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Home Literacy Practices: A Focus on Dominican Families

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HOME LITERACY PRACTICES: A FOCUS ON DOMINICAN FAMILIES

by

Susan E. Pendleton

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Literacy Studies Western Michigan University April 2017

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HOME LITERACY PRACTICES: A FOCUS ON DOMINICAN FAMILIES

Susan E. Pendleton, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 2017

The majority of the current research regarding the home literacies that families employ to help their children become literate are explored through North American family structures. For this reason, there is a lack of knowledge about what Dominican families, a subgroup within the Latino culture, do at home to assist their children in their literacy acquisition in the Dominican Republic. This qualitative research study provides insight as to what literacy practices take place within the Dominican household. I gathered pertinent information from 10 Dominican participants using a semi-structured interview so literacy practices could be revealed. Findings from this research indicate literacy practices include parents participating in the following: (1) helping their children with their homework; (2) reading with their children at home; (3) helping their kids practice proper diction with everyday conversation; (4) using singing and music to build language development; and (5) providing access to different modes of technology to support literacy learning. These findings have implications for classrooms in the United States who have students from this cultural group.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to thank Dr. Selena Protacio for guiding me through each step in the process for writing my thesis. She never failed to make herself available to me for help whenever I needed it. She has great dedication and embodies a love for literacy that I cannot help but feel blessed to witness. Above all, I appreciate her challenging me again and again. I knew she believed in me and what I could achieve through my research, and her challenges made that apparent.

Next, I would like to thank the members of my graduate committee, Dr. Protacio, Dr. Piazza, and Dr. Kuo for taking the time to thoughtfully review my work and offer suggestions along the way whenever needed. Both of these women made a consistent effort to check in with me and make sure I knew what I needed to do. I especially appreciate their desire to see me succeed in an area of study I am passionate about.

Lastly, I would like to thank my boyfriend, Susan E. Pendleton, for helping me feel comforted all the long days and nights I spent writing this thesis. There were many days I came close to the point of breaking, but he picked me back up and carried me through those times. Through his support and love, I have completed my goal. He kept my motivation high and always blessed me with his words of reassurance and love. It is through his support that I was able to succeed and meet every deadline. He is truly my blessing from God. Through God’s grace, I have already achieved more than I could have dreamed!

Susan E. Pendleton
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Much of the current research regarding the home literacies that families employ to help their children become literate are explored through North American family structures. There is a significant population of Latino immigrants in the United States with Dominicans being one of the fastest growing of the Latino population. Between 1998 and 2002, roughly 20,000 Dominican immigrants came to the United States each year to live (The Dominican, 2004). For the Dominican population who became residents in the United States, their children needed an education. Even though there is a large influx of Dominicans in the United States, there is still currently little to no accessible research regarding this culture’s home literacies present today in educational literature. The lack of this information leaves educators unprepared to teach Dominican children when they do enter into the United States school system (Rodriguez, 2000).

It is therefore crucial to investigate what the families from this background do within the confines of their own home in regards to literacy practices with their children that helps set them up for success within the United States school system. Thus, it is vital that researchers determine what literacy practices are currently taking place within the Dominican home and explain the significance of using these practices within the United States school system.

Much of the research today has been limited in that many texts have not differentiated Dominican home literacy practices from the broader scope of “Latinos.” It should not be assumed that all cultures that fall under the group “Latino” participate in similar home literacies. Other ethnically and racially diverse groups have been researched in regards to their own home
literacies and have benefited from this research. For example, African American family home literacies have been explored for some time. Teachers who have utilized African American home literacies within their classroom, have proven to have positive educational effects on African American students because their home literacies are utilized in their classroom. If Dominican children are going to succeed in their acquisition of literacy, just like African American children, research needs to be done on their home literacies as well. This uncovered information will help to better equip Dominican children for their future educational endeavors within the classroom (Ford, 2013; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Turner, Hayes, & Way, 2013). That is to say if these home literacies are not researched and analyzed, Dominican children may be at a disadvantage later on in school because the ways in which they learn in the school system will not necessarily accentuate, replicate, or reflect how they learn at home. In other words, this could result in the school system not necessarily being responsive to Dominican children’s unique learning styles or backgrounds.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to acquire information regarding what literacy methods and practices are being employed by families with their children within Dominican households. These practices are expected to be based on Dominican cultural lifestyle and values. This study will allow the field to begin to understand Dominican families’ literacy practices, which would help educators within the schools in the United States to become more aware of practices they could incorporate into the daily life of their classrooms so Dominican children can feel encouraged to participate and excel. Eventually, this research could be utilized to aid in the development of more scholarly texts which would teachers with information about Dominican children’s methods of obtaining literacy, and in turn, help make literacy methods within the
United States school system more suitable for these children. Results of this study will allow teachers to become more culturally responsive (Gay, 2000) to the needs of Dominican students in their classrooms.

**Research Question**

This study will address the following research questions:

(1) What literacy practices do Dominican children engage in while they are at home?

(2) How do Dominican parents support their children’s literacy development at home?
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Currently, there is little research conducted that analyzes specifically what literacy-based practices Dominican families participate in at home that assists their children in their future educational endeavors. Few studies have investigated what several Dominican families do in the United States and what literacy practices Latinos in general participate in at home with their kids. This is interesting considering that, “Spanish speakers are by far the largest group of language-minority students in the United States” (Rubinstein-Avila, 2007, p. 568). However, an even more limited number of research is available that describes what Dominican families do in their home in Dominican Republic.

To further show the importance of uncovering Dominican home practices, general parent perceptions regarding their involvement in their children’s literacy must be emphasized. According to Baker et al. (1996), parental perspectives explain that, “literacy is a source of entertainment, literacy is a set of skills to be deliberately cultivated, and literacy is an integral ingredient of everyday life” (p. 71). Thus, parents naturally see their homes as a literacy environment for their children to access and thrive in. It is for this reason parents see the necessity to actively participate in their children’s literacy development at home. Perry, Mitchell, and Brown (2013) specifically state, “Parent involvement in children’s literacy learning has been linked to children’s higher reading achievement,” (p. 99) Parents who acknowledge the importance of home literacy are increasing their literacy achievement as a result.

Focusing more specifically on Latino parents’ perceptions, parents emphasize their interest in being more closely involved in the literacy acquisition of the children inside and
outside of school (Ramirez, 2003). Fuller and Olsen (1998) argue schools must take into 
consideration the cultural differences of their students if they want to increase parental 
involvemnt and school learning. For example, Ramirez (2003) asserted that both Mexican and 
Guatemalan parents felt more included in the children’s education and more educated on what 
they need to do to help their kids when the teachers communicate with them. A few ways this 
could be accomplished was through notebook communication on homework pages, phone calls, 
and one-on-one meetings. Parents desired this communication and wanted to use it as a method 
to help their children at home. Also, it is through this collaboration that teachers can become 
aware of what their students’ specific needs are, which allows home literacies to have value in 
schools (Ramirez, 2003). Schools that consider the home literacies of their student population 
would have the capability to create a more enriching curriculum that invites the parents to be 
active participants in their children’s education in both school and home settings.

As a result of both general parent perceptions and Latino-specific parental perceptions, it 
is crucial that research is conducted studying Dominicans, one of the fastest growing Latino 
populations in the United States. To understand the necessity of new research, first we must 
analyze and review what other studies have contributed thus far on this topic. All studies 
discussed below were conducted within the United States, regardless of whether the population 
studied were Dominicans, Mexicans, Latinos, or any others. Across these studies, several themes 
have been identified.

**Functional Literacy Practices**

Functional literacy is literacy that serves a function in everyday life events. Several 
articles discussed that specific literacy practices are the basis for survival when living amongst 
an English-speaking society in the United States (Rodriguez, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000; Rodriguez,
These authors discussed literacy practiced within the home of Dominican families in the United States. They describe how different practices are prioritized, which is based upon what the family needs to do in order to make it through average daily functions in the home. Thus, all practices can be referred to as functional. Rodriguez (2000), who specifically focused her study on the literacy practices of three children, ages two through four, used reading and writing in their home. The study consisted of the researcher recording observations as well as interviewing mothers of the children. Her findings suggest many of these functional literacy practices include doing homework, paying bills, filling out forms, reading labels, watching television, making phone calls, reading street signs, following directions, etc. Even though it is apparent the researcher sees these “survival literacy activities” as very important to Dominican families, it does not take into consideration whether those skills would be different had the families not moved to the United States. The participants in these studies used specific literacy practices that helped them navigate their life in the United States. Thus, it is vital to determine what functional literacy skills are used and emphasized by families while still living in the Dominican Republic.

**Parent Education as an Influence on Practice**

Another finding present amongst the studies was in direct response to parental educational achievement (Rodriguez, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000; Tamis-Lemonda, Sze, Ng, Kahana-Kalman, & Yoshikawa, 2013). Both studies indicated if the mother or father of the children have a higher level of education, meaning they graduated from high school and continued to establish themselves educationally, the probability of them reading with their children and having more books in the household are increased. In Rodriguez’s (2006) study, one of the issues she was trying to reveal had to deal with literacy materials being present within the
homes of Dominican families. More specifically, she wanted to know if materials were accessible, what kinds were seen, and how they were implemented within the home environment. In regards to education, “in the homes of the two families in which the mothers had some college education, there were more books in general and more children’s picture books in particular” (Rodriguez, 1999, p. 21). Thus, a higher level of education resulted in more books being present.

Tamis-Lemonda et al. (2013) also reinforce this theme by stating if parents have a higher education, they are more likely to provide a richer literacy environment for their children. The researchers stressed that parental language and child language acquisition are connected. More specifically, their study focused on parental language experiences and how those experiences impact their children’s language development. For example, their longitudinal case study focused on diverse family cultural backgrounds and how each parent interacted with their children during block play. Blocks had letters on them and other symbols. The goal was to observe and record the types of literacy learning that took place and the types of positive or negative reinforcement present. Among the different variables, level of education was one aspect taken into consideration, and the level of education indicated a higher or lower level of literacy. The findings indicated if parents acquired a higher level of education, they could afford to have materials such as books, pencils, and literacy games for their children to use as they acquire language. The reason they would be able to buy more things to assist in their children’s’ learning is because they would be able to establish themselves in higher-paying career opportunities because they are more specialized as a result of their education. Also, having a higher level of education could have an impact on what the parents see as valuable for their children to learn and the tools for their children to have to assist in their literacy development.

The studies described above showed that parents’ language ability influences their
children's language acquisition. Since these students were conducted in the United States, research needs to be done to determine if these findings stand for families in the Dominican Republic. It is possible that parents in the Dominican Republic would have vastly different ideas of what meaningful literacy practices look like if they are living in their native country. This is also where cultural beliefs impact the activities participated in by the children and their families.

**Conversation**

Use of language through conversation is a third theme identified as being of high value to Dominican families (Rodriguez, 2006; Rubinstein-Alvia, 2007; Song, Tamis-Lemonda, Yoshikawa, Kahana-Kalman, & Wu, 2012; Rodriguez, 2006). There is a positive correlation between the amount of conversations exchanged between members of the families and the vocabulary gain and development in the children’s language (Song et al., 2012). The more parents interacted verbally with their children, the more their children learned. They could hear what fluent language sounded like and how to use the new vocabulary words within a meaningful context because their parents modeled fluent language. Song et al. (2012) assert in their article that Dominican families who live in the United States are more apt to use code-switching (switching from one language or dialect to another according to situation and circumstance) within their home between Spanish and English than other Latino populations. Meanwhile, Rodriguez (2006) found that Dominican mothers in her study all had a desire for their children to be bilingual, and as such, the older siblings would help the younger children do their homework in English and Spanish. Parents recognized the importance of their children using both languages in the home so the children could be proficient in both English and Spanish.

In Rubinstein-Avila’s (2007) article, the participant, Yanira, lived in the United States
with her Dominican family, and she needed to transition into high school. It was during that time that the study was conducted. Throughout the study, Yanira, talked about one of the main focuses which is in regards to what she considers literacy to be in her life. She explained how there were usually few print sources available in the home, but the radio shows and music were always on. The family would listen and converse regarding what they heard. This provided rich conversation to take place within the home and gives a good example about how conversation is used as a tool for acquiring literacy. Yanira also explained that the radio frequently addressed politics and religion (Rubinstein-Alvia, 2007). Each topic had its own set of vocabulary associated with it, so she and her family had access to many words. Even though Yanira recognized the radio and conversations that arose from it as being helpful for language acquisition, the practice itself was not supported with reasons as to why it was valued as a literacy practice. This is where a qualitative interview from the parent’s point of view could have been beneficial.

Music and Singing

Music is valued in the Dominican home, and it incorporates verbal language (Rodriguez, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000; Rubinstein-Alvia, 2007). Rodriguez (1999, 2000) states in two of her studies that the few Dominican families she conducted her research on listened to bachata and merengue all the time; these songs usually had an important message that supported culture and beliefs and values. Thus, not only were children exposed to cultural values, but they were also able to learn new and relevant vocabulary in the form of lyrics put to music. The young participant in another study, Yanira, explains that the radio in her family’s home always played music, and the family could enjoy doing everyday activities as the music played in the background. Music addressed similar religious and political themes to those stated above
A second example of a verbal language practice utilized in Latino households is a practice called sing-song (Song et al., 2006). This is the term that refers to children learning songs and singing them aloud. Singing songs helped the children to understand meaningful concepts and recall important ideas. Even though there were a few families that support singing during the day or before bedtime is crucial to their children's literacy acquisition, the study does not express why it is effective and valued nor how it became effective. More importantly, the practice that was briefly expounded upon was not examined in enough detail to understand how Dominican children acquire vocabulary using this practice. Furthermore, there is little information regarding how exactly sing-song functions in the everyday life of a Dominican family. This is not something that is common in studies done on home literacy practices in the United States.

**Addressing the Gap in the Field**

The most prevalent methodologies utilized within the studies were ethnography and case study. Most of the studies incorporated observation as a key component to the research. Also, the few ethnographies that honed in on Dominican family literacy practices, while incorporating interviews, were based in the United States. It is for these two reasons that using a qualitative interview methodology with Dominican parents of children in the Dominican Republic would be valuable and provide crucial insight. For the articles that focused on interviewing Dominicans in the United States, the results cannot be generalized to include Dominicans that live in the Dominican Republic. It is reasonable to assume that Dominicans who have lived in the United States for a significant amount of time would possibly hold different beliefs and ideas about home literacy practices which could be influenced by the environment and societal beliefs in the
Using an interview design would allow a more in-depth examination into family literacy practices as compared to observations or a quantitative study. For the purposes of gathering an in-depth understanding of the data being gathered, case studies help to serve this purpose. For example, three longitudinal case studies focused on participants within the same initial pool of four families, and the researcher audio taped literacy events, took field notes, talked with the mothers, and observed (Rodriguez, 1999; Rodríguez, 2000; Rodríguez, 2006). This enabled the researcher the ability to gather in-depth data using multiple methods, which allowed her to have a deeper understanding of the data she collected.

Lastly, more than half of the limited research available indicates what literacy practices Latino families in general participate in with their children at home. However, an even smaller selection of literature examines home literacy practices of the Dominican population separate from the generalized group “Latino.” Perry, Mitchell, and Brown (2013) support the idea if parents are more involved in their children’s literacy at home, their children will acquire a higher level of reading achievement, and the Latino population takes this concept very seriously. As mentioned previously, interactive literacy practices are meaningful in Latino homes as well as activities that are found to be useful and culturally relevant to the family (Perry et al., 2008; Saracho, 2007; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2013). These broader studies suggested that the family’s culture and beliefs impacted what parents exposed their children to and how they helped them learn. An important question would be whether this belief accurately portrays the Dominican population. That is something that would need to be investigated because it would be unrealistic to assume that every culture that falls under the name “Latino” engages in the same practices guided by similar cultural views and beliefs.
The proposed study would benefit the educational literature in a new and meaningful way because it will investigate information about Dominican home literacies which will be gathered from Dominican parents who live in the Dominican Republic. These participants will not be heavily influenced by United States societal values; thus, their responses would more accurately represent home literacy practices in the Dominican Republic. Also, conducting a qualitative study that concentrates on interviewing will permit the researcher to explore the reasons why Dominican families value the literacy practices they engage in at home, focusing on how culture shapes these activities. Lastly, this study would contribute to the educational literature because it will identify the Dominican population as its own valuable group instead of being categorized under the identity of “Latino.”

Based off the limited current research, it is important that research is carried out which specifically investigates what Dominican families are doing because these practices will affect how Dominican children learn in United States school system. The results of the study will help inform teachers about students who just moved to the United States from the Dominican Republic. Results will help educators understand the literacy-based practices in Dominican homes and demonstrate why those practices are of value to Dominicans. Thus, teachers can then become more responsive to Dominican students’ needs.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This is a qualitative study that used an interview design to investigate what literacy practices are used at home with children in the Dominican Republic. An interview design is well-suited to answer the research question because it allows the researcher to delve into a conversation that would allow in-depth questioning. Per Lischman (2006), “The main purpose of qualitative research—whatever kind—is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience” (p. 8). Thus, qualitative researchers investigate in-depth responses to questions and examine them across several dimensions. Marshall and Rossman (2011) explain that specific strengths of using qualitative research is that it places value on the context and setting of the research, and it also permits researchers to acquire the realization that participants lived experiences are important and can provide great insight. Seidman (2013) states, “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p.9). This means conducting interviews also invites and encourages participants to share their attitudes and beliefs. Interviewing lets you take a step into the life of someone else through their experiences and description so you can explore beyond surface level interpretations.

Participants

This study involved ten Dominican parents who reside in the Dominican Republic. In order to participate in this study, parents had to currently reside in the Dominican Republic, have at least one child between the ages of two and 13, and have the ability to participate in an interview. Subjects were then recruited through snowball sampling. Initially, the researcher located personal contacts who met the criteria for potential participants. Those participants then
referred the researcher to further contacts of theirs that may have interest in the study and meet the study criteria.

The mothers and fathers in the study were selected to provide a variation in educational achievement. One of them has a high school diploma, four of them have a bachelor’s degree, two have a master’s degree, and three of them have law degrees. Eight of the participants currently live in Santo Domingo, which is the capital of the Dominican Republic and the most highly populated section of the country, while two others live in Santiago, the second largest city in the country. Table 1 gives an overview of the participants’ demographics.

Table 1
*Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th># of Kids</th>
<th>Ages of Kids</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9 &amp; 11</td>
<td>Masters (in process)</td>
<td>Married to Roberto</td>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9, 11, &amp; 19</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Married to Julia</td>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morena</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 &amp; 5</td>
<td>Law Degree</td>
<td>Married to Kevin</td>
<td>Santiago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 &amp; 5</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Married to Morena</td>
<td>Santiago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bachelors (in process)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6, 18, 22</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Married to Maria</td>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6, 18, 22</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Married to Leonel</td>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mency</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolas</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5, 6, &amp; 13</td>
<td>Law Degree</td>
<td>Married to Evelin</td>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5, 6, &amp; 13</td>
<td>Law Degree</td>
<td>Married to Nicolas</td>
<td>Santo Domingo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

After receiving HSIRB approval (see Appendix A), interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol which was generated in English (see Appendix B) and in Spanish (see Appendix C) depending upon which language the participant chose to have the interview in. The interview protocol indicates that the researcher used specific questions at first
to get the conversation started and followed responses with probes. The probing questions ensured that participants could elaborate on their responses. This also allowed participants to share information which the researcher may not have foreseen in creating the questions about this topic. Duration of the interviews ranged from 20 to 90 minutes.

Interviews with two of the participants were conducted in person while they were temporarily visiting the United States. The rest of the interviews were conducted via Skype. This type of communication offered flexibility for the participants to choose what day and time was best for them, and it still enabled participants to be located wherever they were most comfortable.

The researcher started the interviews with initial demographic questions. This information, along with responses to all other questions, helped the researcher discover themes during the analysis phase of the research. Each session was audio recorded so they could later be transcribed during the analysis phase. During the interview, the researcher recorded notes. This allowed the participant to say whatever they wanted, without being restricted, and give a more in depth answer if they chose to.

**Data Analysis**

To facilitate the analysis of findings, the researcher transcribed all audio material to text. Once all data were collected through audio recording and notations, the data was analyzed so a better understanding of the home literacy practices of Dominican families in the Dominican Republic could be identified. Having written transcriptions from all interviews was the first step in the analysis phase.

Once transcriptions were completed after the interview process, each was analyzed qualitatively, going through a process of thematic analysis. The information explored from the
interviews allows the researcher to analyze common themes that appeared (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007). Each transcript was read several times so the researcher could gain a good sense of the data. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1996) explain the usefulness of using this type of coding system for all field notes. Transcripts were then coded so that ideas were easily accessible. Two levels of coding were applied first to all transcripts. Table 2 shows a detailed example of one instance how codes were changed through the analysis phase. Examples of level one codes were homework, technology, and music. After triangulating themes and codes across all interviews, the researcher discovered several patterns. Thus, the researcher was able to collapse these codes into focused level two codes. For example, the three codes listed above were collapsed under one code entitled home practices. The triangulation of codes and themes helped the researcher focus the codes under 11 possible groupings. To help focus the codes, the researcher created a data table on a Microsoft spreadsheet that helped her easily see which themes were repeated most frequently through the interviews. This enabled her to review all codes several times transcriptions several times and make sure relevant information was not overseen. After the analysis spreadsheet was updated and modified, similarities and themes were identified further.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this section, I will discuss several themes around home literacy development based on the interviews. All ten participants explained their goal was for their children to be college educated professionals that can contribute to society. They want their children to achieve more than they have, and try to give them as many opportunities to be successful as possible. As an example, Lucia (all names are pseudonyms) stated,

Ósea, mis padres no eran muy dedicados así. Yo estaba en el colegio y hacía mis tareas pero no es lo mismo. Ósea son tiempos diferentes. Entonces ahora uno trata de hacer lo que no hicieron con uno para la mejoría de sus hijos. (My parents were not very dedicated like that. I was in the school, and I would do my homework, but it is not the same. These are different times. So now one tries to do something that their parents didn’t do for them for the betterment of their children).

As a result of this feeling, parents are very dedicated helping their children in as many ways as they can because they want them to be successful in life. To reach these goals each parent has set for their children, these Dominican families developed and currently use many practices within their household to help their children acquire literacy, with the most prevalent being the following: (1) helping their children with their homework; (2) reading with their children at home; (3) helping their kids practice proper diction through the use of everyday conversation; (4) using singing and music to build language development; and (5) providing access to different modes of technology to support literacy learning. Each of these themes assist in the building of literacy in their homes.
Homework

All 10 participants expressed how crucial it is to help their kids with homework when they get home from school. All parents reported being very active in their children’s education and made it a priority in their life. Maria asserted that she helps more with homework than her husband Leonel because of his work schedule, and Evelin also stated that she is more involved in the homework aspect than her husband. However, both fathers in these situations help in other ways and with other practices. For instance, Leonel indicated that he provides support by answering questions about homework when his daughter has questions about something that is giving her difficulty, while Nicolas, Evelin’s husband supports his children by answering their questions and checking in on them to see what they are doing while they complete their homework.

For all 10 parents, it is valuable to give their children the extra homework assistance. The methods used to help their kids with their homework is different depending upon available resources in the home. For example, Julia, Roberto, Lucia, and Mency have a computer or tablet in their home and use it frequently to help their children understand ideas when they are confused. Meanwhile, Maria, Leonel, Morena, and Kevin help their children understand their homework by reading their class books with them so they can explain things using the specific material given from school. Other ways in which parents help their children with homework includes reviewing the homework once it is completed or sitting down next to their children while they do their homework so they are available if their children need help. Lucia explained how sitting with her eight-year-old daughter is particularly useful because she can correct her when she writes things professionally. Lucia can explain in that moment why what her daughter wrote was incorrect and how to fix it so she does not continuously make the same mistake.
However, for all 10 parents, there is not one strict method they follow in every circumstance so they can help their children.

Through these methods, parents take it upon themselves to do the best they can to supplement in the home what their kids are learning at school. For their sons and daughters to be successful, each parent recognizes they must devote the necessary time to ensure their children are understanding what it is they need to accomplish in their school courses. Parents emphasize to their children how important it is for them to practice at home what they do in school and to always give their best effort. As Julia stated,

La respuesta ideal es que todos debemos trabajar igualmente en la educación de nuestros hijos porque si el maestro quiere ayudar a los niños en la escuela, y el padre no ayuda, no hay mucho que el maestro pueda hacer. (The ideal response is that we should all work equally in the education of our kids because if the teacher wants to help the kids in school, and the parent doesn’t help, there won’t be much that the teacher can do).

Julia’s statement shows that there needs to be a commitment between both the educational and home spheres of each child’s life. This means that parents and teachers should allocate time to collaborate with each other regarding how to help their children so they can be successful in both spheres. This also suggests teachers are not the only people responsible for helping children, but parents serve an important role when helping their children at home. Baker et al. (1996) emphasizes this importance as well when they urge that student benefit greatly when parents and teachers learn and transfer literacy practices across both educational and school spheres. Julia indicated that when done successfully, each realm builds on the strengths that the other has presented. In other words, not only can teachers learn from parents, but parents can learn from teachers and make sure to use similar practices when helping their children with their
homework at home.

**Reading with Children**

Reading is a literacy practice that all 10 participants affirm using within their homes with their children. Reading helps their children acquire new Spanish vocabulary, as well as uncover new meaning in a valuable and authentic way. There are a variety of genres and types of texts that children read with their parents. The type sometimes depends on what the purpose for reading the text is. Some types of books the parents specifically use are story books, the Bible, magazines, dictionaries, and so on. Among the various types of texts, story books are the most common type of text used with six participants indicating they use them at home.

Some sources used by the families are influenced by the parents’ religion and culture. For example, when Maria talked about reading with her daughter, she stated, “*le tenemos una biblia de niños que la enseña a ella la historia de Jesús, pero de una forma que ella pueda comprender.*” (We have a Bible for her that shows her the story of Jesus, but in a form that she can understand). It was because of her religion that she and her husband Leonel made sure an appropriate level of the Bible was accessible for their daughter to use.

Although all parents use books as a means to interact with their kids and pose questions, there are slight variations in regards to what their focus is on when reading. Thus, certain methods for reading would be taking place as a result. For example, Julia, Robert, Nicolas, and Evelin read with their children mostly so they can acquire good diction and new Spanish vocabulary. The types of questions they would ask their children would be grounded more in word recognition and word articulation. In Morena and Kevin’s home, they use reading as a way to help their children practice speaking and to help them with their homework. Maria, Leonel, and Mency also use reading to practice language, but it is also as a way to promote new
vocabulary development. Lucia also primarily focuses on helping her child read to comprehend. Thus, the way in which she helps her daughter is through various questioning strategies and active dialogue throughout the story.

Morena and Kevin elaborated on another practice related to reading in which their two daughters play word games to help them learn and practice words they may come across in their textbooks, homework, or daily reading activities. Both parents explained further where they get their ideas from for the reading word games. Morena said, “El libro nos da ideas de juegos que pueden ayudar a las niñas con la lectura. (The book gives us ideas about games that can help the girls with reading).” The book Morena is referring to is one called Nacho. Their daughters are very familiar with using the book with their parents. Both parents use this resource for ideas regarding games that can support the reading achievement of their daughters, especially when they are having trouble. After practicing literacy strategies through games and using new vocabulary in creative ways, both daughters are able to find more success when they read because they can directly apply the same strategies in their school and home activities. The transference of skill is apparent to the parents.

Using the varied reading practices and materials discovered, parents have reinforced the idea that reading is extremely valuable to them and meaningful for their children. More specifically, among the 10 participants, three stated that reading has even been the most powerful influence helping their children become literate. Even though most participants did not say it was the greatest impact, they all acknowledged and reiterated its importance in their daily lives and set aside time for their children to read every day. For example, Nicolas and Evelin read with their children and help them independently read every day from 4:00pm until 6:00pm. For the other eight participants, they save time also during the day to devote to reading, but it is not
necessarily at a fixed time. For example, Mency stated that her two sons read throughout the day, and she reads to them before they go to bed. Making time to read is seen to be effective in all participant homes and valued for different reasons.

**Pronunciation/Diction**

Having good diction due to being able to accurately pronounce words is seen as a useful and valuable skill according to seven out of the 10 participants. All seven parents who focus on diction want their children to speak Spanish professionally and fluently. Interestingly, several ways of practicing diction were seen across interviews. For example, Julia states,

“La primera cosa que hacemos es corregirles. En Español, tenemos muchas palabras que usamos en una manera para comunicar. Entonces lo que hago para ayudarles es corregirles y decirles que no hablen así; y escuchan lo que es correcto. (The first thing is I correct them. In Spanish we have a lot of words that we use in a way to converse with one another. So what I do is to help them improve is to correct them and tell them, “Don’t talk like that. Hear what is correct”)

It is important to Julia and Roberto that they constantly correct and encourage their children to speak professionally because they want them to be professionals one day, and professionals know how to use language appropriately. When one speaks professionally s/he can be successful, and they use multiple real-life examples of how using language professionally can help them in future educational and career endeavors.

Julia, Roberto, and Lucia explained how they enforce good diction with their kids through conversations with them about multiple real world topics and their future. When talking about these topics, the conversation becomes relevant and important to the kids because the topics are tangible and relatable because they can see how the topic impacts them. Saracho
(2007) would argue this type of conversing is valuable because children can use these literacy moments to better understand the world in which they live. Another positive consequence as a result of this type of communication is children can acquire beliefs and analytical skills in the process, as Julia and Roberto state in their interview. On the other hand, Morena, Kevin, Maria, and Leonel help their kids improve their pronunciation and diction by correcting their child directly when they speak through normal family conversations or reading. As Maria stated, “Nosotros le corregimos lo que hablan, y cuando dicen algo mal, buscamos en el diccionario. (We correct what they say, and when they say something wrong, we look in the dictionary)”. The dictionary they use helps their six-year-old daughter visually understand better how words are pronounced and spelled.

**Singing/Music**

Music and singing has shown to be important for six out of the 10 participants because they mentioned it as being one of the most important practices they use with their children. Music and singing has helped the children acquire more Spanish vocabulary, fluency, and expression in language. This practice can be seen through movies, programs and songs. Morena and Kevin describe their children as being like sponges because they absorb everything they hear. So when they put music on, both daughters learn the lyrics quickly. Rodriguez (2000) would agree that singing offers an enriching experience children because they can interact with language in an engaging and fun way.

Maria and Leonel would also express the importance of singing in the lives of their children because they are members of a Dominican Christian Band called *Chocolates Del Señor* (Chocolates from the Father), When discussing the singing portion the kids are involved in, Maria states, “*Ellos aprenden más palabras que están en las canciones. Ellos usan esas*
palabras en conversación con nosotros porque hablamos de las canciones antes que cantan en las misas de la iglesia. (They learn more words that are in the songs. They use those words in conversations with us because we talk about the songs before we sing in the church).” Discussing the songs allows the words to become valuable and important to the children because they can see how the words are applied. Thus, there is meaning attached to the words they learn in the songs which enhances overall understanding and literacy.

Another way music was discussed through the interviews was through the act of playing music in their Christian band; María and Leonel encourage their children to participate in playing instruments and dancing. María and Leonel explained that playing an instrument involves discipline and concentration because the notes on a sheet of music need to mentally be converted into letters. Those letters then need to be thought of as keys or pieces on an instrument that can emit a specific, desired sound. By playing music, all three of María and Leonel’s children interpret language in a different way. María further discusses her kids in regards to playing instruments by stating,

Ellos saben tocar piano. El profesor me decía que era bueno que aprendieran de música porque eso le abriría el entendimiento. Camelot no ha tenido una gran oportunidad de aprender otra cosa que no sea flauta. Pero eso le ayuda mucho. (They know how to play piano. The teacher would tell me that it was a good idea that they would learn about music because that opens their understanding. Camelot has not had a great opportunity to learn anything that was not the flute, but that helps her a lot.)

**Technology**

Technology is a big part of what helps all 10 parents help their children acquire literacy. The utilization of technology started in response to necessity. All participants stated there are
little to no libraries around them and that libraries are not very common. As a result, parents who have enough money to buy books can, and those who do not have a lot of money cannot. All parents have some books, but not as many as they would like to have for their children. To help fill in these gaps, parents need to be creative with the different forms of technological platforms that are available, so they can help their children’s literacy acquisition grow. As a result, technology has been sought after and used in participant homes in diverse ways to help their children acquire a broader vocabulary and understanding of words.

In regards to using a computer or other device to access the internet, six out of the 10 participants stated that they regularly use the internet to help their children understand their homework or other language concepts when they are having difficulty. The parents do not have access to resources such as libraries or special tutoring to help their children understand material, so they rely on the computer to provide them with the knowledge and understanding they need so they can assist their children. When discussing how the computer helps her assist her daughter, Lucia stated, “Ella usa mucho la laptop y ella la usa para aprender cosas. Cualquier tarea que ella tenga, yo me ayudo de Google y le digo a ella que eso le ayuda mucho. (She uses the laptop a lot and she uses it to learn things. Whatever homework that she has, I help myself understand by using Google, and I explain to her how it can help her)”. It is easiest for parents to find answers to their children’s problems by using the internet because there is an endless amount of information and tools. It is by having access to these technological tools that has enabled Lucia and the other parents with the ability to learn the literacy content if needed and how to explain it to their sons and daughters at home.

Another example of how the computer, tablet, or laptop have positively impacted literacy development is through the use of word games. Word games are a literacy resource frequently
used in the homes of six participants. These parents have seen the usefulness of providing literacy games as meaningful opportunities to practice Spanish word knowledge in response to the excitement their kids feel when playing the games and witnessing the literacy growth as a result. The games focus on the children learning words and using their background knowledge to predict words in different game scenarios. These games reinforce vocabulary as well as introduce new literacy concepts.

Mency explained that her two sons play the games on their tablet. Using technology allows the boys to get constant, instant feedback regarding whether or not they are acquiring the word concept. Also, she indicated her children’s motivation increased because they could play the games through the facilitation of technology. One benefit of using a tablet or computer to play these educational words games is the bonus that everything needed to play the game is incorporated in the application. No outside physical resources are necessary, which help simplify the facilitation of the literacy games.

Another practice parents use technology for is texting and sending messages through social media or applications such as WhatsApp. Six out of the 10 parents said this is beneficial. Using technology to write messages or use applications helps them monitor how their children write and interpret information. Lucia explained that when he daughter writes something incorrectly, she can instantly see what it was and and help her revise it. This offers Lucia and the other parents the ability to consistently check their children’s grammar and whether they are communicating effectively.

Another source of technology often found in the homes of the participants is the television. The television is used frequently by nine of the 10 parents in their households. Children are exposed to different programs, movies, cartoons, and news. Julia explained how the
television gives them an opportunity to question their children about the things they watch. She said she makes her two sons reflect on the program and what it is helping them understand. This helps the boys learn that reflecting is crucial, and being an analytical thinker is important. When discussing a specific instance of using analytical skills with her son, Julia stated,

> Él me dijo el otro día “hay una planeta nueva” y más y más, no sé, y le pregunte, “Dónde has escuchado eso? Cuál es el recurso? y él dijo, “el internet,” y dije “Pues, eso fue un recurso fiable donde lo has escuchado?” Los tengo evaluar cosas porque quiero que ellos tengan sus propios criterios de cosas. Eso es una parte de sus crecimientos. Quiero que sean diferentes. (He told me the other day “there’s this new planet” and so and so, I don’t know, and I asked him, “where did you hear that? What is the source?” and he said, “the internet” and I was like “well was that source reliable where you heard it from?” I have them evaluate stuff because I want them to have their own criteria of things. That Is part of their growth. I want them to be different.)

Julia tries to instill in her sons the importance of not putting all of their trust in what someone or something says without knowing if the information is valid. She also believes that life is about thinking analytically and studying everything. Thus, her beliefs impact what she does with her sons.

Morena and Kevin also love using the television so their daughters can watch a variety of movies. Morena stated, “Ellas ven muchas películas de Disney y ellas ahí aprenden y dicen muchas palabras que son muy complicadas para ellas. (They watch a lot of Disney movies and there they learn and say a lot of words that are very complicated for them)”. For this family, the use of television to watch Disney movies has dramatically increased their daughters’ Spanish
vocabulary and speech development because she is watching movies that are engaging and adequate for her level of literacy development.

Summary

All participants assist their children in many ways to help them acquire literacy at home. The five themes listed above have proven to be the practices most prevalent in their homes. All practices have supplied the children with a rich literacy environment established by their parents which gives constant encouragement for them to achieve more that they would have had they not had parents who supported their literacy in these ways.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Educational literature has been utilized by many scholars as well as educators because researchers have recognized the importance literacy practices have on students being successful academically. There has proven to be a positive correlation. More specifically, researchers are becoming aware of what other countries have done and continue to do in regards to addressing and facilitating students’ literacy acquisition because they are seeing the positive outcomes due to the child utilizing their home literacy practices. Home literacy practices within the Dominican household is an example of a context in which literacy research has not given much focus.

As previously stated, studies before this one have discussed functional literacy with an aspect expressing that Dominican parents help their children with their homework as much as they can. Functional literacy incorporates all day to day activities that utilize reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills to complete whatever task is necessary. At times, it is difficult for parents to help their children successfully because the homework may be in English. Thus, although homework is a priority and is seen as functional literacy for Dominican families in the United States, researchers really do not know how Dominican parents help their children more specifically with their homework when it is in Spanish and they are in the Dominican Republic. The current study contributes to this gap by presenting data suggesting parental assistance is demonstrated in the form of working at the table with their children, reading school textbooks to explain content, working on the computer or other technological resources to help supplement their children’s learning, as well as go over and check their children’s homework to see if there is anything they need to go over with them as a result of the work being done incorrectly.
Findings from this study also enrich the understanding of how parents use reading within their home to increase their children’s literacy. As noted in previous studies, conversation is a crucial practice for children to participate in if they wish to become fluent speakers of whichever language was present in the family. In the case of all previous studies, since the children were in the United States, this consisted of speaking both English and Spanish (Rodriguez, 1999; Rodriguez, 2000; Rodriguez, 2006; Song et al., 2006; Tamis-Lemonda et al., 2013). Thus, conversation would be utilized as a model for children regarding what fluent language sounds like. The discussion based learning also encouraged children to use new vocabulary learned from by parents through conversation. However, it was not known how conversation came into practice, more specifically in what circumstance would conversation be used, and whether families in the Dominican Republic, who focus on teaching their children Spanish, also consider conversation to be a key component in their literacy acquisition. This is where the current study helps contribute to the educational literature.

Based off the findings in this study, parents use real world topics, books, technology, and music/singing to activate these conversations. Some parents, such as Julia and Roberto, use real world topics to facilitate these discussions because they want to talk about things that directly impact their children and because they want to give them the opportunity to express their opinions about things that are meaningful to them. In addition, all parents use a wide variety of books and genres to read with their children. Many times, the books are read out loud to model fluent speaking, and other times texts are read out loud by the children so parents can correct their diction and pronunciation when necessary. These books also become the focus of conversation while reading during interactive read alouds with parents. Together parents and children have meaningful conversations about story elements as well as their understanding of
the story. Lucia explained raising questions about texts to facilitate conversation has proven to help her daughter’s overall comprehension of important concepts. Conversations are also seen through technology. Julia expressed earlier how it is common for her children to watch something on the television and she would ask them what they are watching and why. She helped her children engage in conversations about what they watched so they could support their reasoning and learn to think critically. Their conversations helped her two sons express their critical thinking. It is also through music that conversations have been initiated. Maria talked about how her children were participants in their Christian band and would engage in discussions about what the songs mean before singing them or playing the music with instruments. These conversations exposed them to a specific vocabulary set while also engaging their background knowledge before studying the words.

Previous studies, as well as the current study, have explained the importance of singing. Past studies explained singing is a common practice and is encouraged daily. It is an effective tool for children to learn new vocabulary. However, researchers did not know how singing is more specifically used in the home. For example, the reasons children sing or in what context they are singing were not addressed. This is where the current study helps to fill in the gap. For some participants, they play music from favorite movies or shows of their children so they can sing along. The children are automatically engaged because they love the movie or show. Other times, singing is used as a way to teach new vocabulary. For example, if Maria and Leonel’s children are learning a new song to sing, they would go over the lyrics together and explain the meanings of all words. Singing is seen as a form of engagement for the children as well as an opportunity to use new vocabulary from whatever they are learning in a fun way.

Other aspects of this study that contribute to the educational literature that were not
focused on in previous studies are the use of technology to learn and playing word games. Technology is used in many ways across multiple formats. Parents encourage their children to utilize the computer, tablets, phone, the radio, television, as well as write and send text messages over the phone or through social media sites such as WhatsApp. All parents have stated there is little to no access available for them and their children to use public libraries because either there are not many or they are far away. Thus, technology has become a huge resource component for Dominican families in the Dominican Republic. Parents use their varied functions to help them consistently support their children in all aspects of literacy, especially writing. This is also where word games have become important. There are many applications for these technological devices for parents to download so their children can practice new vocabulary and word spellings.

**Implications for Practitioners**

It is my aspiration that through this study, I have shared with educational practitioners a way of understanding how Dominican children acquire crucial literacy skills. It is my hope that these practices can inform classroom literacy instruction throughout the United States in a positive way that would assist in the literacy acquisition and academic success of the Dominican student population as a whole. Fuller and Olsen (1989) would agree knowing these critical, cultural home literacy practices would only help enrich classroom instruction. This is the case because the teachers would have the ability to use a variety of literacy practices to help students who have a range of background knowledge regarding home literacy practices based off their culture, beliefs, and values. From both the previous studies, we already know that Dominican parents within the United States want to have communication with schools about literacy practices they engage in at home and how they can modify school practices into their home, and the current study expresses how the knowledge of home literacy practices would benefit
Dominican parents’ children by making the learning environment more culturally responsive. Thus, the first step is to improve literacy instruction for all students through the acquisition of knowledge about the home literacy practices of the students and how their culture shapes those practices. This is what I hope to have successfully shed light on.

There are many ways in which the data from this study can inform the practice of educators within the United States. However, I have developed several ideas for how teachers can incorporate these Dominican home literacy practices into their classroom. First, if possible, give students access to different forms of technology within the classroom. Help them understand different tools that are already designed for them to practice literacy. Children of the parents interviewed for this study use a lot of technology at home to supplement their learning. Some of the applications and games they utilize with their parents could reinforce the content they are learning in class. Encourage students to discuss what they use at home, whether they use words game sites, educational videos, literature resources, among others, so they can use the same resources in the school.

Second, allow children to read interactively so they can engage in conversations about the text. Conversation has been very valuable in the Dominican home as opposed to individual reading and writing. This helps the children utilize content specific vocabulary while practicing fluency of speech. In Dominican Republic, parents and children are constantly engaging in discussions that require the children to use the new vocabulary as well as think critically about different topics. This home literacy practice could be used in the classroom through means of a guided reading or interactive reading activity. Guided and interactive reading allows children to talk about what they see, think, feel, and question. These are all aspects of discussions that consistently take place with the Dominican home. These types of activities can also be useful for
Dominican students because the questioning of literature helps them monitor their thinking and understanding of what they read. When children learn to monitor their own thinking, much of the accountability for comprehending the reading is given to them, and all participants would agree this is essential.

Next, it would be beneficial to give opportunities for students to sing and move around. Music is very popular in the Dominican culture. This has proven to stimulate the minds of Dominican children as well as engage them in what they are learning so they remember content and can practice using it in a meaningful way. It could also be an effective idea to incorporate fun videos or music that discusses content. The kid-friendly songs will help them remember important aspects of any lesson.

Lastly, all 10 participants have expressed their desire for home literacy practices to be transferred over into the school atmosphere. One way of ensuring this would be to have an open line of communication between teachers and parents. For example, the information gathered in regards to how Dominican parents helps their children with their homework can be very useful knowledge for practitioners. Not only does this information help educators understand what the homework practices are, it allows an opportunity for the educators to have educational conversations with the parents, explaining how what the parent does at home can be used to help with the child completing their homework. These discussions are particularly helpful for the Dominican parents who are in the United States and struggle with the English language. They have a strong desire to help their children with their homework but often times must resort to taking on more of a motivational support instead of an educational one. If teachers are aware of how much Dominican parents in the Dominican Republic and in the United States want to help their children with their homework, then having conversation between the teacher and parent
about how the parent can help, would provide parents with the confidence when working with their children at home. Also, the important information discussed and collaborated on would give Dominican parents the ability to modify those ideas and information in a way where the child can practice literacy in a way that is in accordance with cultural, religious, and social beliefs. Furthermore, it is easier to reciprocate literacy practices to benefit learning when parents and teachers discuss what they have seen personally help their children. This transference will help make literacy practices more meaningful because they would carry over into both spheres of the children’s lives.

**Implications for Researchers**

It is my hope that through my study, I have shared with literacy researchers and other professionals a way of understanding how Dominican children acquire crucial literacy skills within their homes in the Dominican Republic. Researchers can use this data as a starting point for helping them assess whether these home literacy practices support Dominican children going through the educational system within the United States. Researchers can gather data that would demonstrate the correlation between Dominican home literacy practices utilized in the school and the educational achievement of Dominican students.

Another example of research that could be conducted would be in regards to incorporating the literacy practices discussed in this study into a classroom in the United States in which the teacher has Dominican students. Data could be collected to demonstrate whether the utilization of these specific home literacy practices have proven to assist the Dominican children’s literacy acquisition in a more effective and productive way. It would also be interesting to see how these practices impact the literacy acquisition of the general education student body.
Lastly, researchers could gather data focusing on Dominican parents’ perceptions of how their children are learning literacy skills within schools in the United States. Findings could help fill in the gap of knowledge regarding the importance Dominican parents place on the home literacy practices they participate in with their children, and give a clearer understanding as to how their practices have changed in response to school literacy practices in the United States. For example, the studies might collect data suggesting how much home literacy practices are changing in response to school practices in the United States and how those changes are impacting their children.

**Limitations**

One limitation of this study was that the researcher was unable to recruit participants from all regions in the Dominican Republic. For this reason, it should not be assumed that all literacy practices discovered in this study can be generalized to the population of Dominicans in all regions of the Dominican Republic. It is possible that home literacy practices could be different depending upon what city or sector the families live in within the country.

Also, the interviews for this study were conducted through Skype. This could be a limitation for two reasons. First, participants had to make sure they were home and had access to the internet to participate in the study. Many times, I had to reschedule interviews for weeks because there was a weak internet signal or there was no signal at all due to power outages. Using Skype could have also been a limitation because I was unable to acquire a true sense of what the home literacy environment looked like. Had I seen the literacy materials and home, further questions could have been developed to ask the participants. Thus, a more personalized set of questions could have been developed. This could have have enabled me with a richer understanding of how home literacy practices are used. For example, if I would have seen a
specific learning object in the home, I could have asked a specific question about it. It is possible that the possible new line of questioning could have revealed other interesting information about the practices used.

Conclusions

Through my research and findings, I have realized my interpretation of literacy has been altered. Previously to this study, in my mind, literacy simply meant that someone could read, write, speak, and understand meaning of different texts and language, with meaning being the most important. Literacy seemed like it was a concept that is very concrete, and its meaning is absolute. However, after doing my research I realized literacy is much more than all those things I thought previously. Literacy is social, and it is something families practice every day without necessarily realizing it. One does not practice literacy simply through work that a school sends home with the child to do, and literacy is not confined to a classroom or educational institution. There are meaningful literacy engagements that are taking place all the time within the confines of our own home. People first started to acquire language in the same place they first experienced love—in the home, and when looking at my research, I see that the more interaction and conversations there are, the richer the literacy environment. It is through these consistent social practices that children are, in a sense, playing with and stepping into a world of literacy.

My journey of understanding has been forever changed, and it is my desire that researchers and educators will have a changed perception as well. More specifically, it is my hope that through this research, educators within different schools across the nation can become more aware of how Dominican children acquire literacy within their home setting. Sarancho (2007) explained when parents build a supportive foundation for their children’s learning, their children find academic success in their education. Thus, the data that shows the different ways in
which these Dominican parents engage their children in home literacy practices is not surprising because all 10 parents have made it their personal goal to always assist their children in their literacy development. Just as Kevin states, “La educación empieza en el hogar, uno le da la cultura, en la escuela yo pienso que se le complementa la educación que no les podemos dar aquí. (Education starts in the home, one gives their children culture, and in the school, I think they complement the education that we cannot give them here.)” It is through this overlap of literacy support for the children that they can thrive.

It is also my intention to show that a diverse student population benefits academically when teachers implement literacy practices that children participate in when they are within the confines of their own home. Dominican parents add a unique perspective to the educational literature because each see their children as capable learners that thrive in their home. This common belief guides them in their literacy practice decisions because the goal they have for their children is to accomplish more and succeed in more ways that they ever could have done or did. Thus, understanding home experiences and parents’ perspectives on literacy are important prerequisites to building connections between home and school, especially when the cultures of the home and school are dissimilar (Baker et al., 1996; Thompson et al., 1996). This balance permits understanding and enables educators with the opportunity to provide culturally responsive teaching through diverse literacy activities.

In summary, my research has provided an example of home literacy practices that might look different from those in the United States or other countries. These literacy practices could be in response to the economic situation in which the family lives, lack of resources such as libraries, or other daily life commitments one navigates through in order to survive. Practices could also be the result of cultural or religious affiliations as noted through reading religious
texts such as the Bible.

When discussing literacy and its importance, we recognize children all have a different way of learning those foundations on which they can prosper and find academic success. For this reason, home literacy practices become essential building blocks in any child’s literacy acquisition. Taking this scenario a step further to incorporate Dominican students’ home literacy practices into the educational setting will not only ensure that Dominican children see those literacy components transferred over, but it will also make them feel like their practices and ways of doing things are valued and contribute significantly to their literacy achievement.
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Appendix A

HSIRB Approval Letter

Date: May 4, 2016

To: Selena Protacio, Principal Investigator
   Susan Pendleton, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 16-04-24

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Home Literacy Practices: A Focus on Dominican Families” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: May 3, 2017
You have been invited to participate in an investigation entitled “Home Literacy Practices: A Focus on Dominican Families.” This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
The purpose of this study is to understand the literacy practices that take place within Dominican households. This study will help educators in the United States become aware of the literacy practices that their Dominican students utilize within their homes so that they can replicate those practices within their classroom, and thus help Dominican students to become more successful in their educational endeavors.

Who can participate in this study?
You are invited because you are a member of the Dominican cultural group, and because you have at least one child between the ages of 2 and 13.

Where will this study take place?
Your family can choose to have the interview either in your homes or any other places that are convenient and comfortable to your family.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
This study will only consist of your participation in one interview that will take roughly one to one and a half hours to complete.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
You are invited to participate in an interview that will ask you about your experience using literacy practices within your home with your children. Your answers will help educators in the United States better understand their Dominican students and how they acquire literacy.

What information is being obtained during the study?
With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. During the interview, you will be asked questions about how your children acquire literacy within your home. The focus will be on the practices you and your children participate in as well as why those practices are valuable.
Questions will also be about the importance of literacy in your family and how your culture and beliefs impact the practices you and your children engage in.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**
There are no more than minimum risks associated with participating in this research project. The nature and likelihood of possible risks include mild discomforts when you are asked about your family experiences. To protect your family from these possible risks, you can choose to skip any questions that you are not comfortable responding.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**
There are no direct benefits of participating in this research project. Indirect benefits are that your input will help United States teachers use literacy practices found in Dominican homes in their classrooms. This will help Dominican students be more successful in the classroom.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**
There will be no costs associated with participating in this research project.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
There is no monetary compensation for participating in the study.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
Efforts will be made to keep your family’s personal information confidential. Only the investigators will have access to the information collected. Pseudonyms will be used for your family identities and private information when the results of the study are presented in the student investigator’s thesis, professional meetings, or for publication in journals.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You can at any moment choose to stop participating in the study for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by the decision to stop participation. You will not experience consequences either academically or personally if you decide to withdraw from this research project.

The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the principal investigator, Selena Protacio at selena.protacio@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board.
chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name.

Participant’s signature Date
La Universidad de Western Michigan  
Departamento de Educación Especial y Estudios de Literacia

Investigadora Principal: Selena Protacio  
Investigadora Secundaria: Susan Pendleton  
Título del Estudio: Las Prácticas de Alfabetización de la Casa: Un Enfoque en las Familias Dominicanas

Usted ha sido invitado a participar en una investigación que se llama “Las Prácticas de Alfabetización de la Casa: Un Enfoque en las Familias Dominicanas.” Este documento va a explicar el propósito de este estudio y todo lo que usted va a necesitar saber, incluyendo el proceso, los riesgos y los beneficios de participar en este estudio. Por favor lea este documento, y pregúntame si necesita más clarificación.

¿Qué estamos tratando de descubrir con este estudio?

El propósito de este estudio es comprender las prácticas de alfabetización que tienen lugar dentro de los hogares Dominicanos. Este estudio ayudará a los educadores en los Estados Unidos a darse cuenta de las prácticas de alfabetización que sus estudiantes Dominicanos utilizan dentro de sus hogares para que puedan replicar estas prácticas dentro de su salón de clases, y de este modo ayudar a los estudiantes Dominicanos para ser más exitosos en sus esfuerzos educativos.

¿Quién puede participar en este estudio?

Esta invitación es para usted porque usted es un miembro del grupo cultural o de nacionalidad “Dominicana,” y porque usted tiene por lo menos un hijo entre la edad de 2 y 13 años.

¿Dónde vamos a hacer este estudio?

La familia puede decidir si quiere tener la entrevista en su casa o en cualquier lugar que sea conveniente y cómodo para usted.

¿Qué tiempo se va a tomar este estudio?

Este estudio solamente consiste de su participación en una entrevista que va a tomar entre una hora y una hora y media.

¿Qué se le pedirá a su familia hacer si usted y su ustedes deciden a participar en este estudio?

Usted está invitado a participar en una entrevista que va a questionarle de su experiencia usando prácticas de alfabetización con sus niños en su casa. Sus respuestas van a ayudar a los maestros
en los Estados Unidos así que puedan entender mejor como sus estudiantes Dominicanos logran la literacia.

**Qué información se obtendrá sobre este estudio?**

Con su permiso, la entrevista será audio grabado. Durante la entrevista, se le harán preguntas acerca de cómo su niño(s) obtienen literacia en la casa. El enfoque será en las prácticas que usted y sus niños usan en la casa para que así los niños obtengan su literacia.

**Cuáles son los riesgos de participar en este estudio y como se pueden minimizar?**

No hay más mínimo riesgo asociados con la participación en este proyecto de investigación. La naturaleza y la probabilidad de posibles riesgos incluyen una leve molestia cuando se le pregunta acerca de sus experiencias familiares. Para proteger a su familia de estos posibles riesgos, se puede optar por omitir cualquier pregunta que usted no se sienta cómodo de responder.

**Cuáles son los beneficios de participar en este estudio?**

No hay beneficios directos de la participación en este proyecto de investigación. Los beneficios indirectos son que su aporte será ayudar a los maestros en sus clases que usen las prácticas de literacia que usan las familias Dominicanas en sus casas. Esto va a ayudar los niños Dominicanos a tener éxito en sus clases.

**Hay algún costo asociado en participar?**

No hay ningún costo asociado en participar en este proyecto.

**Hay alguna compensación por participar?**

No hay compensación en forma de dinero por participar en este estudio.

**Quien tendrá acceso a la información colectada en este estudio?**

Se hará lo posible para mantener la información personal de su familia confidencial. Sólo las investigadoras tendrán acceso a la información recogida. Los seudónimos se utilizarán para sus identidades familiares y la información privada cuando los resultados del estudio se presenten en la tesis de la investigadora secundaria, reuniones profesionales, o para la publicación en revistas.

**Qué pasa si quiere parar de participar en este estudio?**

*Usted puede optar por dejar de participar en el estudio en cualquier momento y por cualquier razón. Usted no va a sufrir ningún perjuicio o sanción por la decisión de dejar de participar. Usted no experimentará consecuencias ya sea académica o personalmente si decide retirarse de este proyecto de investigación.*
La investigadora también puede decidir dejar la participación de usted en el estudio sin el consentimiento de usted.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta antes o durante el estudio, puede ponerse en contacto con el investigador principal, Selena Protacio, selena.protacio@wmich.edu. También puede comunicarse con las Presidente de la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Temas Humanos al 269-387-8293 o la vicerrectora de Investigación en 269-387-8298 si surgen preguntas durante el curso del estudio.

Este documento de consentimiento ha sido aprobado para su uso por un año por la Junta de Revisión Institucional de Temas Humanos (HSIRB) según lo indicado por la fecha estampada y la firma del presidente de la junta en la esquina superior derecha. No participe en este estudio si la fecha estampada tiene más de un año.

He leído este documento de consentimiento informado. Los riesgos y beneficios han sido explicados. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio.

Por Favor Introduzca Su Nombre Aquí

Firma de participante  Fecha
Appendix B

Research Protocol in English

1. To start off, can you tell me a little bit about yourself?

2. How many children do you have? How old is each child you have?

3. How would you describe your child(ren)?

4. What language(s) do you speak at home?

5. What kind of activities do you do with your children to help them learn your language(s)? What activities do you do to help them become a reader and/or a writer?

6. How did you decide what activities to do to help your kid(s) learn language at home and become literate?
7. Among all the things you do to help your kid(s) acquire language, which activity(ies) do you think have helped the most? Why?

8. Is there anything else you do to help your child learn language and acquire literacy at home?

9. Do you think it is important for your child’s school to use similar literacy practices in school that you use at home? Why or why not?

10. How involved are you with your child’s education? Probe: Can you elaborate on that please?

11. How do you support your child’s learning at school here in your home?

12. On a scale of one to ten, one being not important, and 10 being crucial, how important do you think it is for schools to use the same literacy practices in their classrooms that their students engage in at home?

13. What is your goal for your child’s education?
14. Does your culture or beliefs have any impact on how you teach your child language? If so, how?

15. Do you have any questions for me about what I asked you, or is there anything that does not make sense?

16. Is there any other information about any language or literacy activities that you do at home that you would like to share with me?
1. Para empezar, puede hablarme sobre usted?

2. Cuantos niños tiene? Cuantos años tiene cada uno de sus niños?

3. Como describiría sus hijo(s)?

4. Cual(es) idiomas usted y su familia habla en su casa?

5. Qué tipo de actividades usted hace con sus niños así que ellos aprendan su idioma? Cuales actividades usted hace con sus hijo(s) para ayudarlos a mejorar como leen y escriben?

6. Como usted decidió las actividades que hace con sus hijos así que aprenden bien el idioma y obtienen literacia?
7. De todas las actividades que hace con sus hijos para que puedan aprender el idioma, cuáles de esas actividades usted cree que han ayudado más que las otras?

8. Hay otras cosas que usted hace con sus hijos en la casa para que obtienen literacia?

9. Usted cree que es importante que los maestros en las escuelas de sus hijos usan las mismas prácticas de literacia a enseñar sus hijos que usted usa en su casa con sus hijos? Por qué o por qué no?

10. En que tanto usted está involucrado en la educación de su hijo(s)? Puede elaborar en eso por favor?

11. Como usted apoya el aprendizaje de su hijo(s) en la casa?

12. En una escala del uno al diez, uno significan que no es importante, y diez significa que es súper importante, cuanta usted cree que las escuelas deben usar practicas muy similares a las que usan en las casa de los estudiantes?

13. Cuál es su meta para la educación de su hijo(s)?
14. Su cultura y sus creencias impactan cómo usted enseña a sus hijos en la casa? Si dice que sí, explique cómo?

15. Usted tiene preguntas para mí sobre lo que le pregunte, o hay algo que yo dije que no tiene sentido?

16. Hay otra información sobre las actividades de lenguaje o de literacia en su casa que usted le gustaría compartir conmigo?