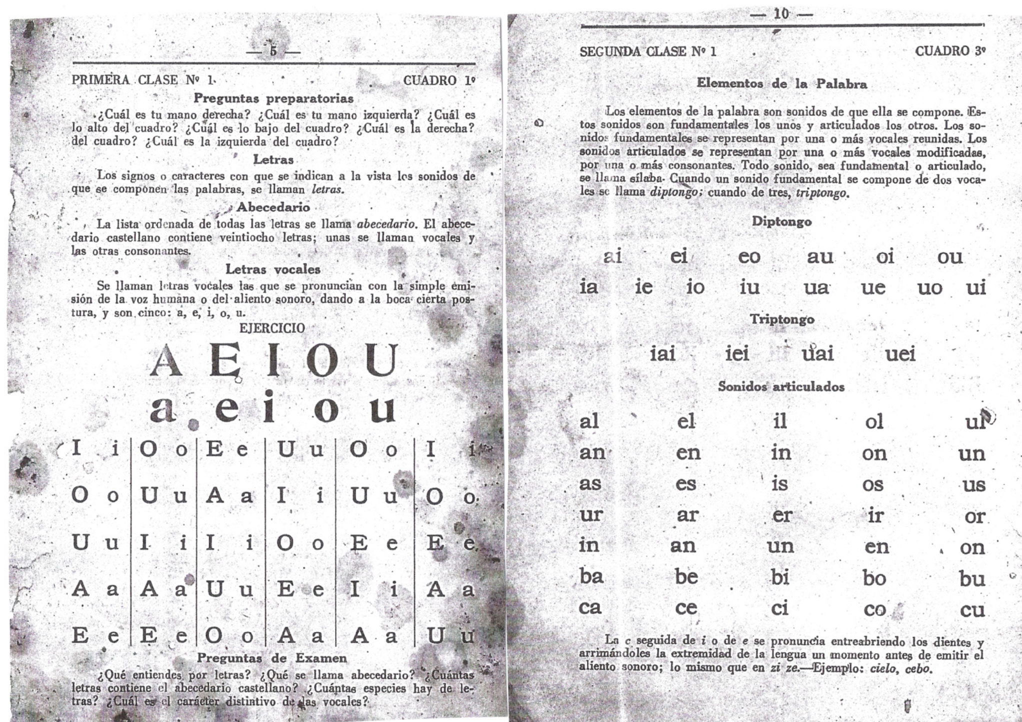


*Figure 22*. Small blackboard for handwriting and arithmetic operations.

Don Emiliano recalled that "some families owned small blackboards for their children to share at home, to write down their assignments and to practice

handwriting and arithmetic lessons in class." He continued telling me that he was only able to attend school until the second grade, and he quit because his parents needed help laboring in the fields, but he proudly asserted that "what I learned in two years could not be compared even to what you learn in elementary or high schools nowadays. Those teachers were strict, but they were devoted and had passion for teaching."

For Don Emiliano, *La Citolégia*, was his primary book for learning to read and write in first grade (Figure 23). This first book followed a phonics method for teaching reading and writing and spelling lessons.



— 5 —

PRIMERA CLASE Nº 1 CUADRO 1º

**Preguntas preparatorias**

¿Cuál es tu mano derecha? ¿Cuál es tu mano izquierda? ¿Cuál es lo alto del cuadro? ¿Cuál es lo bajo del cuadro? ¿Cuál es la derecha? del cuadro? ¿Cuál es la izquierda del cuadro?

**Letras**

Los signos o caracteres con que se indican a la vista los sonidos de que se componen las palabras, se llaman *letras.*

**Abecedario**

La lista ordenada de todas las letras se llama *abecedario*. El abecedario castellano contiene veintiocho letras; unas se llaman vocales y las otras consonantes.

**Letras vocales**

Se llaman letras vocales las que se pronuncian con la simple emisión de la voz humana o del aliento sonoro, dando a la boca cierta postura, y son cinco: a, e, i, o, u.

EJERCICIO

A E I O U

a e i o u

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I i | O o | E e | U u | O o | I i |
| O o | U u | A a | I i | U u | O o |
| U u | I i | I i | O o | E e | E e |
| A a | A a | U u | E e | I i | A a |
| E e | E e | O o | A a | A a | U u |

**Preguntas de Examen**

¿Qué entiendes por letras? ¿Qué se llama abecedario? ¿Cuántas letras contiene el abecedario castellano? ¿Cuántas especies hay de letras? ¿Cuál es el carácter distintivo de las vocales?

— 10 —

SEGUNDA CLASE Nº 1 CUADRO 3º

**Elementos de la Palabra**

Los elementos de la palabra son sonidos de que ella se compone. Estos sonidos son fundamentales los unos y articulados los otros. Los sonidos fundamentales se representan por una o más vocales reunidas. Los sonidos articulados se representan por una o más vocales modificadas, por una o más consonantes. Todo sonido, sea fundamental o articulado, se llama sílaba. Cuando un sonido fundamental se compone de dos vocales se llama *diptongo;* cuando de tres, *triptongo.*

**Diptongo**

ai ei eo au oi ou

ia ie io iu ua ue uo ui

**Triptongo**

iai iei uai uei

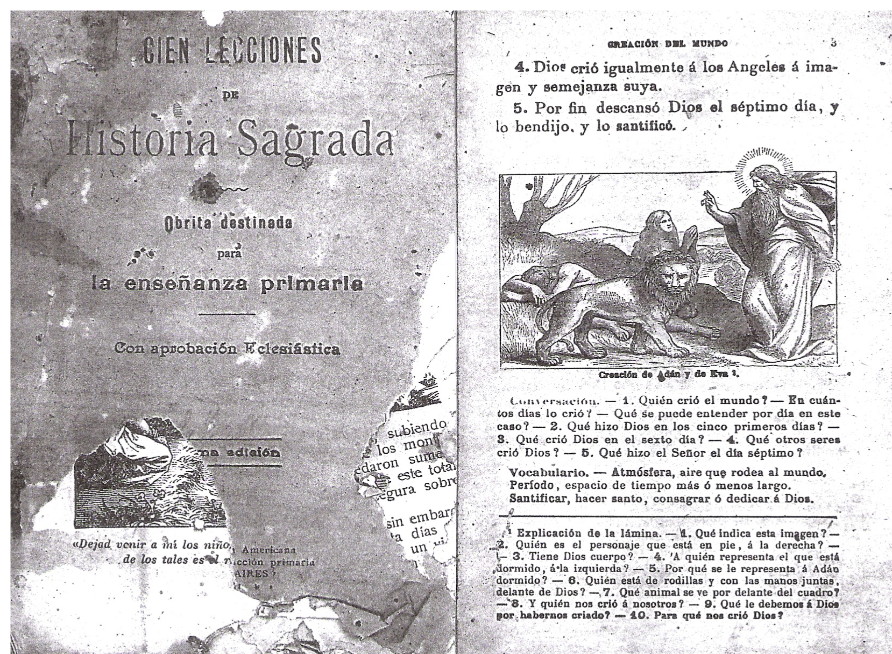
**Sonidos articulados**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| al | el | il | ol | ul |
| an | en | in | on | un |
| as | es | is | os | us |
| ur | ar | er | ir | or |
| in | an | un | en | on |
| ba | be | bi | bo | bu |
| ca | ce | ci | co | cu |

La *c* seguida de *i* o de *e* se pronuncia entreabriendo los dientes y arrimándoles la extremidad de la lengua un momento antes de emitir el aliento sonoro; lo mismo que en *zi ze.*—Ejemplo: *cielo, cebo.*

*Figure 23*. Excerpts of lessons from *La Citolégia*.

Another significant feature that deserves notice is the role of religion in elementary school. Don Emiliano recalls very well how from Monday through Friday his teacher, Doña Alicia, taught regular classes on arithmetic, language, history, and good manners, but on Saturday school children received instruction on religion. From his small wooden box, Don Emiliano pulls out an example of a small illustrated book titled *Cien Lecciones de Historia Sagrada: Obra Destinada para la Enseñanza Primaria*. [A Hundred Lessons of Sacred History: A Little Primer for Elementary School Teaching] (Figure 24).



CIEN LECCIONES
DE
Historia Sagrada
Obrita destinada
para
la enseñanza primaria
Con aprobación Eclesiástica

CREACIÓN DEL MUNDO 3

4. Dios crió igualmente á los Angeles á imagen y semejanza suya.

5. Por fin descansó Dios el séptimo día, y lo bendijo, y lo santificó.

Creación de Adán y de Eva [1].

Conversación. — 1. Quién crió el mundo? — En cuántos días lo crió? — Qué se puede entender por día en este caso? — 2. Qué hizo Dios en los cinco primeros días? — 3. Qué crió Dios en el sexto día? — 4. Qué otros seres crió Dios? — 5. Qué hizo el Señor el día séptimo?

Vocabulario. — Atmósfera, aire que rodea al mundo. Período, espacio de tiempo más ó menos largo. Santificar, hacer santo, consagrar ó dedicar á Dios.

[1] Explicación de la lámina. — 1. Qué indica esta imagen? — 2. Quién es el personaje que está en pie, á la derecha? — 3. Tiene Dios cuerpo? — 4. A quién representa el que está dormido, á la izquierda? — 5. Por qué se le representa á Adán dormido? — 6. Quién está de rodillas y con las manos juntas, delante de Dios? — 7. Qué animal se ve por delante del cuadro? — 8. Y quién nos crió á nosotros? — 9. Qué le debemos á Dios por habernos criado? — 10. Para qué nos crió Dios?

*Figure 24*. A hundred lessons of Sacred History: A little primer for elementary school teaching.

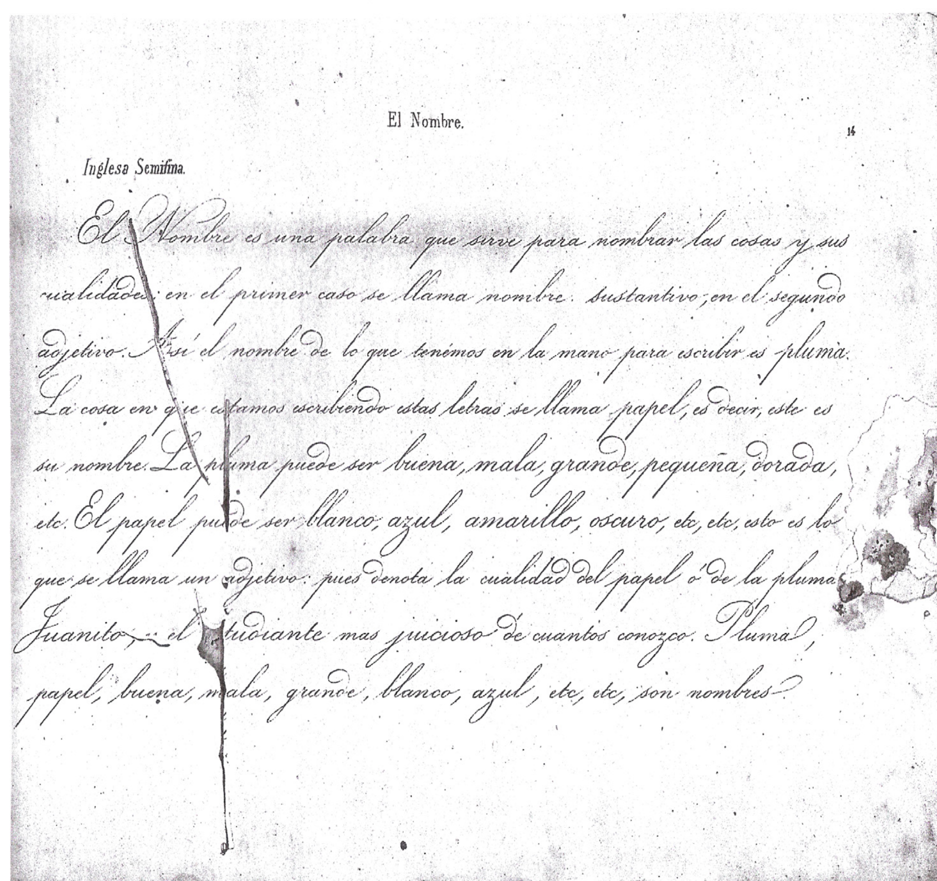
This illustrated book was intended for teaching religion to children, but it also functioned as a very useful book for practicing literacy. It contains stories

from the Old and New Testament with questions for reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. It was also the responsibility of the schoolteacher to prepare students for their first communion through catechism instruction on Saturday classes. This teaching of religion was not directly sponsored by the Catholic church as an institution. Instead it was part of the curricula for Federal schools.

Don Emiliano considers that learning to write was another important component of his formal schooling and that writing granted some prestige to households in the rural communities. The vividness of his early writing memories suggests the significance of both personal and public uses for writing. At a very early age, Don Emiliano seemed to understand the value assigned to writing in society because of his father's example of writing documents to the community using careful handwriting. After finishing his second grade and leaving formal schooling, Don Emiliano continued to practice his handwriting, and he fondly recalled moments with his best friends:

> I used to get together with my friends *Rigoberto* and *Alcides*. We brought candles and a kerosene lamp to light my room, and stayed practicing our handwriting until eleven at night with this method [he shows me a Palmer method handbook]. We used a bottle of ink and a fountain pen to do penmanship. That's how I embellished my handwriting, to send love letters to the girls [Don Emiliano laughs].

Don Emiliano has preserved a very old Palmer method book printed in Mexico that he received as a present from a family friend. This method combines the teaching of handwriting with grammar lessons (Figure 25) and offers models for receipts and for bills of exchange (see Appendix C).



El Nombre. 14

Inglesa Semifina.

El Nombre es una palabra que sirve para nombrar las cosas y sus
cualidades: en el primer caso se llama nombre sustantivo; en el segundo
adjetivo. Así el nombre de lo que tenemos en la mano para escribir es pluma.
La cosa en que estamos escribiendo estas letras se llama papel, es decir, este es
su nombre. La pluma puede ser buena, mala, grande, pequeña, dorada,
etc. El papel puede ser blanco, azul, amarillo, oscuro, etc, etc, esto es lo
que se llama un adjetivo: pues denota la cualidad del papel ó de la pluma.
Juanito, es el estudiante mas juicioso de cuantos conozco. Pluma,
papel, buena, mala, grande, blanco, azul, etc, etc, son nombres.

*Figure 25*. Excerpt from a grammar lesson on nouns and English style font.

With this Palmer method, Don Emiliano continued practicing his penmanship and learning how to write different documents both for personal and public use through the imitation of the models provided in the book. He also

recalled a book called "*Recetario de los Amantes*" (A Recipe Book for Lovers) that contained models for love letter writing. He has fond memories of a time when he read love letters that one of his friends sent to a girl friend. Don Emiliano used to imitate them. His friend had beautiful handwriting and wrote long love letters. "Since I fell in love so many times [laughs] when I was young, I wrote many love letters to the girls. I used the book *Recetario de los Amantes* several times because I needed beautiful words to embellish my letters," he said. Don Emiliano reached into his wooden box and showed me a draft of one of these love letters (Figure 26).

*Figure 26.* Don Emiliano's love letter draft.

Years later, Don Emiliano put his writing skills into practice for a wide variety of purposes ranging from personal to social writing. He began his own business by opening a small grocery store for the community. He recalls how helpful it was for him to be able to write and to perform arithmetic operations to keep records of his own business. He showed me a notebook that contained

credit records of people who bought groceries such as rice, vegetable fat, and candles at his old store (Figure 27).

*Figure 27*. Excerpt from Don Emiliano's business record notebook.

Don Emiliano also told me of the first time he bought land in *El Caserío Las Guamas*; he wrote the land deed and from that point on Don Emiliano kept writing documents for people in the community, a literacy social practice that he saw his father performing many times. He also pointed out that "the spoken

word was like a document then when doing any kind of business." However, he preferred to use his writing skills to make deals on stamped paper (Figure 28).

*Figure 28.* Example of Don Emiliano's loan document.

Don Emiliano mentioned that people usually hung on the walls of their houses *El Almanaque de los Hermanos Rojas* [The Rojas Brothers' Almanac]. It was a guide in this rural Andean community for planting and predicting the weather, but he added that "this almanac has been substituted by almanacs

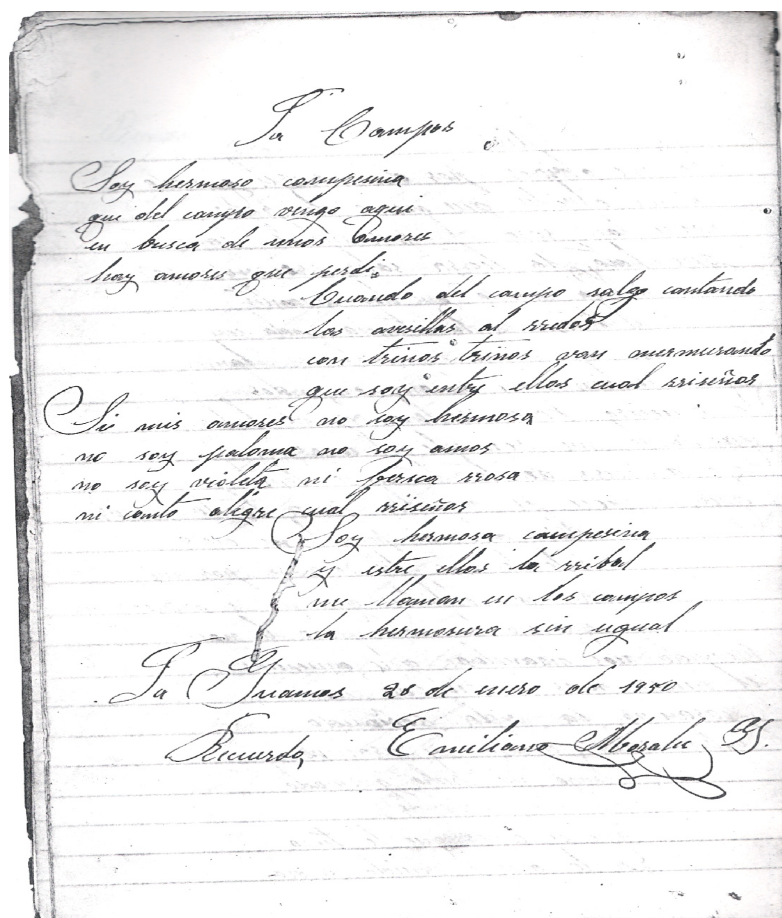
given to people in grocery stores nowadays, and they aren't as good as *El Almanaque de los Hermanos Rojas*." According to Don Emiliano, this almanac contained more details regarding weather, astrological signs and onomastic explanations.

Home remedy notes were other pieces of writing Don Emiliano shared with me (Figure 29). Since herbal medicine has been one of his major interests in his life; he invited me to see the great variety of curative plants on his property, while he explained their uses. His wealth of popular knowledge speaks to how people become local experts through their daily activities and the knowledge they have gathered across several generations. Popular knowledge that Don Emiliano has written down is the example that follows that requires both text and quantitative literacies:

Pastillas colmun con limonada y
en la noche flotacion, aceite de comer
un poquito de aceite de tartago tuetano
aguardiente canela y agua florida,
a los pies le ponen plantillas ojas
de naranjo tuetano carbon molido
aceite de comer y canela esto por
3 dias el miercoles se purga con-
un purgante antivilioso san carlos
se lo tomo en jugo de naranja
dulce serediso de flor de cauco y ojas
de son, pasando tres dias el
purgante sigue tomando las table-
tas efedrina una en la mañana
y otro en la noche y al termi-
nar las pastillas deja pasar
tre dias sigue tomando las cu-
charadas antipaludica indias 3
cucharadas al dia, serediso de sera-
da un concha de quina y manzana

*Figure 29.* One page from Don Emiliano's home remedies notebook.

In the last part of the interview, Don Emiliano talked about popular romance poetry that he heard and memorized as a young adult. On one page of a notebook, he pointed out a poem he had learned by heart during his spare time. The title of the poem is *La Campesina* [The Country Girl]; he wrote it down in 1950 (Figure 30).



La Campos

Soy hermoso campesina
que del campo vengo aqui
en busca de unos amores
hay amores que perdi.

Cuando del campo salgo cantando
los avesillas al rredor
con trinos trinos van murmurando
que soy entre ellos cual rriseñor

Si mis amores no soy hermosa
no soy paloma no soy amor
no soy violeta ni fresca rrosa
ni canto alegre cual rriseñor

Soy hermosa campesina
y entre ellos la rrival
me llaman en los campos
la hermosura sin igual

La Granos 28 de enero de 1950

Recuerdo, Emiliano Morales B.

*Figure 30*. The country girl poem from Don Emiliano’s notebook.

At one point in his adult life, Don Emiliano built houses and worked as a carpenter. “I learned these crafts just by watching people doing them,” he expressed. According to Don Emiliano, the knowledge he acquired regarding textual and numerical literacy continues to be of much value for knowing and reading standard measurements.

Don Emiliano’s inventory of literacy practices illustrates both the richness of oral and literate practices and the funds of knowledge in a local Andean family and community in which he was raised. But his inventory also offers a glimpse

at the various texts and quantitative literacy technologies he has used through every stage of his life. His interest in reading and writing were beyond the normal experience during those times and led him to become a sort of a local expert and literacy broker in his community and neighboring ones. Don Emiliano employed his literacy knowledge for both personal and social purposes. His early years are a combination of a life of struggle and lack of opportunities that people often experienced in the 1930s and 40s. But despite this hardship; his literacy practices symbolize his desire to become literate and the ability to integrate new literacy practices and technologies as a response to personal and social changes. Through Don Emiliano's story, I attempted to sketch how people acquired literacy during those years in this farming area based on specific scenes of his literacy life, what materials he used, and what he represented as a literate person for the community. Additionally, Don Emiliano's literacy story illustrates for teachers how literacy serves different purposes—personal and socioeconomic—and how these purposes need to be incorporated in the teaching of literacy in schools.

## Ramiro's Oral *Testimonio* of his Literacy Life

My intention to use t*estimonio* as a method of inquiry and representation offers the opportunity to honor normally silenced voices for this literacy research project. That is to say, to recognize research participants' right to speak for themselves—"an affirmation of the authority of personal experience" (Beverley,2000, p. 556). Beverley (2005) defines *testimonio* as

a novel or novella-length narrative, produced in the form of a printed text, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts. Its unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience. (p. 547)

Testimonio de Ramiro

*Yo estaba más o menos de unos siete años cuando me anotaron en la escuela y mi abuelo ya estaba enfermo. Aquí en la comunidad no había carretera, ni transporte, nada. Bueno me anotaron y empecé a ir a la escuela en la mañana, pero tenía que pararme antes de las seis de la mañana porque tenía mucho trabajo que hacer: moler las arepas, traer las tres vacas, mientras mamá me hacia un poquitico de comida.*

*Bueno, después me terciaba la mochila para ir a la escuela. Al tantito ya estaba empezando a aprender las vocales. Ya estaba empezando hacer las letras cuando mi abuelo se enfermó. Entonces me mandaban que tiene que ir pa' tal parte, que tiene que ir pa' otra parte. Entonces yo iba solo un día a la escuela. Cuando regresaba a la casa, comíamos a las tres. Después a buscar leña, a buscar los becerros. Si. Yo en las noches con una velita, yo hacia las tareitas. Cuando yo empecé, la maestra me ponía a decir y a escribir el abecedario. Ahora yo veo que no es así. Yo tuve una sola clase de multiplicación, más nada. Yo dividir,*

*si nunca llegué a tener clase. En ese tiempo la profesora se preocupaba porque aprendiéramos.*

*También una vez a mi esa maestra me castigó. En ese tiempo se usaba una regla de palo. Tenía el metraje y todo pero era de gruesa más o menos tres dedos y era como cuarenta centímetros o cincuenta de larga.*

*Cuando mi abuelo murió, mi mamá quedó sola y mis hermanos pequeños. Hasta ahí yo fui a la escuela. Un año estuve en la escuela. Como éramos muy pobres, no teníamos nada. Yo comencé a trabajar. Mire mi mamá y nosotros si que sufrimos. ¡Yo si sé lo que es pobreza! ¡En verdad, mamá si ha sufrido! Y el abuelo nos dejó un terreno con la casita pero casi lo perdimos porque los papeles eran privados. Así se hacían antes. Mamá tuvo que vender las vacas y junto con el dinero que yo gané de mi trabajo, pagamos en el registro y legalizamos los papeles.*

*Entonces ese fue mi problema, yo aprendí apenas a leer y a escribir las letras porque claro, yo tenía inteligencia pero la cosa es que yo no pude por la pobreza. A pesar de todo, yo siempre más o menos fui practicando con el libro que se llamaba Pablito. Era un librito de treinta hojas. Otro el de Rosita era más grandecito. Había un libro que era del perrito. Ese era más*

*grande. Ese ya lo utilizaban los muchachos de tercero porque ahí daban hasta cuarto grado.*

*Y yo de escritura sé poco porque yo me interesé más por leer que escribir. Yo escribo el nombre, conozco las letras pero la escritura no la practiqué. Cuando estaba trabajando en Caracas y mi familia me mandaba cartas, yo las agarraba y las leía. Yo las volvía a repasar y ahí entendía. A mi me gusta leer el periódico y los libros que traen los niños, y les digo conozcan y escriban la "a" y luego les digo búsquenme la "a" como me decía la profesora, pa' que ellos vayan aprendiendo.*

*Uno fue aprendiendo cosas desde pequeño. Es como por decir algo, yo miro una res y yo le digo a usted más o menos esa res da tantos kilos. Yo le conozco a usted el ganado. Uno tiene que conocer las cosas. Uno esas cosas, no las aprendió por la escuela. El mismo negocio me fue enseñando y mire aprendiendo las cosas usted trabaja con lo que sea.*

*Por ejemplo con la tierra, uno se vuelve técnico trabajando con las matas. Vamos a suponer, viene un perito agrónomo, ve la tierra y entonces dice mire esta tierra le hace falta fertilizante después de hacerle el estudio en un laboratorio, pero a la hora de la verdad, es más técnico el que la está trabajando porque el campesino conoce el tipo de tierra y ya sabe lo que se logra dentro de ella.*

*Bueno, yo no tuve ninguna oportunidad de estudio, pero me hubiera gustado estudiar cosas como pa' administrar una empresa o algo así. Yo digo que uno pa' administrar una empresa, teniendo un poquito de idea y habiendo una persona que lo ayude, uno puede administrar una empresa.*

Ramiro's Testimonio

(I was about seven years old when I started school and my grandfather was already ill. Here in the community, there was not paved road or public transportation either, nothing. Well, I started to go to school in the morning, but I used to get up before six because I had a lot of chores to do: grind the corn for the *arepas*, bring the three cows for milking while my mom prepared me a little bit of food.

Later, I put on my rucksack to go to school. Soon, I was beginning to learn the vowels. I was learning to write the letters when my grandfather got very sick. Then, my mom used to send me to one place, to another one, and I just went to school once a week.

When I returned home from school, we ate around three. Then, I had to bring firewood and the calves. Yes. I did my homework at night with the light of a candle. The teacher asked me to read and write the alphabet. Nowadays, I see that it is not like that. I only

had one class for multiplication. I never had a class for learning to divide. The teacher was very concerned about our learning.

Also, the teacher punished me once. In that time, she punished me with a wooden ruler. It was about five centimeters thick and forty to fifty centimeters long. When my grandfather died, my mom was alone with my siblings. I stopped going to school in that time. I attended school for one year. We were very poor, and we didn't have anything at all. I began to work. Listen, my mom and I suffered a lot. I do know what poverty is! Really, my mom has suffered a lot! And my grandfather left us a little house with a piece of land, but we almost lost it because the documents were private. People did not register documents then. My mom had to sell the cows and with the little money I earned from working, we registered the documents.

Then, that was my problem of learning when I could not attend school. I just learned to read and write the letters. Of course, I was intelligent, but the thing is that I could not attend school because we were poor. Yet, I kept practicing with the book called *Pablito*. It was thirty pages long. Another one called *Rosita* was bigger. There was a book about a dog. That one was big. It was used by the third graders because this school was from first grade to fourth grade.

I do not know much about writing because I was more interested in reading than in writing. I write my name, I know the letters, but I did not practice writing. I used to read letters that my family sent me when I was working in Caracas. I reread these letters and then I could understand them. I like to read the newspaper and the books that my nephews bring home, and I tell them look at the letter "a" and write it down. And then, look for the letter "a" as my teacher taught me, to help them learn the alphabet.

I have been learning things since I was little. For example, I look at the cattle and I could tell you how many kilograms it weighs. I know the cattle very well. One has to know the things. You do not learn these things in school. My day-to-day experience doing business taught me. And when you learn your business, you can work with almost anything.

By cultivating the land, one becomes an expert at working with agriculture. For example, an agronomist usually comes and takes a sample of your land and based on the lab results he tells you that the land needs fertilizers. But that is all just his advice opinion, and in the end, the *campesino* is the expert who knows the land and the type of crop you can harvest in it.

Well, I did not have any opportunity to study, but I would have liked to study something related to business administration. I tell you

> that for one to manage a company, having just a tiny idea and a person to help you out, one can administer a business.)

When I heard Ramiro's oral *testimonio*, I asked myself, how many people like Ramiro have been in our Andes Mountains—with their sufferings, but rich oral and vernacular literacy experiences and funds of knowledge—in a world that continues to devalue their *saberes populares* (popular knowledge)? His *testimonio* cries out for teachers, researchers and curriculum policy makers to learn more about the individual and collective worlds of rural people, and find ways where their vernacular knowledge and traditional oral and literate habits can be meshed well with formal schooling. Yet this dialogue of knowledges—popular and academic—needs to be grounded on values of respect, understanding, commonality, and ethics.

Ramiro's testimonio also describes three issues that deserve notice. First, Ramiro talked about how his mother almost lost the land and house inherited from her father. It was very common in Andean communities to request the service of a literate person in the community to write private documents for house or land property, but these documents were not legal; they were intended for private matters among family members. His mother had only a private document and Ramiro's mother had to hire a lawyer to legalize the document. For Ramiro and his mother, it was a difficult situation because they did not have money to pay the lawyer, and his mother had to sell her cows and also use Ramiro's savings. Second, Ramiro did not learn to write because he only

attended school for a year, and first grade teachers only taught children learning to read and write the alphabet, words and short phrases. The emphasis on writing was in second grade, and Ramiro could not learn to write because he had to quit school. Third, in the last part of his *testimonio* Ramiro expressed that to cultivate the land; farmers do not follow recommendations from outsiders or experts in agriculture because the *campesinos* do what they have learned through generations, and they become local experts in agriculture. In Ramiro's testimonio, learning about agriculture takes plays in an informal way by doing these activities daily—learning by doing.

In Ramiro's oral *testimonio*, his education became his day-to-day life since he dropped out of formal schooling at a very early age due to the economic circumstances surrounding his family life. In his interview, Ramiro recalled how at his house a group of nearby *abuelitos* (elderly neighbors) used to gather to tell stories in the evenings. He has fond memories of these gatherings because these *abuelitos*' stories taught him many lessons of wisdom. Ramiro expressed that these community encounters as he was growing up provided him with popular knowledge, skills for livestock dealing and cultivating the land. "One's intelligence to know those things (livestock dealing and cultivating the land) is not the result of school knowledge," he expressed in his *testimonio*. Despite not having finished first grade; he has been successful in his life as a livestock dealer and half-owner of a butcher's shop. His accomplishment in life is an example that formal education needs not be the

road to economic takeoff. Ramiro did not have the opportunity to receive vocational counseling in formal school, but experience provided him the talent and skills for choosing an occupation in life. Though he succeeded, Ramiro regretted missing a formal education:

> Well, I did not have any opportunity to study, but I would have liked to study something related to business administration. I tell you that for one to manage a company, having just a tiny idea and a person to help you out, one can administer a business.

Finally, Ramiro represents the oral memory—private and collective—for his community. Ramiro's retelling of popular folktales that he heard from *abuelitos* in his childhood and adolescent years makes him a genuine *cuentero* (storyteller) who entertains both young children and adults for hours. Additionally, Ramiro is intimately acquainted with local history with details of family trees and stories related to families from the community. Because Ramiro is a storyteller, he was invited to participate in the school literacy project illustrating what Walter Benjamin (1968) writes: "the storyteller takes what he tells from experience-his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (p. 82). The incorporation of stories from the community into our language classroom offered a space for what Benjamin calls "the ability to exchange experiences ... (that) has fallen in value" (pp. 83-84). Ramiro's *testimonio* also speaks of what Louis Moll (1994) calls communities' "funds of knowledge" and Barton and Hamilton (1998)

identify as “vernacular knowledge.” These researchers found in their studies that people in local communities posses popular expertise in areas such as agriculture, home economics, construction, religion, gardening, family and local history.

Lucia’s Story: “*One Day, I Would Like To Be A Teacher*”

A few days after completing the school literacy project for my dissertation study, I returned to Lucia’s (pseudonym) class for my last interview, an interview that I felt ethically compelled to carry out. Her story represents one of those events that as a qualitative researcher “breaks your heart” to borrow Ruth Behar’s (1996) expression. Perhaps because Lucia’s story exemplifies two things: First, the harm caused by teachers when students are negatively labeled. Second, the lives of many girls who in this rural community just cherished the dream of being somebody, but never had the chance for that dream to come true.

“I will never learn to read.” These were Lucia’s recurring words articulated during the first interview at the beginning stage of the school literacy project. I inquired of her about the possible reasons behind her statement, and she explained that her teachers from third grade on told her that she did not want to learn to read. Yet she felt that her teachers did not have any interest in helping her, and she could not learn to read because she did not have the opportunity to practice it in class. Lucia also described how her fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Natalia (pseudonym), even told her to find assistance at home to learn to read or she

would be at risk of not succeeding in elementary school. These frustrating experiences at school damaged Lucia's self-esteem to the point that she felt she was a failure. Lucia explained that, because she was a struggling reader, her teachers never had her participate in activities such as reading aloud, like the other students.

After learning about her literacy life in school, I became very interested in her case. Reading the transcripts of her interview several times, two issues emerged from her conversation: the need to learn about children's family literacy practices, and the harm caused to students when they are labeled deficient. Lucia's story reminds me of Strickland's (1995) own reflection when she writes that labels "tell the world more about what students *are not* capable of doing than what they *are* capable of doing. And more importantly, such labels become who these people are" (p. xi, emphasis in original).

Following her initial interview, I set out to learn more about Lucia's family. She comes from a large household composed of her grandparents, her single mother, two uncles, three aunts and one cousin. Her grandparents are not literate, and the rest attended school through second grade, but the only literacy task they learned to do was to sign their names when required for legal purposes. They never learned to read and write at school.

Lucia occasionally misses school because she has to help her mom to find firewood to cook, bring breakfast and lunch to her uncles in the fields, and watch the cows with her cousin, Luis. Her teachers do not believe Lucia's

explanations that she must help her mother. Additionally, Lucia's literacy worsens because her family does not recognize the value in attending school, the family feels is most important to do the chores at home. Her family does not exhibit any high expectations for her success in school because for those who attended school in the family, the learning was minimal. Lucia's teachers also failed to learn about her family because there is a tendency to view children and parents from poor families as deficient. When the teachers asked Lucia to find help at home with her reading difficulties, her teachers ignored the fact that nobody could serve at home as a role model for literacy learning. Lucia's teachers did not understand her home situation because it was unusual.

In the initial stages of the school literacy project, learning about Lucia's family background and her literacy learning was of a big help to make her feel part of what Smith (1988) calls the "literacy club." In Lucia's case, I incorporated some of Smith's characteristics for language learning—spoken or written. Smith explains that language learners become part of the world of literacy when reading is: (1) meaningful—reading materials that make sense to learners, (2) collaborative—reading as a collaborative endeavor where teachers and classmates help other literacy learners understand what they want to understand or express, (3) no-risking—reading in a comfortable atmosphere where literacy learners do not feel left out or laughed at. Combining these three characteristics was very helpful in providing the needed understanding and support that Lucia required in her initial stages to become a successful literacy

project member. The problem was not with Lucia's desire to learn to read, but with how she was taught to read.

Additionally, to help Lucia become an active and avid reader in the school literacy project I drew on Vygotsky's (1987) principle about the role of more knowledgeable others to provide a model of fluent reading. In small groups or paired reading, her classmates modeled read-aloud stories for Lucia. I could see Lucia's vivid eyes moving as quickly as her classmates when they took turns for reading stories. I realized that she enjoyed listening to the other kids reading and her eyes were dancing through the words and illustrations in the story. After a month, she was losing her fear and beginning to read faster. Lucia felt secure and she received praise. She eventually became one of the most avid readers in the literacy project. Lucia was reading in class twice a week and she was requesting books to take home.

During the last interview, Lucia recalled about an episode with her fourth and fifth grade teachers who thought that she could never learn to read. These teachers were surprised because the sixth grade teacher selected Lucia as the student who would read the speech for the celebration of National Flag Day on March 12. After the school event, "these two teachers approached me to ask who taught me reading," she said. "And they told me you are reading very well now." But this was just one event that made her proud of being a member of the school literacy project. As the interview went on, Lucia recalled her new literacy experiences at home. She became a sort of *literacy broker* to the rest of her

family and even the reading teacher for her cousin, Luis, and for her neighbor's 5 year-old girl, Doris. Lucia mentioned that when someone brings newspapers, obituaries, and mass service calendars, she reads them aloud to all her family. Lucia added that her family nowadays feels proud of her because she is the only one who knows how to read and write at home. She also expressed that she enjoys teaching reading to Doris and her cousin Luis with the book "*Coquito*," a primer book for teaching reading in elementary schools.

Finally, Lucia expressed that "one day she would like to be a teacher." There is, however, one problem for Lucia's dream because her family cannot afford to send her to high school to continue with her education, and her grandfather does not want Lucia to continue studying. Her dream of becoming a teacher is the same dream cherished by many girls in her local community. Although Lucia can not attend high school right now, she will have the opportunity to continue studying through a new government sponsored educational program, *Misión Ribas*. This program is intended for young and adults from urban and rural communities who can not afford to attend formal education. As a researcher, I have the responsibility to continue helping out this local community once the research project is over. I believe that it is my ethical responsibility to provide Lucia and other people in the St. Isidro community with the opportunity to take advantage of this educational program. *Misión Ribas* can be implemented in the St. Isidro community through a partnership between the municipal government and state universities.

I want to finish Lucia's story with a poem that brings together different dreams of girls from this community whose only opportunity to get a job is to go to small towns or big cities to work as domestics. At one time many of these girls cherished a dream of being someone else. I wrote this poem based on my recollections of my informal talks and field notes while visiting families during weekends when their daughters returned from their jobs as domestics.

---

A *Campesina*'s Dream

I wanted to be a *secretary*

a *hairdresser*

a *dressmaker*

but I'm only a *campesina*

with many dreams

wandering through the fields.

I wanted to be a *bachiller*

a *teacher*

like *Mrs. Pérez*

but I'm only a *campesina*

with many dreams

wandering through the fields.

But wake up!

you can't be that

you were born

to plunge the fields

with your dreams.

---

Family Literacy Portraits in St. Isidro Nowadays

Another important theme to emerge from this study was family literacy involvement to support their children's literacy learning and schoolwork in this rural community. First, families value greatly the education that their children receive because the families believe that there are better opportunities nowadays than before. Second, although with very limited literacy skills, women find ways to support their children's schoolwork and literacy learning. What I observed women doing with their children challenged a widespread belief that because poor families did not have educational opportunities, they do not have the capacity to support their children's learning (Taylor, 1997). I witnessed during my several visits how mothers and other women who took care of the neighbors' children helped them to learn to read and write, and they guided them with the school assignments regardless of the multiple work tasks at their homes (Figure 31). It is important to notice that these women did not participate in special training related to family literacy programs or adult educational training to improve their literacy skills; this was a voluntary decision to be part of their

children's education. What I learned from families in this local community contradicts the pervasive belief that disadvantaged families offer inappropriate atmospheres for nurturing language development.

*Figure 31*. Two community women helping kids with literacy and schoolwork.

An analysis of this event supports the view of literacy learning as socially constructed knowledge that builds up through interactions with more experienced members of the community (Vygotsky, 1986). Family involvement in children's language learning calls for literacy researchers to investigate the beliefs and practices held by rural families, but this research needs to honor the authority of family members to speak for themselves which means that literacy researchers need to find ways to incorporate "the voices of family members .… 'Experts' should not speak for them, own the talk, or write family literacy programs in which their voices are not heard" (Taylor, 1997, p. 7). Barton and Hamilton (1998) offer a similar comment because "within family literacy educational initiatives there is often not equal representation of home literacy

and school literacy. School literacy is a dominant literacy, supported by powerful institutions and infiltrating other domains, including the home" (pp. 206-207).

## Summary

These three stories document literacy over time. Don Emiliano's, Ramiro's, and Lucia's stories offer a multilayered picture of what Deborah Brandt (1995) calls accumulated literacies. These stories track literacy development across three generations in a local Andean community. Don Emiliano's story, the literacy documents and artifacts he has accumulated for years represent a historical record of literacy learning in the 1930s and 40s in this Andean community. Ramiro's story symbolizes the collective memory of his community and the craft of a genuine storyteller. Finally, Lucia's story represents the current students who are labeled because they are struggling readers. Yet once children like Lucia are exposed to literacy workshops, they become avid readers and even literacy brokers for their families.

# CHAPTER SIX

## CHILDREN AT WORK: THE REPOSITIONING OF THE LANGUAGE ARTS THROUGH STORIES IN A RURAL SCHOOL

Chapter six brings insights from previous chapters related to oral and written language practices of a local community together with new understandings of literacy and the language arts. First, I briefly examine past and current children's educational opportunities in a rural Andean Venezuelan school setting in relation to the three literacy stories presented in chapter five. Second, I provide the rationale behind my literacy project. In the last section of the chapter, I present an overview of the workings of this approach with a group of sixth graders, and how this approach offers new opportunities to envision literacy classrooms for children where their home literacies, values, needs, and ways of knowing are valued and incorporated into their language classroom.

The three stories used to exemplify literacy learning over time in chapter five provided a basis for thinking about what it looked like to get an education in the past in Venezuela and what is happening today. The research presented in chapter four on the intersections of popular religious beliefs and literacy practices at home along with the findings of chapter five on literacy stories over time helped me to envision and structure the literacy project I describe here, and the kind of opportunities I could make available for children's literacy learning and growth.

First, if I look at Don Emiliano's and Ramiro's stories, it is easy to understand that in both cases they could not continue attending elementary school because of family reasons where boys and girls were needed to help labor in the fields and do home tasks. My interviews with families, including Don Emiliano's and Ramiro's stories, confirmed to me that at the time period when these men were school age, most families felt that two or three years at the most were enough for children to attend schools. Children were only expected to learn to read and sign. Furthermore, although there was a public education system between the 1930s and 60s, education was not compulsory; schools were scarce, and the ones that existed were also located at long walking distances from some communities.

Comparing these two stories to Lucia's, I found that the reasons for Lucia's not attending high school were different. First, being a single mother's daughter and having a grandfather as the patriarchal figure at home created a difficult situation for her. As Lucia expressed in her second interview, her grandfather decided that she should not continue attending school. However, speaking in legal terms in Venezuela at the present time, the rights of children and youth are outlined by two important official documents. First, the *Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela* approved by popular referendum in 1999 under Title III: Duties, Human Rights and Guarantees, Chapter VI on Culture and Educational Rights, Article 103, states the following:

Toda persona tiene derecho a una educación integral, de calidad, permanente, en igualdad de condiciones y oportunidades, sin más limitaciones que las derivadas de sus aptitudes, vocación, y aspiraciones. La educación es obligatoria en todos los niveles, desde la maternal hasta el nivel medio diversificado. La impartida en las instituciones del Estado es gratuita hasta el pregrado universitario. A tal fin, el Estado realizará una inversión prioritaria, de conformidad con las recomendaciones de la Organización de las Naciones Unidas. El Estado creará y sostendrá instituciones y servicios suficientemente dotados para asegurar el acceso, y permanencia y culminación en el sistema educativo. Toda persona tiene derecho a una educación integral, de calidad, permanente, en igualdad de condiciones y oportunidades, sin más limitaciones que las derivadas de sus aptitudes, vocación, y aspiraciones. La ley garantizará igual atención a las personas con necesidades especiales o con discapacidad y a quienes se encuentren privados de su libertad o carezcan de condiciones básicas para su incorporación y permanencia en el sistema educativo.

Every person has the right to an integral, high-quality and ongoing education under equal conditions and opportunities, with no limitations other than those resulting from a person’s aptitudes,

> vocation, and aspirations. Education is mandatory at all levels from maternal to the diversified secondary level. Education offered at State institutions is free of charge up to the undergraduate university level. To this end, the State will make investment in public schools a priority in accordance with the United Nations recommendations. The State will create and sustain educational institutions and services with the required facilities and equipment to secure individual's access, permanence and culmination in the educational system. The law will guarantee equal attention to persons with special needs or disabilities, and to those who have been deprived of liberty or do not meet the basic conditions for admission to and continuing enrollment in the educational system.

This part of the right to an education in the Constitution goes along with *The Organic Law for the Protection of the Child and Adolescent* (2000). In Article 53, this law establishes that children and adolescents have the right to an education and the right to be enrolled in the public school system. Additionally, Article 54 promulgates that parents have the obligation to guarantee an education for their children. Parents are compelled by law to register children in a nearby school, to encourage them to attend classes regularly, and to participate in an active way in their children's educational process.

Based on the current laws in Venezuela in regard to children's education, children have access to education as a human right as compared to previous

generations of children like Ramiro and Don Emiliano's childhood experiences. Although the State has the major responsibility to guarantee the fulfillment of this constitutional right, families are also accountable to comply with the law to make sure that their children get an education. Therefore, Lucia's case presented a dilemma for me as a researcher. My role as a researcher limited my possibilities for dealing with this situation because I had to meet the terms of the IRB protocol established for my research.

Although Lucia has the right to receive an education just like the rest of Venezuelan children, Lucia's grandfather attempts to deny her that fundamental right expressed in the Constitution. Yet I felt that my literacy project became an occasion for Lucia to overcome her reading struggles and to turn into an avid reader. It was also very rewarding to hear from her that she acted as a literacy broker at home, and that she would like to become a teacher one day. Lucia's case offers a glimpse of the benefits of my literacy project because, as I will demonstrate in the pages that follow, this project opened new literacy paths for the students who participated in the project as well as the literacy researcher.

## Theoretical Underpinnings of the Literacy Project

Throughout my research journey for this dissertation study, I found that stories played a central role in the lives of my participants—children, families, community and school. As Bruner (1996) states, through the use of stories "we frame the accounts of our cultural origins and our most cherished beliefs" (p. 40).

In his work *The Storyteller* circa 1930s, Walter Benjamin warned about the ending of the art of storytelling and the losing of the value of collective experience as the source for stories. As a literary critic, Benjamin was concerned about the removal of “narrative from the realm of living speech” (p. 87) by the arriving of the techno-globalized age of communications. Approximately fifty-eight years later, Kieran Egan (1989), a researcher and educator, wrote about the neglected role of imagination in learning theories of education. He expressed the following:

> Our most influential learning theories have been formed from research programs that have very largely focused on limited range of children’s logical thinking skills. That research has largely neglected imagination, because imagination is, after all, difficult stuff to get any clear hold on. Consequently the dominant learning theories that have profoundly influenced education, helping to form the dominant model and principles mentioned above, have taken little account of imagination. (p. 2)

Likewise in the last decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, a group of literacy researchers and teachers continue to argue for the value of stories and imagination for education and language learning (Egan, 2006; Gillig, 2000; Pagnucci, 2004; Pahl and Kelly, 2004; Paley, 1990, 2004; Rosen, 1986; Schaafsma, 1989, 1993; Zipes, 1995). Schaafsma (1989)

summarizes succinctly why teachers often disregard stories for learning and why he thinks stories are so important for teaching and learning:

> We who teach often dismiss stories as a primitive form, a form for children, something students need to move 'beyond' for the learning they will have to do in schools. However, stories, as they are grounded as they are in students' lives and concerns, are one important means students have for making sense of their worlds, an important tool for learning. (p. 89)

In Schaafsma's and other scholars' view, stories act as a genuine vehicle to integrate students' home and school literacy learning and education. Yet many curriculum designers and educational policy makers today emphasize decontextualized ways of teaching and learning literacy. They accomplish this via top down language approaches built on phonics and artificial language study rather than utilizing the power of stories and imagination for meaning making and language learning.

Traditional views of language instruction based on mechanical models of cognitive research have been widely disseminated through commercial reading materials. Publishing companies often masquerade traditional literacy views under a label of "authentic" activities, exercises and testing materials eventhough the materials rarely respond "authentically" to students' personal, cultural and home backgrounds, or to their attitudes and interests. Under this view, literacy resources become a tool for the "instrumentalization of the

imagination of children" (Zipes, 1995, pp. 2-3). Additionally, reading textbooks and supplemental resources often undermine both teachers' and students' opportunities for designing their own ways to construct a shared language arts curriculum with the collaboration of all the parties involved—teachers, students and parents.

Therefore, in the school-based literacy project for this research, I decided to make use of stories as a catalyst for oral and written language development for two reasons: (1) to serve as a springboard for the teaching and learning of the language arts: listening, speaking, writing, reading, viewing, drawing, and enacting, and (2) to fuse a local community's oral and literate vernacular practices with school related literacy practices, under a culturally responsive pedagogical approach. Harold Rosen, cited in Zipes (1995), states that

> if the culture of the community is to enter the culture of the school, *its stories must come too* and, more profoundly perhaps, its oral-story-telling traditions must become an acknowledged form of making meaning. (p. 1, emphasis added)

Similarly in his book *Teaching Literacy: Engaging the Imagination of New Readers and Writers*, Kieran Egan (2006) writes about the power of stories in people's lives and in literacy learning and education:

> We constantly use the story form to shape events, to tell our friends about something that happened in the office or an adventure on holiday. This ability to narrate is a central to human

> skill, and those who do it well have both a satisfying ability to clarify and sharpen meanings for themselves and important power is being able to convey information and meaning to others. This power can be greatly valued in all walks of life. It is one of the great skills of orality (the cognitive tool kit of people who live in oral cultures), and its development can lead to enriched literacy. It is also one of the great skills that can make teachers effective in educating. (p. 6)

Visual representation was another issue that I found relevant to include in the design of the literacy school project. Visual representations of the vernacular culture and literacy practices had appeared to be important community elements in all stages of my data collection—the Rosary Rock petroglyph, altars with religious images, *novena* booklets, and literacy documents among others. Participants used these visual representations to communicate life experiences and stories. For that reason, I made visual communication in the form of drawing and picture creation a teaching method in the project. Kostelanetz (1985) states that "much of the best writing depends as much on visual literacy as on verbal literacy; many 'readers' literate in the second aspect are illiterate in the first" (p. 29).

In the same way, Street (2005) also addresses the need to include viewing literacies for students to learn how to handle these practical literacies experienced in their daily lives. This need to insert the use of the visual in the

learning of literacy has increased because of a “pictorial turn” which has taken place in the last years across many disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities (Mitchell, 1994).

Drawing upon the ideas of the above theorists and language researchers and the work of literacy workshops (Atwell, 1998; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1991), and taking into account stories and visual representations as key components of the local community, I worked to develop a flexible model that attempted to forge alternative pathways for children’s language learning in rural schools.

## Home-School Connections: The Literacy Project

For the school literacy project, I proposed a model where stories were at the heart of the acts of communication, both spoken and written (Figure 32).

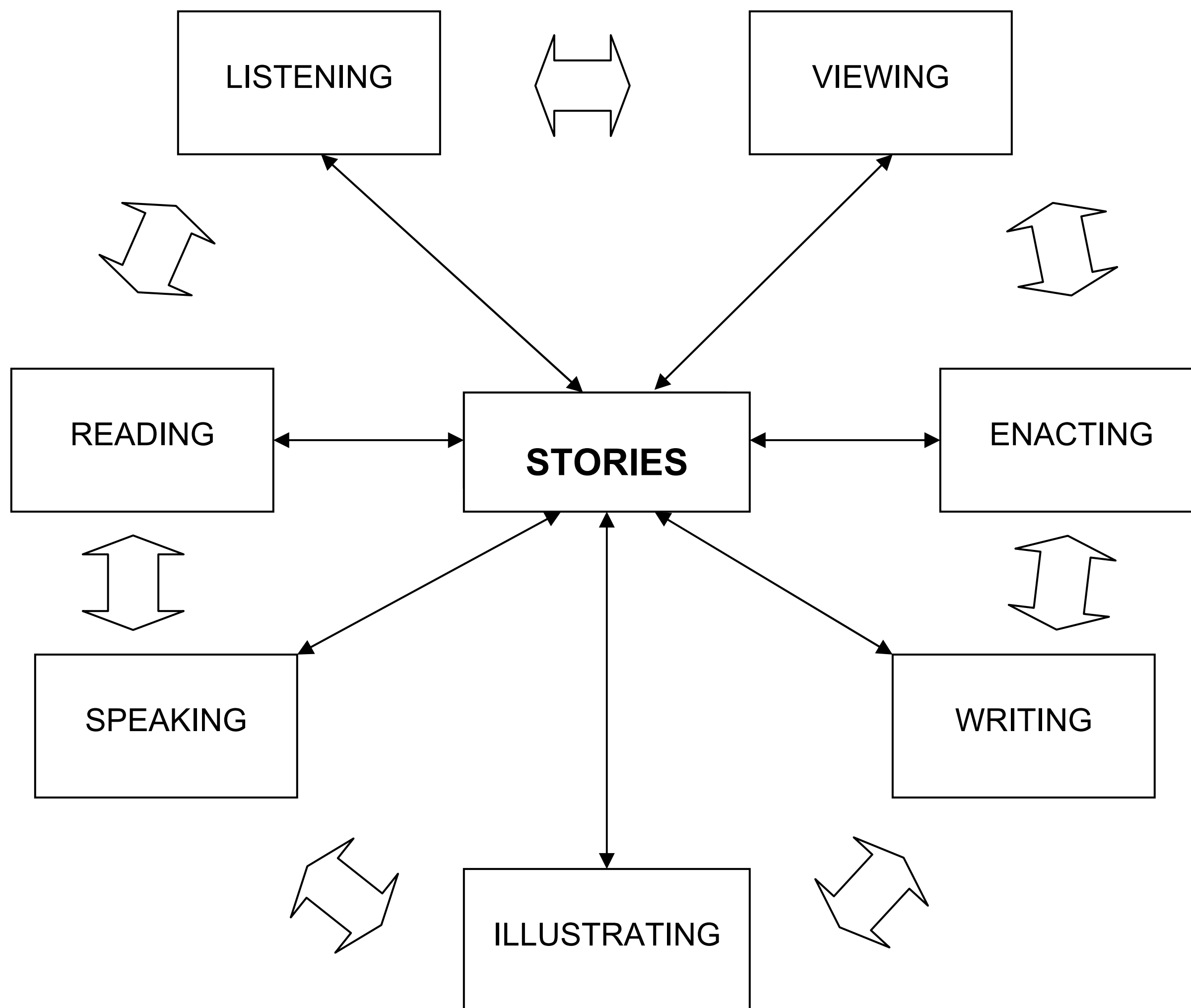



*Figure 32*. Language arts diagram.

From my experiences throughout the school project, I realized that on numerous occasions reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, illustrating and enacting occurred in a continuous way as the arrows in Figure 32 also indicate. There was not a linear progression or step by step approach; it seemed rather more like the elements that compose this figure were working forward and

backwards and forward and vice versa continuously. All these elements interacted with each other.

In this school project, stories reinforced and fostered all the language arts: listening, speaking, reading, writing, illustrating, viewing and enacting. Children's familiarity with stories was used to encourage more engagement and interaction in a nonthreatening learning atmosphere. Furthermore, the inclusion of stories in the classroom provided me with the opportunity to make sure that children's school oral and written forms of language were culturally appropriate, and that those stories drew upon the literacies and life experiences of the children, their families and the local community. This school and community integration will be shown in the stories of some of the children who participated in the project.

The idea of illustrating their stories was also a very important component of the project. On some occasions, children struggled with their writing skills or lacked confidence about writing. The artistic part of the task allowed the students to convey their intended meaning before writing the first draft of their stories.

Many benefits derived from this approach to language learning. For example, when children got the opportunity to tell, perform or talk about their stories with the rest of the class, they developed their oral expression and did so in a meaningful context. Children also improved their speaking and listening skills and learned how to use pitch, volume, gesture, and silence. In *Language*

*Stories and Literacy Lessons*, Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1983) state that the use of oral language in the classroom has a positive influence on children's literacy growth and Kougl (1997) asserts that "*communicating becomes the way to learn*" (p. 5, emphasis in original). She goes on to say that

> In the past, schools emphasized reading and writing for all students. If speech communication got any attention, it was limited to specialized speaking events, such as public speaking or debate, and reserved for small numbers of students. Yet speech communication has always been the means through which we conduct our personal and public lives. (p. 5)

The idea of incorporating for this school project drama through puppetry allowed children to experience and experiment with the language arts in very creative ways within imagined or real life situations. As Manna (1996) asserts:

> Drama itself is a language art, but it is also a learning medium around which many different language forms and functions can be experienced within meaningful contexts. In a given drama, students speak and listen, but they can also be encouraged to read and write. (p. 96)

This literacy project was also developed following fom the work of Nancy Atwell (1998), Lucy Calkins (1994) and Donald Graves (1991). Their ideas about teaching language in workshop classrooms helped me to create a classroom environment where I had the opportunity to respond and give feedback to

children's writing individually and in groups. Children also experienced sharing their writing in this project.

## Stories and the Language Arts in a Sixth-Grade Classroom: The Project in Action

In what follows, I will illustrate the dynamics of a two-day session of the school project with a group of sixth graders in a rural school. I decided to write about this one teaching activity for two reasons: (1) this activity facilitated the integration of the whole concept of language arts in a literacy workshop, and (2) it was one that the children enjoyed the most. For this example I focus on a teaching unit that dealt with using drama and stories through puppetry. The first day, I invited Eglish, a puppeteer, to offer a workshop where kids learned about different types of puppets, how to make and manipulate them, and how to present small puppet shows (Figure 33). Eglish brought six puppets she made based on a conversation we had. I explained to her that the most common characters children used in their stories were dogs, cats, cows, children and witches. The children usually wrote stories about their daily lives in the village. After her small workshop presentation, Eglish allowed children to manipulate the puppets and improvise some shows to practice different voices and to familiarize children with the handling of the puppets.

*Figure 33*. Puppet show demonstration.

This same day, I brought pieces of cardboard and some paint to construct a puppetry stage with the children. I organized the students into small groups where they handled stage making collaboratively. One group was in charge of putting together small pieces of cardboard to build the puppetry stage. Two groups were responsible for drawing scenery and the last two groups had to paint the puppetry stage. The idea behind this initial activity was to introduce the notion of collaboration and camaraderie that was also a central feature throughout this project (Figure 34).

*Figure 34.* Children collaborating to construct the puppetry stage.

After the first day of the language arts workshop was over, the children said they were very motivated and were very eager to continue working the next day. I asked the students to think about the puppets Eglish brought to the class because the following afternoon, they would have the opportunity to choose from those characters, write a story, and create a small play for their puppet presentations.

The second day, I began the class with the organization of small groups. I provided them enough time to talk about their stories in their groups and to decide who was going to play the role of the storyteller. Next, I asked for volunteers to tell their stories. All the groups wanted to volunteer at the same time. A little bit of chaos and noise filled the room because the students all

wanted to be the first to act as storytellers. It took me a few minutes to calm the students down and to begin with the activity.

Then we started with the storytelling session and each group had someone tell their stories to the rest of the class. Pedro was the first to jump out of his chair and tell his group's story about a little boy and his two pets who wanted to be soccer players for the Brazilian team. In the story there was a cat named *Pepetón* and a dog named *Betoven.* I asked Pedro about his group's motives for writing this story, and Pedro expressed the following: "We like to play soccer on weekends and watch the soccer games on TV." Then one of the students, Yoel, explained that the following year Venezuela would be the host country for the 2007 American Soccer Cup, and that this event also inspired them to think up their story. Figures 35 and 36 show Pedro's group's final version of their story with illustrations after the revisions.

| DIA | MES | AÑO |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | | |

El Perro, el gato y el niño

Habia una vez un niño, que tenia un gato que se llamaba pepeton y un perrito Betoven, y el perro y el gato eran muy juguetones. Un día el niño lo sacó a pasear y de pronto miraron a un lado y vieron a un equipo de futbol entrenando para el mundial.

Y el perro se emocionó tanto tanto que quiso entrenar con ellos. Y el niño se acercó y se dió cuenta que era el equipo de Brasil.

Y le preguntó al entrenador que si le podia dar una oportunidad al perro, y al gato. para entrenar, junto con ellos.

Y el entrenador dijo, son dos animales inteligentes y ¿cómo se llaman los nuevos jugadores? El perro se llama Betoven y el gato se llama pepeton.

Y con su esfuerzo pudieron jugar en el mundial.

ALPHA

*Figure 35*. Pedro's group story.

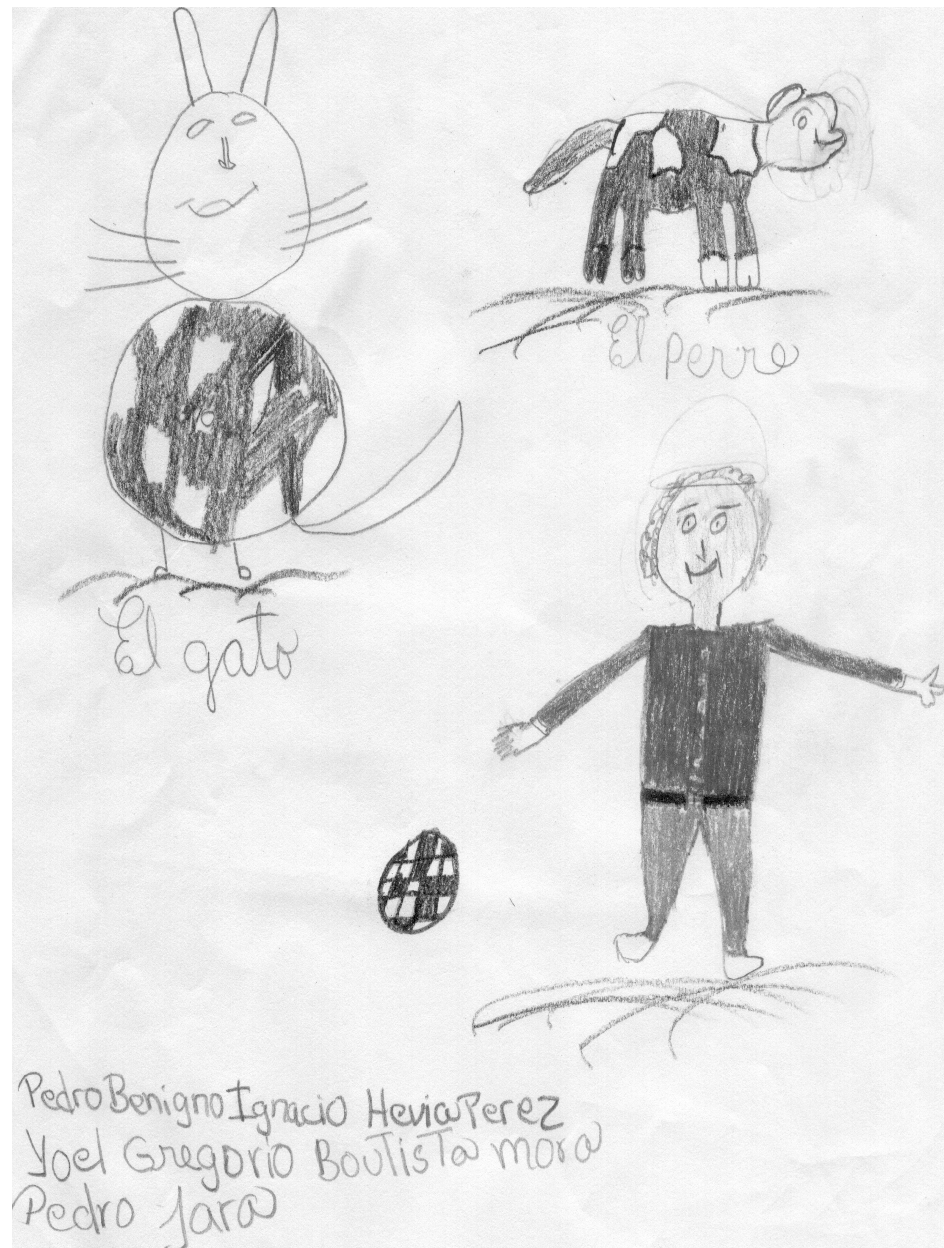



*Figure 36.* Pedro’s group illustration of the story.

The second part of the class was dedicated to writing first drafts of these puppet stories. As I squeezed my body through the small dark room, I noticed how the students were discussing about how to put into writing their oral

versions of the stories. Noise filled the room again and busy groups were beginning to draft first written versions of their stories (Figure 37).

*Figure 37.* Children writing their collaborative stories.

After a 45 minute period of continuous work where I moved around each group looking at their drafts and making some suggestions, we took a break. I went to the teachers' lounge room and I sat down to have a cup of coffee; some teachers from the others grades were very interested in knowing how I was able to keep this group working and with very little noise. They communicated to me that it was a difficult class to handle because of discipline problems and because of the varied ages of the children. Some of these students were repeating sixth grade for the second and third time. I shared with this group of teachers what I was doing and how the kids seemed very motivated to participate and to work hard. As I was leaving the lounge to return the

classroom, I saw an incredulous look on the teachers' faces because some of them had taught this group of students in previous years.

The break was over and I went back into the classroom. When I arrived some children were already playing with the puppets and making their own decisions about who was going to be first for their puppet show presentations. I asked them to take their seats and gave directions for the next activities before the final presentation. The students continued polishing their stories before reading them aloud to the class, in the "author's chair." The next student to take a turn to share a story with the class was Josman. His group's story was titled: *El Perro y el Chivo* (The Dog and the Goat). Their story was very important because they incorporated both their imaginations and their own experiences from home that they learned from their families in day-to-day life working with cattle. In their fantastic story a dog and a goat went to a forest and met some other animals there. During their journey through the forest, the goat saw a castle, but the dog got really sick with high fever. Then, the goat told the dog to go to the castle. Once they arrived there, the goat went to find some herbs to prepare a home remedy for the fever. After a while, the fever was gone, and the goat and the dog were hungry and did not have anything left to eat, and they ran out of the castle (Figures 38 and 39).

El Perro y el Chivo

Una vez el perro y el chivo se fueron
a una ciudad y ahí se fueron a una
selva y se consiguieron muchos animales
y todos se hicieron amigos. Meses después
El perro y el chivo se fueron a un lugar
muy lejano de los amigos.

Ellos se encontraron con un tigre muerto,
el chivo se asustó y se echó a correr.
El perro le gritó 5 veces hasta que por fin
el chivo se paró y el perro logró convencerlo
a seguir el camino que llevaban. siguieron
pronto el chivo miró para un bosque
y vió un castillo. El perro, le dió fiebre, y
el chivo le dijo vamos para aquel castillo.
el perro al escuchar aquellas frases se
alegró tanto y se echó a correr al castillo
y el chivo atrás del perro. Los dos llegaron
al castillo que estaba desordenado,
lo arreglaron bien, el chivo se fue a buscar
unas hierbas para hacer un bebediso para el pe-
rro que se estaba muriendo de la fiebre. Al poco
tiempo, el chivo logró curar al perro de la
fiebre que cargaba. Mas tarde se les acabó
la comida que habia en el castillo y se
econtraban hambrientos y no sabian que comer
así que todos salieron corriendo del castillo.

FIN

Josman, Naifer y Omar.

*Figure 38*. Josman's group story.

*Figure 39*. Josman's group illustration of the story.

Then the last two activities consisted of writing a small script for the play and then performing it with the puppets. This was the part that the kids enjoyed to the point that they requested to go to the other classrooms the following days to present their puppet shows (Figure 40).

*Figure 40*. Children presenting their stories through drama and puppetry.

## Summary

The school language arts project offered opportunities for the children to learn to use their oral and written language and images along with their imagination. The students were able to create meaning in multiple forms because I did not limit their choices. Some days, the students read aloud Venezuelan folktales, and on other occasions they worked following a writing workshop format. In my role as a researcher, I had the chance to investigate the possibility for bridging home vernacular oral and written forms of language together with school related literacy practices. The use of thoughtful activities such as the dramatic presentations with puppets motivated children and fostered enthusiastic participation in their acquisition of literacy.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# WEAVING THE ORAL, WRITTEN, AND VISUAL IN LITERACY LEARNING AND RESEARCH: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

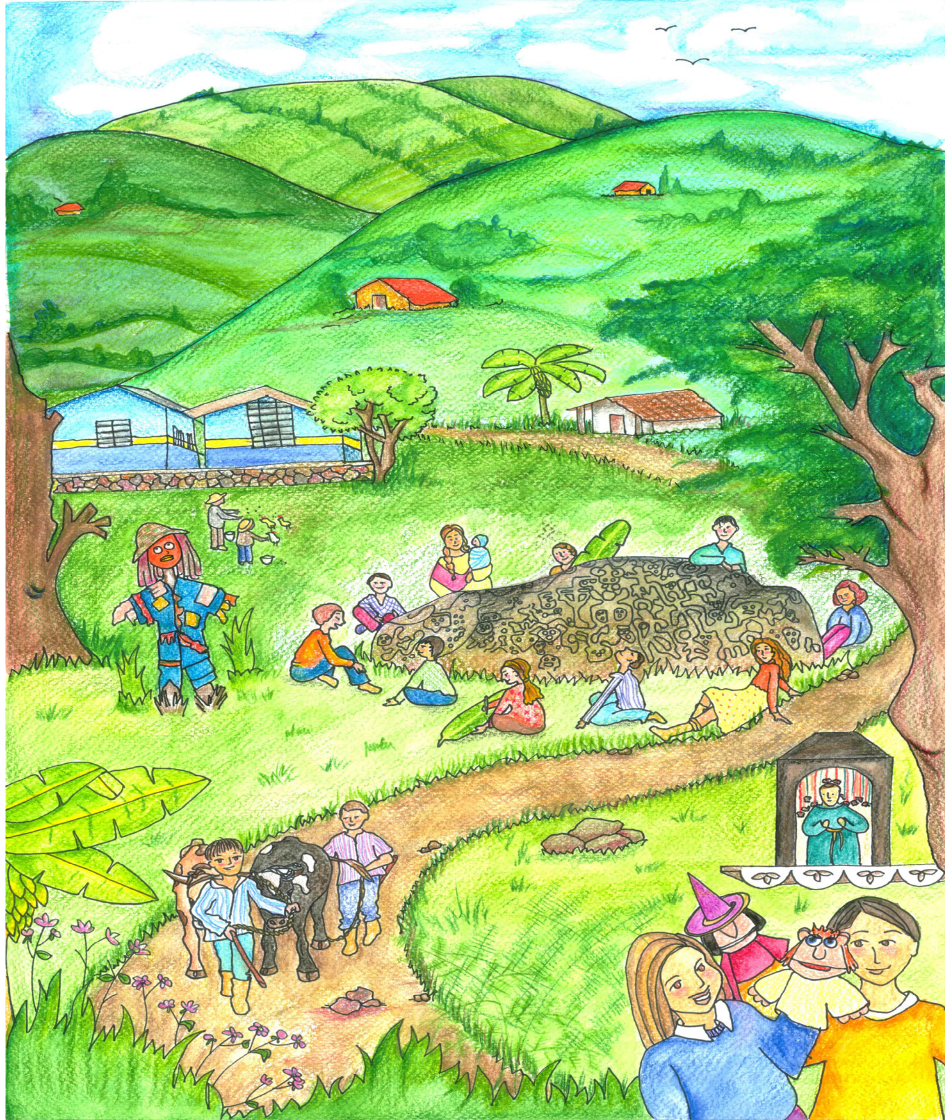


*Figure 41.* Oral and literacy portraits of St. Isidro by Ana V. Casique (2007).

Images in this painting capture in a vivid way and weave together major threads of this dissertation study, both from the community of St. Isidro and the

school site for the literacy project. The painting is a story that pulls together goals, community, school, people, events, and major insights. This image belongs at the beginning and end of this study because its scenes bring to the forefront the original goals of the study which aimed at portraying the meanings attached to some forms of “vernacular literacy” (Barton and Hamilton, 1998) embedded in people’s everyday lives in the community of St. Isidro.

The painting also illustrates how language functions in community and school domains under a multiplicity of conditions entangled in the countless acts of speaking, reading, writing, enacting, listening, illustrating, and viewing (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Chalfen, 2003). Moreover, this work of art speaks of the power and the role of the visual for literacy learning and research for the 21$^{st}$ century.

## Major Literacy Insights from the Study

Lincoln and Guba (1985) talk about the emergent nature of the qualitative research design; it is not possible for the researcher to approach the study site with a prefigured design. They state that “what emerges as a function of the interaction between inquirer and phenomenon is largely unpredictable in advance” (p. 41). Their assertion found echo in a major insight in my study that speaks about the connections between people’s religious devotional practices in the community of St. Isidro and popular literacy forms. In my dissertation proposal, I never planned to research religious beliefs connected to literacy practices, such as reading *novenas* in front of a home altar. Yet as I proceeded

with my visits and conversational interviews with some families from the community, it became clear to me the importance of religion as a primary source of literacy for the community of St. Isidro. In most homes, religion has played and continues to play a central role in people's rearing, in their lives, and in their religious devotional practices. Though my family uses print literacy for religious devotional purposes in front of our home altar, I never thought of it as a form of popular literacy practice, perhaps because these popular forms of language are often found at the margins of sanctioned or institutionalized literacy practices in schools and in academia. Therefore, in my study, I came to acknowledge religious devotional practices attached to some forms of literacy practices that "have their roots in people's homes" (Barton and Hamilton, p. 252).

Another important insight from this study comes from the idea of documenting literacy over time by means of informal conversational interviews of three generations, and then writing the interviews up in the forms of stories. Don Emiliano's, Ramiro's, and Lucia's stories offer a multilayered picture of what Deborah Brandt (1995) calls accumulated literacies, because these stories track literacy development across three generations in a local Andean community. As I listened to Don Emiliano's story and saw the documents and artifacts Don Emiliano has accumulated for years, I realized that his story may represent the last generation to appreciate the aesthetics of handwriting. Ramiro's story symbolizes the collective memory of his community and the craft of a genuine storyteller. Lucia's story represents the current students who are labeled

because they are struggling readers. Yet once children like Lucia are exposed to literacy workshops, they become avid readers and even literacy brokers for the family, as in Lucia's case. These participants' stories become important records for literacy studies and for this local community of rural Andean people whose voices have been "suppressed, silenced, marginalized, and written out of what counts for authoritative knowledge" (Flynn, 1997, p. 551).

This literacy study enriched children's language learning and development by (1) fusing the spoken and written word with the visual, (2) integrating literacies with school related literacies by the use of stories, and (3) encouraging collaboration. This study confirms the need to incorporate both verbal literacy and visual literacy in language teaching and learning instead of privileging the written over the visual (Garrett-Petts, 2000; Kostelanetz, 1985; Petrucci, 2005). It recognizes the use of stories and imagination as powerful tools for meaning making and literacy learning (Egan, 2006; Pagnucci, 2004; Schaafsma, 1993). And, it demonstrates that language learning is a product of social collaboration that depends on culture, context, and customs (Bakhtin, 1981; Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1986). As for Lucia and the other children who participated in the project, they demonstrated their ability to successfully read, write, tell, illustrate, and perform stories. The children were also able to integrate components of literacy development through the use of stories.

A final important insight that emerged is the role women play to support their children's literacy learning and education in the community of St. Isidro.

Women are very supportive within the community in regard to their children's literacy learning. This happens despite the women's very limited literacy skills and the lack of family literacy preparation programs sponsored by educational or governmental institutions. What I learned from families in terms of this role challenges a common belief that because disadvantaged families did not benefit from educational opportunities, they do not have the required abilities to support their children's literacy learning (Taylor, 1997).

## Major Research Methodology Insights from the Study

As I worked on my dissertation, I encountered obstacles and confusions, but sparkling ideas as well. One of the issues I struggled with from the initial stages was how to present the data from this dissertation. From the very beginning, as I visited families in the community, I learned that the visual in the form of altars, images, and photographs played a major role in the lives for the community of St. Isidro. Yet it has been the tradition that when images are included in dissertation studies, they will usually go in the appendices. Garrett-Petts (2000) writes about how in higher education one of the learning goals for students is to acquire a

> highly specialized, print-centered discourse. The promotion of rich perceptual experiences as vehicles for academic inquiry becomes, at the very least, suspect; creative play and risk-taking have little 'legitimate' place in higher learning. (p. 39)

Therefore, one of the major methodological insights is that this study offers literacy researchers a new kind of research method for studying literacy, one that embraces a multilayering of the visual and textual to offer what Garrett-Petts calls "rich perceptual experiences" as a methodological pathway to literacy studies.

The title of this dissertation suggests a new way to look at research methodologies for literacy studies in communities and schools. It does so in two directions. First, the title refers to recognizing the voices of those who have been denied the right to be heard. Second, it implies a new methodological insight that calls for literacy researchers to envision collective creative literacy research projects.

In this study, the voices of this Andean community "*wind*" through the mountains to talk about their stories, their struggles, and their literacy experiences. Similarly, in Katherine Sohn's (1999) dissertation study *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy and Development since College*, Appalachian women's voices are heard. Although distanced by physical and cultural borders, her study and mine both connect the "word and the world" (Freire and Macedo, 1987) on issues of literacy learning in communities entrenched in the Andean and Appalachian mountains. People for both of these mountain regions have been stigmatized for years by mainstream discourses, and there is a lot of prejudice against the rural ways of talking and being. What

our works attempt to do is provide a space for these voices to be heard and recognized.

The ideas of collective and creative come from the work of Enrique Buenaventura (1985), a very well known dramatist, poet, and painter from Colombia, who contributed a new approach for the production of plays. Buenaventura coined the term "*Creación Colectiva*" for his method. This dissertation draws upon Buenaventura's belief about collective or collaborative projects. It adds the notion of creative because it offers the idea that a research project is an artistic endeavor that needs to be enriched by the field of arts and literature. Goodall's (2000) final words in his inspiring book *Writing the New Ethnography* supports my calling for qualitative research methods based on *collective creative literacy research projects*. Goodall writes:

> What I hope we are doing through the practice of new ethnography is *evolving to a higher state of scholarly consciousness*. The measure of our human worth will be in the quality and the difficulty of writing through the questions we ask, as well as in the ways in which our stories speak to the communicative need—to the souls and hearts and minds—of other human beings. We want to use our work to build closer relationships with our readers and a stronger, more open, more diverse, and certainly a more thoroughly humane, scholarly community.
>
> Ours is a *dialogic* ethic, and a *transformational* vision.

> The time has come in the academy to change some of our academic standards, for the *better*. To improve what and how we know, as well as whom we know it *for*, and why we know it *at all* …. To use what we write, and what we write about to make differences—positive, productive differences—in the lives of people. (p. 198, emphasis in original)

This dissertation is my contribution to the changes that Goodall calls for in the world and in academia by experimenting with new forms of qualitative research.

## Implications of the Study for Literacy Teachers, Teacher Educators, and Researchers

Literacy teachers and researchers need to inform themselves of the written and oral language forms that children bring with them into the classroom, their cultural identities and ways of beings in their social worlds where oral and written language is produced (Heath, 1983).

Literacy teachers may use this research to support other kinds of literacy teaching and learning in their classroom. This dissertation study suggests that sixth grade struggling readers like Lucia and other children in the project became avid readers and constructed meaning from text, images, and stories in a very individually and collaboratively meaningful way that most likely would be impossible in a decontextualized approach to literacy teaching and learning.

Literacy teachers may perhaps expand their understanding of the connection between reading and writing and the rest of the language arts (illustrating, enacting, viewing, listening, and speaking) through the use of storytelling in their classrooms. In the school literacy project, students' literacy learning was encouraged through an integrated language arts approach. This allowed children to be more motivated and creative and to use their real life experiences and imagination for meaning making and literacy learning.

As for literacy researchers and literacy teacher educators, although this one small study looks at literacy in a community and local school context, this dissertation study still puts forward a partial and an alternative contribution to theoretical, researched and pedagogical understandings of literacy in rural areas. It was not the intention of this project to make generalizations or the possibility of calling for "carbon-copy" studies, as it has been the practice of traditional empirical forms of research in literacy. As Flannery (1990) states "any global universalizing claims ought to be suspect from the start" (p. 208), and she goes on to say that we need to break away from the aim to "institutionalize" literacy projects. Instead we should support projects as long as they are "local, specific, and necessarily temporary projects" (p. 210).

A final important issue that emerged from this dissertation concerns Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and ethical issues. IRB committees need to be more culturally sensitive to issues of researchers who study in their local cultures. I had difficulty when people from the community agreed to be part of

the study and I requested them to sign their permission to voluntarily participate in the project. They expressed that their spoken word was like a document and it should be enough. Participants manifested that they did not trust signing documents. As someone that was born, raised and continues to live in these Andean mountains; I understand participants' concerns about being asked to sign because for many years we have been deceived by politicians who have come to our communities looking for support during election campaigns. Additionally, the *spoken word* is stronger when people do transactions in rural communities; it is valued as a legal document. People always say "my word is a document."

As for IRB committees, I understand the importance of protecting vulnerable populations of any possible misrepresentations, but as Christians (2005) writes, "IRBs in reality protect their own institutions rather than subject populations in society at large" (p. 147).

## Future Research

This research also raises questions for further investigations, especially about literacy learning related to gender in rural Andean communities. Though gender was not addressed in my study, my field notes for the school literacy project registered that during the collaborative work children excluded each other in groups by gender. Thus, a question to explore could be the role that gender plays in literacy workshops in rural Andean schools.

Seeking to understand family literacy practices in rural communities also justifies the need for further research and has implications for literacy teachers and researchers as well. Pahl and Kelly (2005) offer new insights into the field of family literacy. They suggest there is “a third space between home and school” (p. 90). Based on their research with families, Pahl and Kelly propose the notion of “family literacy classrooms” as a third space. This notion of space brings into play the home and school domains “where both discourses, of home and school, are present and can be recognized within both parents’ and children’s text making” (p. 92).

Exploring these questions in the future will open the possibilities for studies that will enrich and add new ideas to the literacy research in the home, family, and school domains in rural Andean communities.

In conclusion, this dissertation study has aimed to portray the meanings attached to some forms of vernacular literacies embedded in people’s everyday lives in the community of St. Isidro. The study also attempted through a school literacy project to find ways for promoting new understandings and relationships of oral and written language practices in a rural community with school related literacies. It is also my hope that my insights into home/school related literacy practices could inform both the field of literacy learning and research methodology for literacy studies.

## Final Comments

I am indebted to the people who participated in this project and recognize this debt as an ethical issue of this research. Although my dissertation study is over, I need to continue being part of this local community and helping the nearby school. I strongly believe that it is my ethical responsibility as a researcher to endure a working relationship with the community of St. Isidro. I envision some possible ways to continue my involvement with this local community to the benefits of those who participated in the study and those who did not. As of now, some of the ways to continue to collaborate are (1) to share a narrative photographic exhibition based on my dissertation study, (2) to work with families in the community to create a local museum to preserve the collective memory of the people of this community, and (3) to be part of their communal council (*Consejo Comunal*) and participate in all the projects sponsored by the government in favor of the community of St. Isidro.

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# APPENDICES

Appendix A—Palmeta

# Appendix B— A Business record of Don Emiliano's father

Por Bs. 200

El 16 de nobiembre de 1.949 recivi la cantidad de Bs. 200 de manos del Señor Urbano Morales por un lote de terreno que le he vendido en la Molina, y a quedado deviendo los intereses de 11 años

Gabriel Morales

Los Guamas 20 de nobiembre de 1.949

# Appendix C—Models for receipts and for bills of exchange



Modelo de Factura

Sr. Dn. Eduardo Rodriguez en Valparaiso Debe al Señor Ignacio Sanchez lo que á continuacion se expresa, embarcado en el buque "Camöens" del puerto del Havre.

Paris, Enero 12 de 1877

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ER | | Una caja conteniendo: | | | | | | |
| S | 25 | Docenas, Jabones finos | á Fcos 12 | " | 300 | " | | |
| N.º 109 | 12 | " Frascos de olores finos | 15 | " | 180 | " | | |
| | 6 | " Polvo de arroz | 9 | " | 54 | " | | |
| | | | | | 534 | " | | |
| | | Descuento 5 p% | | | 26 | 70 | | |
| | | | | | | | 507 | 30 |



Modelo de las Letras de Cambio.

México, 15 de Marzo de 1877 Por $ 4000.

A Treinta días vista, se servirá Vd. pagar por esta Primera de Cambio, á la órden de D. Pedro Ramirez, la cantidad de Cuatro mil Pesos, en oro ó plata, Valor recibido de dicho Señor, que anotará Vd. en cuenta, segun aviso de

A D. Ramón Díaz
del comercio de Veracruz.

José F. González.

Modelo de los Endosos.

Páguese á la órden de D. Juan Delgado, valor recibido en numerario de dicho Señor.

México, 30 de Marzo de 1877.
Pedro Ramirez.