

Young children and a school community open pathways for a grandmother's literacy

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One current challenge highlighted by the United Nations is to increase the number of adults who achieve literacy and numeracy by 2030. This article focuses on one experience from an underprivileged Mexican school that implements *Family Education, a Successful Educational Action*. Following a communicative methodology, we conducted a communicative life story, five semi-structured interviews with agents of the school involved in family education, two observations and a review of internal school reports. The results present a personal story of success that shows the impact that family education has had on the literacy of Maria, a woman who had never attended school before. The love and support of her granddaughter as a student from the same school, the transgenerational literacy interactions reinforced by the learning communities model, and the support of the school's educational staff and volunteers have enabled not only her literacy but also her becoming a leading woman in her community.

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets targets to attend the persistent challenges of disadvantage, inequality, and exclusion. One of these goals, SDG4, aims to “Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. The relevance of this goal lies in the possibility of socioeconomic mobility that allows education to overcome poverty (United Nations, 2015). However, reaching this aim is still a considerable global challenge. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019) data shows that over 515 million adults between 25 and 64 years of age are illiterate. Two-thirds of this population are women, so illiteracy is gender-biased. To reverse this picture, recent decades of educational research have revealed that an effective approach to literacy focuses on the community and the family. The community plays an important role in literacy processes since it makes it possible to introduce culture, knowledge, multimodal experiences and linguistic capacities to learning processes that take place both inside and outside of school (Kim & Song, 2019; Premo et al., 2023).

According to UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2017), the power of learning families is supported by the principle of lifelong learning and the fact that the development of literacy, numeracy and language skills is an age-independent activity. Family learning stands out as a transformative strategy that works across generations and between institutions, breaking down barriers between home, school, and community.

Research evidence supports a family approach to tackling literacy and other educational challenges disadvantaged families and communities face (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Creating environments that encourage reading and writing, promoting a culture of cooperation among institutions, and embedding literacy and learning in other services for disadvantaged families enable intergenerational learning programs to succeed (Hannon et al., 2020).

Moreover, families play a primary role in the education and learning of all their members (Swain & Cara, 2019). This key role has been mostly studied considering the impact that parental practices have in the education of children and young people in terms of learning outcomes (Mercer-Young et al., 2023), school attendance since early childhood (Sosu & Pimenta, 2023), autonomy, transition to higher education (Bernal-Romero et al., 2020), and higher education and employment aspirations (Ziaian et al., 2023). However, there is a smaller proportion of research that has focused on the inverse impact, that is, the educational effect that children and young people have on their adult family members from educational interventions (Skipper, 2023). UNESCO (Hanemann et al., 2015) considered family literacy and learning programs as part of a holistic approach to lifelong learning that links three main aims: (1) the wellbeing of children and their families; (2) universal basic education; and (3) the advancement of literacy and numeracy for all young people and adults.

In the most vulnerable contexts where families lack literacy, it is relevant to carry out successful educational actions (SEAs) capable of linking families to school and promoting a literacy environment that includes the entire family (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2011, Khalfaoui et al., 2020; García et al., 2019). A large body of scientific evidence also shows the importance of the participation of families in school since it contributes substantially to the motivation and improvement of the students' educational performance and impacts adults (Gómez-González et al., 2022; Rodríguez-Oramas et al., 2021; Soler et al., 2019; García-Yeste et al., 2018; Flecha, 2012). Moreover, through the involvement of adults in the school, they manage to become agents of change in their communities (Warren et al., 2015; Flecha, 2015; Melgar, 2012).

This article explores the impact of family and community participation that made demonstrated contributions to school success and social cohesion, mainly centred in one SEA participation in family education in overcoming illiteracy. This study focuses on one experience from an underprivileged Mexican school. The results present a personal story of success that shows the impact that family education (one of the SEAs) has had on the literacy of Maria, a woman who had never attended school before. The love and support of her granddaughter as a student from the same school, the transgenerational literacy interactions reinforced by the learning communities model, and the support of the school's educational staff and volunteers have enabled not only her literacy but also becoming a leader in her community.

Illiteracy of the adult population in Mexico

Nowadays, there are still more than 4.4 million people over the age of fifteen who cannot read or write in Mexico. It represents 4.7% of the population aged 15 years or over (INEGI, 2020). However, the problem is even more significant when considering that the absolute illiterate population is added to the people considered functional illiterates (people who, at most, managed to accredit until the second year of primary education). Some research shows that when not reaching the equivalent of the third grade of primary education, the abilities to read and write are lost (Cando Tibanquiza, 2017; Carranza & González, 2006). For this reason, to the 4.4 million people who cannot read or write, we should add the almost 2.8 million (also over 15 years old) who completed only the first years of primary education. It is, then, about 7.2 million Mexicans who, in reality, are illiterate (SEP, 2020).

The challenge of illiteracy in Mexico is bigger in vulnerable groups. In the analysis by gender, the gap is 1.6 unfavourable percentage points for women, which is more accentuated in the group of 55 to 64 years where the difference grows to 4.7 percentage points (INEE, 2018). Older adults (60 years and over) are the group that experiences higher illiteracy rates; women stand out in them: almost 29% of the female population over the age of 60 is illiterate. In the 21st century, three out of 10 older Mexican adults have this level of exclusion (INEE, 2018).

The *Educational Panorama of Mexico* report (INEE, 2018) shows the direct association between the employment rate and the level of education attained. According to the data collected in 2017, of the adult population between 25 and 64 years old, only 61.5% of those who did not complete basic education have a job, while the population with higher secondary education that is employed is 70.8%, so there is a difference of 9.3 percentage points. When analysing by gender, data shows that the benefits of schooling in the labour market insertion are more evident in the case of women. Since even though men have higher employment rates at all educational levels, the proportion of employed women increases with schooling, which does not happen in the case of men. These data suggest that the higher the level of schooling, the smaller the labour gap in terms of gender. Therefore, education contributes to the labour inclusion of women. On the one hand, approximately two men are employed for each woman employed (7.7 million of the employees are men and 4.2 million are women) among the adult population without basic education. On the other hand, there is approximately one man for every woman in the population of adult workers with upper secondary education. Therefore, there is greater parity in the distribution of employment (4.9 are men and 3.5 are women) (INEE, 2018).

The educational exclusion of the adult population in Mexico affects the exercise of the rest of human rights; aspects such as access to health services: illiteracy negatively impacts the population's life expectancy (Molina et al., 2018). For these reasons, the scientific literature emphasises the literacy programs to overcome this reproduction of poverty (Gadsden, 2021; Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Rod et al., 2019).

Lifelong learning and community literacy

The literacy challenge is one that is not restricted to a single stage of life. Although this process of acquiring reading and writing usually occurs in early to middle childhood, it is necessary to consider learning processes throughout life in order to meet the challenge of literacy in adults. Within a lifelong learning framework, literacy and numeracy are critical basic education skills indispensable to full participation in society (Hanemann, 2015). Furthermore, implementing lifelong education in a family indicates that family education is one vehicle that a person can take from the cradle to the end of life (Hatimah, 2017).

Lifelong learning should promote the educational inclusion of groups currently under-represented as mature students in various forms of post-school learning opportunities (Chapman et al., 2006). In this sense, lifelong learning for older adults is a meaningful social activity that connects individuals and communities through dialogic participation for social engagement (Tellado, 2017). In this line, family literacy programs seek to meet the learning needs of an entire family through an intergenerational learning approach. UNESCO has defined family literacy (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2017) as:

The development of the literacy, numeracy and language skills of both children and adults. It enables caregivers whose own education has been limited for various reasons to help their children with learning through intergenerational interactions and relationships (p. 3).

Many studies have emphasised the importance of intergenerational approaches to literacy learning (Brooks & Hannon, 2013; Carpentieri et al., 2011). At the same time, families learn to value education, become more involved in schools, become emotionally closer, read more, and build foundations for lifelong learning (Padak & Rasinski, 2003). Frequently, the necessity to help their children with school readiness and schoolwork motivates parents to (re)engage in learning themselves (European Commission, 2012). Over the past few decades, an increasing number of literacy programs have taken this approach to family inclusion into account and generated positive effects on learning for both children and adults; for example *Parent School Partnership* (PSP) program of the Mexican American Legal Defence Fund (MALDEF) (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011); *OneCommunity* (Stauss et al., 2020); *Family Reading Intervention for Language and Literacy in Spanish* (Mesa & Restrepo, 2019) or another example: *Club de Lectura Soy Luna* (Justice et al., 2020). The *Family Literacy Programs* are a lifelong learning opportunity that enables adults' inclusion and educational participation in educational centres. Research highlights the benefits of Family Literacy Programs in improving children's achievement in school and in parents' attitudes about education. The parents' achievements increase in reading, writing ability, maths and science knowledge, knowledge about parenting and child development, social awareness, and self-advocacy (Fikrat-Wevers et al., 2021; Ihmeideh & Al-Maadadi, 2020; Swain & Cara, 2019). Beyond these programs, in the context of SEAs, universal and transferable actions, family education was identified as an action widely recognised for its social impact (Flecha, 2015), developed in the following section.

Family and community participation through family education

SEAs generate improvements in the academic results of the entire student body. Research supports scientifically SEAs taking into account all the voices of the educational community (Flecha, 2015; INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2011). Learning communities (Soler-Gallart & Rodrigues de Mello, 2020), based on SEAs (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2011), are inclusive educational experiences that confront new social needs while raising an equal educational response by working toward social cohesion. It is a social and cultural transformation project of an educational centre and its surroundings to achieve an information society for all people (Valls, 2000), which begins at school but integrates the whole community. Learning communities promote and attribute a key role to families and the community, and it is a relevant means of combating social fragmentation and exclusion (Flecha & Soler, 2014; García Yeste et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Oramas et al., 2021). One of the SEAs is family education. A central characteristic of successful family education activities is that these are organised in response to the needs and requests of families. In this sense, it is the families who decide what they need to learn, how they want to do it, and how to organise themselves to achieve it. This is crucial because it allows creation of spaces where families feel comfortable speaking and participating openly (Flecha, 2015, p. 53). Family education allows families to increase their skills in terms of reading, writing, and discussing school issues with their children, and promoting academic interactions (Flecha, 2015; INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2011; Soler-Gallart & Rodrigues de Mello, 2020).

Family education has been implemented in Latin America since 2013 (Álvarez, 2015). In Mexico, the research centre *Community Research on Excellence for All*, CREA, along with Instituto Natura (private organisation) and the NGO *Vía Educación*, have led the transfer of SEAs, making possible the implementation of these actions in more than 200 schools (Comunidad de Aprendizaje, 2020). The most recent report presented in 2019 by *Vía Educación* confirms the direct participation of 96078 students' families and community members in the SEAs (*Vía Educación*, 2019).

Along the lines of deepening the role of successful partnerships about the SDGs (Boeren, 2019), this article aims to provide evidence of a successful experience that contributes positively to the debate on the shared responsibilities of individuals, education and training institutions and governments to face the challenges to quality education (4SDG). In line with previous research, this paper focuses on the impact of family education and analyses in depth the life story of Maria, the role of her granddaughter and the community, and the educational inclusion opportunities presented to both in a learning community.

Research context

This article focuses on one school situated in a neighbourhood near Guadalajara city in Jalisco, the seventh-largest state in Mexico. Specifically, the analysed school held classes in the afternoon, and the school received students from some of the most vulnerable

families in the area. The school has about 370 students between 6 and 12 years old, and it operates until the evening hours. During 2016-2017, the school began its transformation to a learning community, implementing SEAs. In 2017, the school established family education to promote the learning of the entire educational community. Family education responds to the community members' requests, mainly family members. In this school, the community dreamed of three types of actions: *Dialogic Literary Gatherings*, family education and technology for families. First, it started with dialogic literary gatherings for adults who were family members. It consists of a space for the collective construction of meanings around the dialogical reading of a classic work of universal literature. The participants hold dialogues and debates about readings and do not need to have experience with reading to participate. Secondly, the community dreamt about the implementation of family education. The program arose during the development of the first action, dialogic literary gatherings, derived from the participants' interest in learning to read and write. Adults and children between the ages of eleven and fourteen shared the space, wishing to complete primary education. Thirdly, use of technology for family members, as the school already offered computer classes for students, families wanted to learn too. The courses are certified by the Jalisco State Institute of Training for Work. The teacher requested the certification. This institutional support allowed families participating in the training access to better job opportunities.

Method

This research focuses on the development and impact that family education program brought to the life of a student's grandmother. The purpose was to show how a family education program implemented in a school as learning community based on dialogical learning and community involvement impacted on a literacy process for one woman who had never attended school before. One granddaughter, Itzel (pseudonym), convinced her grandmother Maria (pseudonym) to participate in her school's literacy course. To investigate this case, we implemented a communicative method that draws attention to social transformation (Flecha & Soler, 2014). This method has received recognition for its success in documenting scientific, political, and social impact when applied in research with vulnerable groups. A communicative method contributes to knowledge obtained from participants in an egalitarian dialogue, to researchers sharing scientific knowledge, and to participants contributing their knowledge arising from their own experience of that reality (Gómez et al., 2019).

In a visit to the school, the researchers participating in learning communities met Maria, learning about a woman who had transformed her life by actively participating in the school. From that first contact, we had several conversations with Maria, and identified many elements of transformation. So we decided to ask if she would be willing to have her case published, a proposal gladly accepted notwithstanding her surprise, humility, and stressing that she had done nothing extraordinary. Following the communicative method, Maria participated actively in the whole process, including validating the results and the final reading of the document (in this case, as prepared in Spanish).

Data collection techniques and participants

The fieldwork for this article was carried out between March 2019 and March 2021. Different techniques have been combined to obtain data, basically, communicative daily life stories (CDLS). To complement the CDLS, other techniques were used, including interviews, discussion groups, videos and participant observations.

Firstly, CDLS was chosen to delve deeper into Maria's life, identifying the elements that have enabled her to overcome difficulties and provided for her participation in the school. CDLS involves a process of collective knowledge to understand the reality that people live, intending to transform it (García Yeste, 2014; Gómez et al., 2011). Initially, there were numerous conversations with María that served to get to know her and receive her offers of extra material, such as some of her early writings from when she started writing, and a video where she explained the impact of the training on her. The initial contacts were used to prepare the topics for interviews with open-ended questions. Then, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with key actors linked to Maria's life story and her participation in the school (Table 1):

1. Laura, the school principal;
2. Itzel, Maria's granddaughter;
3. David, the janitor and the volunteer who taught her to read and write.

Table 1: Data collection

Techniques	Source code	Participant pseudonym	Profile
Communicative daily life stories	CD_P01	María	71 years old, six children. Without primary education studies
Semi-structured interviews	E_F01	Itzel	Student at the last grade of elementary school (14 years old at the time of the interview)
	E_D02	Laura	School principal
	E_V03	David	School janitor – volunteer in charge of Family Education program
Discussion group	EG_01_GM	María	Itzel's grandmother
		Melisa	Participating mother in school
		Lilian	Participating mother in school

Along with the interviews, two videos of Laura and David were also analysed. They explained the impact of family training and, specifically, their participants like Maria. Thirdly, a focus group was also conducted with Maria and two mothers who are active in the school's SEAs. This focus group discussed the relevance of family education and the impact of family involvement in the school for the children. Fourth, two participant observations were conducted between March and April 2019. The researchers participated as volunteers in two family education sessions to get involved in the case being studied. These observations consisted of collecting notes on the case witnessed and sharing

meanings and interpretations of the observed actions with the research participants (Gómez et al., 2011).

Community members and researchers generated collaborative dialogue around their thoughts, reflections, and ways of developing in their past, present, and future lives (Aubert et al., 2011). To keep the participants anonymous and to ensure confidentiality, the names used in the research are pseudonyms (Table 1).

All participants gave consent and signed the informed consent form. In this document, the research objectives, their voluntary participation, and the right to abandon the study at any moment were explicit. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Community of Research on Excellence for All (CREA) with the number 20220706.

Data analysis

Researchers analysed the information collected to identify barriers and opportunities related to the exclusionary and transformative dimension about Maria's literacy process, this kind of analysis is the one proposed by the communicative methodology (Gómez et al., 2011). The exclusionary dimension is the elements that impede social transformation or that prevent people from joining or being part of a social benefit, while the transformative dimension corresponds to the elements that create ways to overcome these barriers and convert them into opportunities (Flecha & Soler, 2014; Gómez et al., 2011). The relevance of the research lies in the search for ways to overcome those barriers and develop transformative actions (Pulido et al., 2014). The exclusionary dimension analysis refers to the barriers that Maria faced throughout her life that prevented her from becoming literate and participating in education in formal school, and the barriers that today hinder her participation in school. The transformative dimension focuses on the elements that have allowed her to participate and become literate in her granddaughter's school and the changes that this process has brought about in her personal and family life. The dimensions focused on participation in the family education program, social relations with her family, granddaughter and school staff, school operation, attitudes, and self-concept.

This article focuses on the second dimension, the transformative, highlighting the educational inclusion of a grandmother who becomes literate through the motivation and love from her granddaughter that drives her to participate in the family education program. The main findings were discussed with participants, especially Maria, to confirm that the data collected responded to the key moments that have marked her life trajectory. In the following section, the results derived from this dialogue are detailed.

Results

Family education responded to the families' requests within the framework of the transformation process towards a learning community, requesting better learning opportunities for all. The family education program consisted of a literacy curriculum for adults. Its implementation derived from the participants' interest in learning to read and

write. The interviews narrate the process of preparing the literacy space set up within the framework of family education. Initially, appealing to the principle of solidarity, the director proposed to the school's janitor to volunteer in this space, Laura explained:

Literacy training was implemented, which was proposed to Mr David, who is a quartermaster assistant at the school, he gladly accepted it and even received training at the INEA [National Institute of Adult Education] on his own, some Saturdays (E_D02).

In addition to accepting the proposal, David encouraged the literacy spaces to involve the certification of primary education, making this space more useful for the participants. In this line he pointed out:

The director already told me that she would be interested in working with them so that they learn to read and write. So that's where the proposal was born. They want to learn to read and write and achieve their Primary School Certificate and take advantage of the time that is already dedicated to having a higher objective, that they do not stay just in reading and writing (E_V03).

Family literacy is carried out within the school facilities and the schedule is previously agreed with the participants; in this way the school is adapted to the families' needs. About this, David explained:

And that's the idea [referring to the established schedule according to families' possibilities]. In that way, there is a control and at the same time the children are motivated to see adults they know from their community who are studying (E_V03).

The family education program offered by the learning community presented in this research is the first educational opportunity that Maria, Itzel's grandmother, has been able to access. Given barriers of a socioeconomic and personal nature, she had not been able to attend basic education during her childhood, and neither was she able to do it later in her adulthood while raising her six children.

Dialogic educational environments and the love of a granddaughter: Key elements in Maria's literacy process

According to her granddaughter, Maria's children did not trust her or believe in her, but Itzel was convinced that her grandmother could make a big step and did not hesitate to support her. Just as the school also encouraged Maria to participate, her confidence was the key to overcoming shame and insecurity and participating in the literacy course in the same school where her granddaughter was studying. Maria states that she overcame the embarrassment of participating and that her age was not suitable for literacy. Maria explained her previous situation and the reasons her granddaughter gave her to encourage her to participate in the school:

... I was always asking for help, I would say: "Hey, miss, could you help me make a signature? Hey, miss, could you read this for me, what it says here?" I would go to the school meetings, and I felt very bad, I didn't understand anything. My granddaughter said to me: "Look, you shouldn't be asking for help all the time, you should learn, try to read

what they say. If you learn how to do it, you will see that everything will be different, now you feel ashamed but if you learn you will stop asking for help, come on, you can learn" (CD_P01).

In the discussion group Maria pointed out the role of the educational community in fostering their participation:

The headmistress Laura invited me because she said: "Look, there's going to be a meeting, it's like a school for parents". And I really liked going to the parents' school, but I was embarrassed because I didn't know how to speak, I didn't know how to participate, I imagined that people would make fun of me because I didn't know anything, not even anything, nothing. So then Itzel's teacher ... said to me: "Madam, there is going to be a family education, do you want to come, come on, join the program", and I said: "Teacher, I am already old. I said to her: "Teacher, how embarrassing, how embarrassing" - and she replied "No, you don't feel embarrassed about it, Mr David, he's going to teach" (EG_01_GM).

Itzel not only encouraged her to participate but also followed her grandmother's learning closely. Research participants corroborated Itzel's support throughout the process. Itzel (E_F01) emphasised that she helped her review what she had seen in the course and advance in the content so that when she started studying with Mr David, she would understand things better. Maria passionately explained how her granddaughter would go over her texts and correct her mistakes and encourage her to write more to overcome her errors. And Itzel affirmed:

I really liked helping her because I felt proud of her, because I knew that she was very eager, and also that she was very eager to learn (E_F01).

For Itzel, the support given to her grandmother had a deep meaning, she recognised how important it was going to be for her grandmother to learn to read and write. Furthermore, her love for her grandmother led her to give her all the confidence she could, a key element in the family, which allowed Maria to learn and feel secure. Itzel's feelings of satisfaction and happiness are reflected in the following quote and show the impact that her grandmother's literacy has had on her:

Honestly, I am very happy for her, she wanted to improve herself and she took the first step, like going to school. I told her to do it. Now, I feel very happy for her (...) I felt happy, but at the same time, proud, because when I found out that she was going to study I was very happy for her. At home she studied with me, I helped her with homework and gave her activities to do and other activities for the two of us. I helped her with the things she didn't understand ... Yes, I was always proud of her and when I saw her studying I was very happy because she really wanted to do it and she was getting better and better at it (E__F01).

Literacy and Learning: Transformation

Maria overcame the difficulties in learning to read and write that she had previously encountered. Although she still lives in a rural area with difficult access and

transportation, the meaning, relevance and significance of going to school have made it possible for her to conciliate with her family life and overcome transportation issues. Her participation in the family education program has allowed her, in less than one school cycle (one year), to learn to read and write, overcoming the illiteracy she faced before:

Maria: I also like to come to school, and I have learned a little already. I actually took the exam ... I learned to read and write because I didn't know ... I did not know anything, nothing, not even anything and little by little I said: "Why not? I'm going to do it!" (EG_01_GM).

Maria's participation in the family education program has positively affected her state of mind. It has positively impacted the perception of herself regarding her ability to learn. In other words, it has transformed her self-concept, as highlighted by the following excerpt from an interview):

Maria: [regarding the question about how she feels currently] Very good and happy, very happy! and it is because I realized that If I want, of course I can! If you want to move on, you can do it. Now a daughter-in-law told me that she did not go to secondary school and I told her: "go, go to elementary school, sign up!, go to that, look at me, I'm old and I lost my grief and shame and they taught me a little". And I'm feeling good. I felt very good teacher, I felt different, I did not feel the same, I cannot explain it, but it was that I no longer felt stupid, really.

Researcher: Do you feel capable, with a voice?

Maria: Yes, with a lot of capacity, as with much more education, more to express myself more with my words

Researcher: Now, with your granddaughter in high school, do you feel more confident asking questions or participating in school?

Maria: Yes, yes like this. Right now, her writing and her mathematics are already higher, I no longer understand anything, but whatever or as I can, I will help her there.

Regarding the impact that learning had in the case of Maria, we asked the volunteer in charge of the literacy space, David:

Everyone has their particularity in terms of learning, but for example, Itzel's grandmother is very participatory, she is always supporting the school in whatever way she can, and to study the same. She has the illusion of achieving her certificate, she is one of those with greater desire of obtaining the certificate, and she is the one with the most progress (E_V03).

Maria's participation in the family education program enabled her to complete her primary education and obtain the school certificate necessary to access secondary education. She is currently studying secondary education and hopes to complete compulsory formal education in Mexico. In the community her case is known and her success story has had a positive impact on the motivation for the others who are becoming literate. Her case has resonated throughout the school and has had an impact beyond the literacy courses. Now Maria is enjoying participating actively in school. Likewise, she declares that she has not

only been involved in the family education program but in other educational activities that have arisen, derived from the transformation of the school into a learning community:

Maria: Now, with the girl, because she is my granddaughter (is like my daughter, I raised her since she was a baby) and now I come to participate. I come to the literary gatherings. I come to the interactive groups, whatever is offered. (EG_01_GM).

Other mothers and the school staff recognised her story of personal improvement. Maria is especially a reference for women, not only for illiterate women, but for all women. Melisa, with higher education, who actively participates in the school expressed admiration for Maria and declared that she is an essential motivation for other mothers:

Melisa: She always supports us, and I admire her a lot (EG_01_GM).

The research participants corroborated that Maria is a role model in school and in the community. The acquired learning and the progress in literacy have now allowed Itzel's grandmother to help other women in their learning. Maria's commitment to the school persisted in the interviews carried out to give an account of moments in which Maria has managed to support other women in the training sessions and other children by participating in other educational activities at the school. In her testimony, Maria shared the trust and encouragement provided by the volunteer in charge of the family education program, Mr David, who invited her to continue improving, to be able, in this way, to help other people learn and become a reference. Maria said:

He [David] told me that I was, I don't remember how, but he told me that I was the first, the first to participate and the first to be taught to participate and read, something like I was the queen, something like that ... he used to say: "You can, you want it, you have to help me later. And yes, afterwards I started to help others" (CD_P01).

Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, we have explored the case of Maria, through which we detailed the impacts of family education (Flecha, 2015, García et al., 2018), specifically the literacy course. Maria's story illustrates how family education, as a successful educational action (SEA), can impact underserved people's lives. Her participation in school through the family education program allowed her to acquire literacy skills that she had not achieved at any other time in her life. Maria's life story will enable us to share the potential impact that the family education program has in achieving the literacy of adults from vulnerable contexts and trajectories. Maria's life story is a positive role model of contributing to the inclusion of a vulnerable group in the rural Mexican context (Aguado López & Rogel Salazar, 2018, Ferguson, 2018, Lynch, 2009, Rodríguez-Oramas et al., 2021).

The results show the impact of the literacy course on Maria and how her success has impacted the whole community; results that follow previous literature highlighting the impact of SEAs over the community as a whole (Flecha, 2015, Flecha & Soler, 2014; Renta Davids et al., 2019, Soler et al. 2020). The findings presented revealed the school's

awareness of the significant training needs in the context. The school responded by organising and optimising its resources to achieve dreams and open those training spaces the community requested. This case provides an important insight into how the support of the community, especially the granddaughter, has enabled difficulties to be turned into opportunities. Overcoming challenges has meant that 71-year-old Maria has learned to read and write in just one school year and now is attending secondary education. Maria is a role model for people who are learning to read and write and for all those who participate in successful educational activities, especially women.

Acquiring reading and writing skills enables them to participate in today's society, and in Maria's case, it meant personal transformations in her self-concept and self-esteem. These changes motivated her to increase her participation in the school and made her a reference agent for the rest of the school community (Flecha, 2015; Schreiber-Barsch & Mauch, 2019; Olagbaju, 2020). Maria's interaction with other people in the community influenced them to feel inspired by her learning achievements, and they also decided to participate and overcome previous educational difficulties. These results illustrate the influence of the family education program in improving self-esteem, self-concept, and empowerment towards social participation, giving a voice to those who did not have it before. The relationship between Maria and her granddaughter revealed two basic transformative aspects: solidarity and egalitarian dialogue. Itzel's love and affection were a fundamental incentive in Maria's literacy process. Although an extensive literature reveals the impact on learners' motivation triggered by the educational involvement of families (Hannon et al., 2020; Ochoa & Quiroa, 2020), the story of Maria and Itzel is an example of bidirectional motivation.

In this case, the granddaughter convinces, motivates, supports, and accompanies her grandmother's literacy process and is excited and happy with the learning acquired by her grandmother. This intergenerational relationship and cross-generational support in the learning process can open new lines of research to address the learning needs of adults who are educationally disadvantaged or excluded through their younger family members or relatives, even from those of early age. Our findings deepen the current understanding about the relevance of family education and community involvement in everyone's education, young and adult. In this case, with the support of the younger members of the family and the school community, a grandmother becomes literate and continues to further her education. We argue that this study moves the field forward because it explores the ways relationships impact lifelong literacy, supportive learning contexts, and family literacy practices.

Finally, the case analysed shows that family education as successful educational actions (SEAs) contributes to overcoming illiteracy. It takes on particular relevance in disadvantaged rural environments, directly impacting the reduction of the persistent educational gap in this type of context (INEGI, 2020, INEE, 2018). Participation in the school opened many opportunities for Maria, and in the first letter she wrote we can read: "Promise me that you are braver than you think, stronger than you imagine, and smarter than you think ...". Through her day-to-day collaboration in the school, Maria reminds the

community that educational transformation is possible through Successful Educational Actions.

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