

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1. Overview of Results

The reader will recall that the main objective of this study was to identify the processes and ideologies underlying the learning and instruction of literacy in a particular Mexican elementary school. In order to ascertain the attitudes and values related to the teaching of reading and writing, data from three contexts - school, home and community - were collected, coded, and analyzed. Of specific interest to the researcher was the extent to which local educators recognized and incorporated funds of linguistic knowledge in their classrooms. While the research questions themselves are addressed in detail in the final chapter, this chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the overall findings.

The results were obtained after careful analysis of the observation and interview transcriptions. The categories and subcategories reflect patterns in the observations which have been compared to and complemented with findings from the interviews. Each of the five categories below includes a brief description of the specific practices documented throughout the process of data collection, as well as authentic, illustrative examples (i.e. photographs, quotes) where appropriate. The discussion also mentions any counterexamples, in other words, data that seemed to challenge the general patterns revealed in the categories.

4.2. Reading

As far as reading instruction and learning in the school context, three practices were observed to occur on a somewhat regular basis. In the first grade classroom, most reading took place from the chalkboard or from cards containing the students' names. In

both first and fourth grades, a common exercise was for the children to read out loud, either individual words or sentences they had written, and, in the case of first grade, texts from the Spanish book provided by the Mexican government. To a less extent, the teachers would stimulate discussion about a particular reading assignment. The researcher noted a total of only four instances of silent reading, in addition to one example of funds of linguistic knowledge (i.e. a community text used in the classroom). The description of reading practices common in the school is followed by a brief overview of home reading activities, which were reported by parents and children in the interviews.

4.2.1. Reading from Board / Cards

An activity observed quite frequently in the first-grade classroom was for the students to read letters, syllables, and words from the chalkboard and from cards, either silently, chorally, or one student out loud. The teacher commented during her interview that these were the materials she typically used to teach reading. Additionally, Gertrudis had hung all the letters of the alphabet, both upper and lowercase, above the board. She often would move to the board, take a stick, and point to each of the letters while the children read them out loud. For example, during one class session the teacher announced,

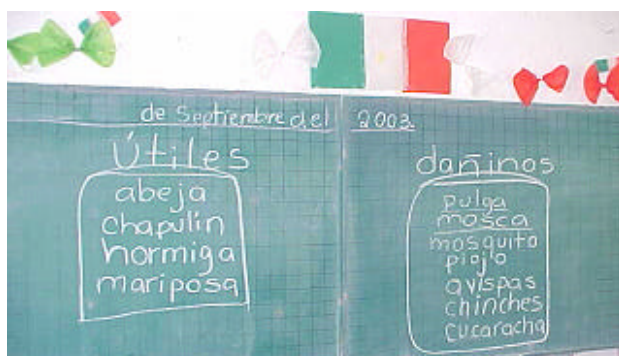
“vamos a dar un repaso a las consonantes y vocales ya que la próxima semana tenemos examen” [let’s review the consonants and vowels because we’ll have an exam next week]. She begins pointing at the letters above the board, asking how each one sounds, until they have reviewed the entire alphabet. Throughout this activity she encourages the students to give examples of words beginning with each of the letters (10/30/2003).

On another occasion, Gertrudis distributed cards containing the students’ full names, and she pointed to the letters one-by-one above the board as they located and covered them

up on the cards. As before, she had the children to sound out the letters in unison (01/14/2004).

The chalkboard was also used regularly for reading words and, more rarely, sentences. For instance, as can be observed in Figure 4.1, the teacher would write lists of words on the board. The students were asked to read them aloud, either in unison or individually.

Figure 4.1 List of Words on the First-grade Chalkboard



It was likewise noticed that the teacher would often select particular students to approach the board and read out certain terms. On January 28, 2004, for example, Gertrudis posted the words *azul* [blue], *paloma* [dove], *cielo* [sky], *bajó* [came down], *de* [from], *el* [the], and, *que* [that]. After the whole class had decided on the order of the clause, *la paloma azul que del cielo bajó* [the blue dove that came down from the sky], she called on seven different children to go to the board and take down the seven words, one-by-one. Clearly they had to be able to read the terms in order to know which one to choose.

During one interesting class lesson, the teacher had prepared cards containing the letters *e*, *b*, *u*, *q*, *n*, *a*, *e*, and *t*. She asked eight students to go to the front of the room and to form a horizontal line. Each child was given a card, and they held them up for their

classmates. After reading the letters individually and sounding them out, Gertrudis instructed the students to try to form a word with them. They quickly moved about and created the term *banquete* [banquet], one of their weekly vocabulary items. The teacher took advantage of this opportunity to have the children to respond to the following questions:

- 1) *¿Qué dice?* [What does it say?]
- 2) *¿Cuántas letras tiene?* [How many letters does it have?]
- 3) *¿Cuál es la primera letra? ¿la segunda? ¿la tercera?*
[What is the first letter? the second? the third?] (2/11/2004)

4.2.2. Reading Out Loud

In both the first and fourth grades, the students were frequently asked to read words, sentences, or even short texts out loud. In the first grade, the children read primarily from the board (see above) and from their textbook. According to Gertrudis, the Spanish book provided by the government free-of-charge to students at the elementary level contains stories appropriate for children of this age (interview, 01/12/2004). She would ask the children to begin reading a story, and they would proceed to read (often mumble) through it until everyone had finished. In fact, they even seemed to understand that the instruction to read meant reading out loud, given that on very few occasions did they actually read silently (see below). To give some specific examples, on October 15, 2003 the researcher observed them reading a story entitled *Los Changuitos* [*The Little Monkeys*]. During another class, the teacher gave out the lyrics to a song about a dove, and the children were asked to read them out loud (01/28/2004).

Interestingly, on neither of these occasions did Gertrudis use the texts for more than an oral read-aloud. In other words, the students did not discuss the meaning of the texts nor did they complete a follow-up activity such as a writing assignment.

Nevertheless, during her interview she expressed the following: “*Alguien que te...después de leer te sabe decir de qué trató el texto, o la lectura...cuál es el mensaje, la idea principal*” [A good reader is] someone who, after reading, can tell you what the text or reading was about...the message, the main idea] (01/12/2004).

Given that many of the first graders apparently began schooling without knowing how to read or write (i.e. no formal instruction in literacy) (interview with Gertrudis, 01/12/2004), the teacher usually allowed those who were still having trouble reading to follow along with their fingers. In other words, they listened to their classmates while reading silently. The teacher likewise encouraged the students to do the best they could, which often resulted in their mumbling instead of actually reading out the text. Such difference in reading proficiency was noted both by the researcher in the observations and by the teacher during the interview. Gertrudis mentioned that she hoped these types of activities would promote scaffolding through cooperative learning. She quoted, “*Doy libros...y lo leen por pareja...por parejas o tríos...y, este, algunos están combinados, un niño que sabe leer les lee a los demás*” [I give them books, and they read it in pairs, in pairs or in groups of three...and, umm, some are mixed. A child who knows how to read reads to the others] (01/12/2004).

Octavio, the fourth-grade teacher, regularly had his students to stand up beside their tables and to read out questions, sentences, and short texts. For instance, during the first observation in this class the researcher noted,

The teacher asks each of the students to stand up and read out some of his/her sentences to the rest of the class. They must not use the same verb as their classmates, and they are to identify the subject and predicate in each sentence. One girl stands up and reads, “*La niña juega en el patio de la casa*” [The girl plays on the house patio]. She has underlined *juega en el patio de la casa* [plays on the house patio] and has labeled it as the predicate (10/13/2003).

On another occasion, Octavio instructed a number of students to stand up and read out several questions they had been dictated about the dictionary. Examples of these questions were 1) ¿Qué es un diccionario? [What is a dictionary?] 2) ¿Qué orden tienen las palabras en un diccionario? [How are the terms in a dictionary ordered?]. The children read the questions and provided the answers that they had been required to research as a homework assignment (10/27/2003).

Regarding larger texts, during one class session the students were given photocopies of a play and were asked to prepare a skit in groups to be presented to the others and to the teacher. All of the children read directly from their papers when it was their turn to speak. It was noted that Octavio interrupted two of the students throughout this reading activity to correct their pronunciation and grammar, respectively. For example, one boy said *habra* instead of *habrá* [there will be], and the teacher corrected his placement of stress. Moreover, a female student was corrected for using the feminine article as opposed to the masculine with the word *acto* [act] (12/01/2003).

4.2.3. Discussion of Reading

Only a few instances of reading discussion were documented. In first grade, Gertrudis once asked the students to recount what they remembered after having read a children's story. Perhaps not accustomed to this kind of questioning, no one responded. Thus, she proceeded to ask them more specific questions, such as “¿Quiénes fueron los personajes?” [Who were the characters?] and “¿Por qué no usan camisa?” [Why don't they wear shirts?]. Observing that not many people were paying attention to her attempt to begin a discussion, she decided instead to have them read the story out loud as a group (10/15/2003). Additionally, on at least two other occasions, Gertrudis solicited opinions

about a reading assignment, remarking “¿A quién le pareció chistoso el cuento?” [Who found the story funny?] (10/15/2003) and “¿A quién le gustó?” [Who liked it?]. (11/19/2003). The reply from the children consisted of a simple “*a mí*” [I did]. In other words, no further discussion took place.

Similarly, the fourth-grade teacher, Octavio, once asked his students to remind him what they remembered about a play they had read, specifically with reference to the plot and characters. However, before they even had a chance to answer, he interrupted and provided his own summary and interpretation of the play. When he had finished speaking he called on various children to mention the points he had forgotten, also questioning them on how the play ended. In this way, it seemed as though the instruction was not allowing the students to grow as readers.

Significantly, this particular reading had been done from photocopies, and the day the researcher observed this brief discussion, only one in every four or five people had a copy. Indeed, the teacher commented during the first interview that the shortage of materials was a major problem in his class: “*Sí, lo que pasa es que el problema es que a veces no...no me ha dado el tiempo de sacar tantas copias para todos, ¿no? Y aparte que es...gasto*” [Yes, the problem is that sometimes I don’t...I don’t have time to make photocopies for everyone, you know? And also, it’s...an expense] (01/09/2004).

This overall lack of reading discussion in the two classrooms contrasted with what one of the mothers expressed during her interview, namely *(un buen lector es) el que entiende. El que entiende lo que está leyendo. El que puede aplicar después lo que, lo que entendió en ese libro...ése es un buen lector*” [(a good reader) understands. He/she understands what he/she is reading. He/she is able to apply later on what, what he/she

understood from that reading...that's a good reader] (Melisa, 01/08/2004). The reading practices observed in both classes tended to serve the purpose of learning to read, not reading to learn. In-depth discussion and follow-up activities regarding the assignments were practically non-existent.

4.2.4. Silent Reading

As opposed to reading out loud (see section 4.2.2.), which occurred quite frequently, silent reading was rare. In fact, the researcher noted just four instances of this sort of activity, all of which took place in Gertrudis' class. Moreover, the task consisted not of reading during an extended period of time, but rather moments in which the children were asked to read the text and provide specific information. For example, on one occasion, the students had read a story from their textbook and were instructed to look for and to circle specific terms. These are the notes from the observation that day:

Gertrudis: "*Vamos a sacar nuestro lápiz rojo. Vamos a encerrar donde dice 'caracol'*". [Let's get out our red colored pencils. We're going to circle where it says 'snail']. The children do this exercise to see which group can finish first. The teacher continues: "*¿Cuántas veces dice 'caracol'?*" [How many times does it say 'snail'?] "*¿Con qué letra empieza 'caracol'?*" [What letter does 'snail' begin with?] "*¿Cuántas veces se repite?*" [How many times is it repeated?] Gertrudis then says, "*vamos a ver cuántas veces se repite 'gusanitos'*" [Let's see how many times 'worms' is repeated.] A little later, she comments, "*vamos a ver cuántas veces se repite 'casa'*". [Let's see how many times 'house' is repeated] (11/19/2003).

On another visit, the teacher distributed a word search and asked the children to look for words containing the syllables 'que' and 'qui', terms that she had written for them on the chalkboard. Figure 4.2 below is a reproduction of the *sopa de letras*, or word search, and activity (02/11/2004).

Figure 4.2 Word Search Activity in the First Grade

R S V A Q U I T A T		
E S Q U I M A L Q F	Qui	Que
V A Q U E R O L S Q	_____	_____
N S T L B O S Q U E	_____	_____
B A R Q U I T O H T	_____	_____
P E N R I Q U E T A	_____	_____
Ñ L P Q U E S O V W		
M O S Q U I T O K N		

A third example of silent reading was noted on February 12, 2004, when the teacher asked the students to read a menu included as part of a story in their Spanish book. Nevertheless, she allowed them only a minute or so to complete the reading before she began giving instructions for them to reproduce their own menu based on the model. In summary, the time dedicated to silent reading was minimal in the first grade and completely absent in the fourth grade. Furthermore, the texts used for silent reading were generally very short and simple, not at all challenging for the children.

4.2.5. Funds of Linguistic Knowledge

Both teachers claimed to be at least somewhat aware of the type of reading done by their students outside the classroom. Gertrudis commented during an interview that she had encouraged her children to obtain library cards at the school and to check out books on a weekly basis. According to her, the children would take these books home with them, read them either alone or with their parents, and then talk to her in class about what they had learned (01/12/2004). Octavio told the researcher that he often had his students to bring texts from home, such as stories or fables, and that they would use these materials during class. Interestingly, he pointed out that not all of the children

participated, given that “*un...cincuenta por ciento de alumnos que sí tienen esa, esa oportunidad y que los papás les gastan en libros o cuentos...Muchos de esos libros son de sus papás*” [Around 50% of the students have this, this opportunity. Their parents spend money on books or stories. Many of these books are their parents’] (01/09/2004).

Despite this reported incorporation of local texts in the classroom, only one such instance related to reading was actually documented throughout the duration of the study. This particular class session was devoted to a discussion of newspapers, as the children read out the titles and talked about where they had acquired the texts. The objectives that day included identifying the purpose of a newspaper, its sections, and the distinction between national and international news (01/19/2004). Nonetheless, it is doubtful that the students actually read these types of texts in their homes. According to the parents interviewed, they usually read only from their Spanish book (i.e. homework assignments) and, in a few cases, other stories and environmental texts such as the writing on cereal boxes and grocery lists. This general lack of reading at home was presumably true for other children in the school as well.

4.2.6. Reading in the Home

When asked whether or not they read frequently at home, only the first-grade children replied affirmatively. Indeed, their parents told the researcher that since they were just now beginning to learn how to read, they enjoyed it. The fourth-graders, on the other hand, reported that reading was not an activity they particularly liked. For example, Mario stated, “*Nada más en la escuela y un poco en casa*” [(I read) only at school and a little at home] (12/19/03).

The kinds of texts typically read in the home setting included schoolbooks, both from the current and previous semesters, as well as children's stories, adventures, magazines, and student encyclopedias. Some of the parents also expressed that their children liked to read billboards and road signs while traveling. Susana said, "*¿Sabes qué le gusta hacer? Que cuando vamos en el carro o algo va leyendo todos los...los este promocionales de la calle y eso...O sea, sí me doy cuenta que, que lo hace... 'Mira, mamá, ahí dice esto'*" [You know what she likes to do? That when we're in the car or something she reads out all the...the umm advertisements on the street. I realize that, that she does it. "Look mom, there it says this."] (01/06/2004).

The students commented that sometimes they preferred to read alone, whereas on other occasions they would read with their parents, generally with their mother, and often with older or younger brothers or sisters. One parent, Tania, pointed out that her first-grade son César had no choice but to read alone: "*Por lo regular no porque mi esposo se va ya en la tarde a trabajar entonces no, este...también no...no comparte mucho tiempo. Los dos no compartimos mucho tiempo...con él mas el fin de semana...y en la noche que llego me pongo a hacer trabajos con él'*" [Usually (he reads by himself) because my husband goes to work in the evening so, umm...also, he doesn't have much time. Neither of us has much time...just on the weekends...and sometimes at night when I get home I sit down and work with him] (01/17/2004). The other mothers reported that they read with their children every once in a while, and that when they did, they would take turns reading to each other. Favorite spots to read included the living room and the children's bedroom.

Not only did the students read very little at home, most of the parents also admitted that reading was not a common activity in their own lives. For instance, Lucia and Tania said that they read at most four or five pages a day, and only when they had a moment of spare time. The texts they and their husbands read included magazines, newspapers, comics, short romance stories, and, very rarely, a book or novel. Many of the texts read by parents, especially the fathers, all of whom were reported to hold steady jobs, were limited to things directly related to their employment. To give an example, Melisa mentioned that her husband, an educator, enjoyed reading books about education, as well as about intercultural issues (01/08/2004).

Despite these findings concerning the overall lack of interest in reading, the parents replied that reading was important. When questioned why people read, common answers were “*para aprender*” [to learn], “*para saber más*” [to know more], “*informarse*” [to be informed], and “*porque es un placer*” [because it’s enjoyable]. No one said that reading was useless or irrelevant in their lives. In other words, their ideas contradicted their actual practices. Nevertheless, the mothers who participated in the focus-group interview confessed that reading had not been culturally engrained in them, and that for this reason trying to get people in the local community to dedicate time to this activity would be difficult, if not impossible.

4.3. Writing

Classroom writing activities were quite prevalent, significantly more so than reading. The students in both grades were required to write their names and the date prior to beginning all of the assignments in their notebooks. The first-graders’ writing was then almost completely limited to syllables and individual words, whereas the fourth-graders

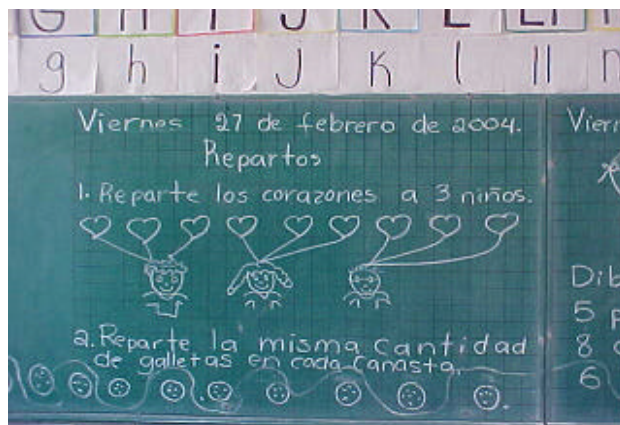
were asked to write at the sentence level. Most texts were either copied (i.e. from the blackboard, cards, or books) or dictated by the teacher. Exercises involving copying were documented in both classrooms, while dictation was much more frequent in the fourth grade. As with reading, only a few written assignments could be classified as communicative (meaning-based), namely in Octavio's class. These practices, along with a discussion of writing in the home setting, are now explained.

4.3.1. Date and Names

As the children got out their notebooks in preparation for a writing task, the first instructions from both teachers were almost always something along the lines of '*vamos a escribir nuestros nombres y la fecha*' [let's write our names and the date]. In Gertrudis' class, the date was almost always displayed on the top of the blackboard, as seen in the picture below. Accordingly, the students could either write it on their own or copy it. In fourth grade, the blackboard was rarely used for instruction, not even for the date. Instead, the children were simply instructed to write the date without a model. All the students were aware that writing the date was required of them, clearly an example of a schooled literacy practice. They often did so automatically, and, on some occasions, even reminded their teachers that it should be included at the top of their papers.

Another common activity, especially in the first grade, consisted of the children writing their own names. Realizing that some of her students were still not proficient at writing their names, Gertrudis usually gave out cards containing this information to each child. Those who wished thus had the option of copying directly from the card, while the others were encouraged to write from memory. During several visits the writing task for the day centered on the multiple repetition of each person's name, until an entire page of

Figure 4.3 Date Written on the Top of the First-grade Chalkboard



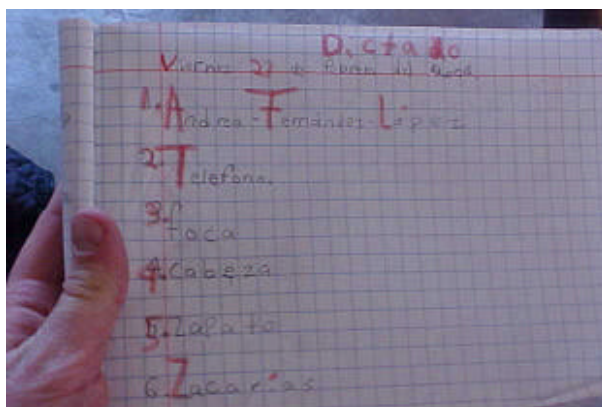
the notebook had been filled. For example, Gertrudis instructed her students to write their names a total six times (10/30/2003) and five times (02/11/2004) on these particular dates.

As is discussed in detail in section 4.4, students were typically expected to write capital letters and numbers with a red colored pencil. As illustrated in Figure 4.4. below, most children complied with this practice in the writing of their names and the date, as well as for other words and sentences, often not having been given explicit indication to do so. Some of the children included accent marks in their names (usually in red), although it is difficult to know whether they copied or had actually learned them.

4.3.2. Syllables and Words

As might be predicted for a first-grade classroom, most of the writing at this level consisted of individual syllables or words. In fact, each week Gertrudis would select a specific letter, such as *q*, *j*, or *m*, and focus the children's attention first on syllables and then on whole words containing these letters. To give an example, during the week of November 24th-28th, the target letter was *q*. After having her students to identify the *q*

Figure 4.4 Use of Red Colored Pencil for a Written Assignment

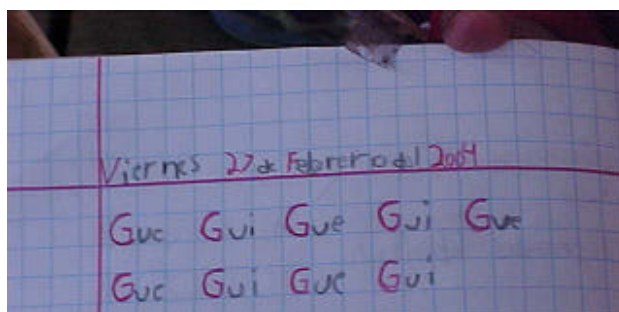


in the alphabet above the board and to make its sound, she wrote the syllables *que* and *qui* on the board. She then wrote the following words (among others), each of which was missing one of these two syllables:

___ ___ ___ s o	[queso = cheese]
___ ___ ___ s a d i l l a	[quesadilla]
b a n ___ ___ ___ t o	[banquito = small bench]
r o n ___ ___ ___ d o	[ronquido = snore]

She proceeded to call out the names of certain students to go to the board and to fill in the words with the missing syllable. On another occasion, the class was working with the letter *g*. They briefly discussed how it sounds and were asked to copy the syllables *Gue* and *Gui* in their notebooks, as seen in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5 Syllables *Gui* and *Gue* Written Repeatedly in a Student's Notebook



As far as the word level, the first-graders were frequently required either to form words with small, cut-out pieces of paper containing letters and/or to copy them directly off the board into their notebooks. For instance, during one session the teacher wrote up the terms *mago* [wizard], *gato* [cat], *gusano* [worm], and *gota* [drop], and in groups the children ordered each of them with cut-out letters and then proceeded to copy them repeatedly in their notebooks (12/10/2003). For another class the homework was to write two words using the syllable *je*, two with *jo*, and two with *ju*. Gertrudis called various students to the board to write what they had done for homework. One student, Juan, wrote *jefe* [boss], *jesús* [Jesus], *joya* [jewel], *hijo* [son], *juez* [judge], and *junio* [June] (2/18/2004).

4.3.3. Phrases and Sentences

Writing at the phrase and sentence levels turned out to be much less common, excluding the sentences and short texts which were copied or dictated (see below). In first grade, the researcher documented only one example of sentences created by the children. Specifically, they had been asked to write two sentences with words containing the syllable *vo*. A girl named Stephanie had written the following:

<i>El volca es hermoso.</i>	[The volcano is beautiful.]
<i>El volante del coche es negro.</i>	[The car's steering wheel is black.]

Although Gertrudis had given Stephanie a checkmark for her work, she had not corrected the child's misspelling of the word *volcán*, which also includes an accent (01/14/2004). Thus, the purpose of the assignment appeared to be communication rather than a strict focus on form.

In the fourth grade, again most sentences were either copied or dictated, but at least three instances of student-generated sentences/short texts were observed. For one

class the homework was to write five sentences in which the task was to underline the predicate (10/13/2003). A week later, the children were instructed to write a poem comprised of ten sentences. Octavio made it explicit that every two sentences should rhyme with each other (10/24/2003). Another homework assignment in his class was for the students to write five “interesting” riddles (11/24/2003).

Clearly, all of these exercises involved a minimal amount of creativity on the part of the learner, as compared to the copying and dictation activities explained below. However, it is important to mention that due to difficulties gaining access to the fourth-grade classroom toward the latter part of the data collection process, there may have been more examples of sentence production that were not documented.

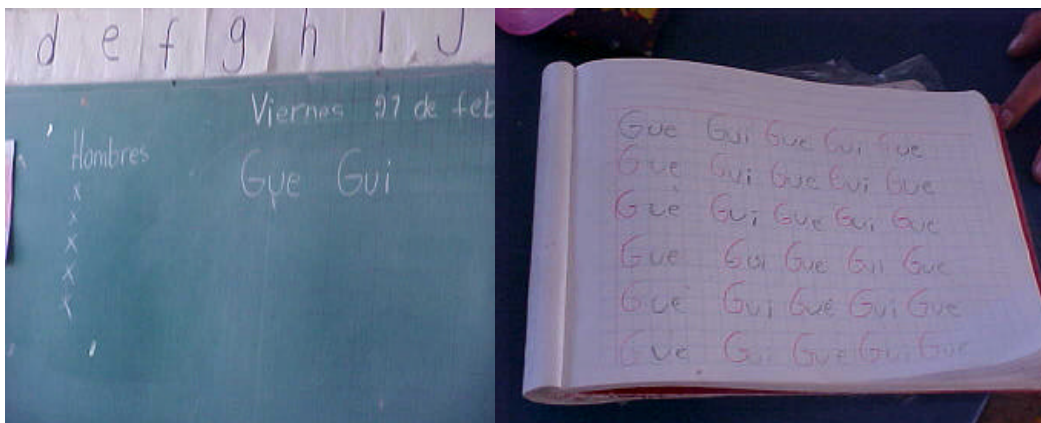
4.3.4. Copying

One of the most established writing tasks in both classrooms consisted of copying, either from the blackboard, books, or cards. As mentioned in section 4.3.1, the first grade students would often copy the date from the blackboard. They would likewise be told to copy their names from cards on which Gertrudis had already written them. In the case of the children with lower writing abilities, such as César, the teacher would also model the date and their names in their notebooks for them to copy.

Other copying activities in the first grade involved letters, syllables, words, and sentences. For instance, during one class on cursive writing the teacher wrote the letter *a* on the blackboard, both upper and lowercase, five times each. After describing how the cursive letters were distinct from those printed (i.e. more connected), she instructed the children to copy the examples on the board directly into their notebooks. This exercise was completed for all five vowels (02/19/2004).

Regarding syllables, the teacher would similarly write the syllables-of-the-week on the board for the students to copy. The researcher noted that many of the children would fill up a whole page in their notebooks with between two and five syllables. During one visit, for example, the class had been studying the syllables *que* and *qui*. Gertrudis wrote these on the board for review and, automatically, the students began copying them repeatedly (11/26/2003). More recently, the target syllables were *gue* and *gui*. The teacher wrote them on the board in both capital and lowercase forms for the children to copy. The photographs in Figure 4.6 illustrate both teacher and student writing on this particular day (02/27/2004):

Figure 4.6 Teacher Modeling of Syllables *Gue* and *Gui* on the Chalkboard and an Example of Student Copying



Word copying was also a frequent activity in the first grade. As with the letters and syllables, the teacher would write up a list of words to be copied by the students. For instance, during one class she put up the following words: *esquina* [corner], *paquete* [package], *quince* [fifteen], *quiero* [I want], *raqueta* [racket], *queso* [cheese], *toque* [touch], *aquí* [here], *quema* [it burns]. Clearly, all of these terms contain either the syllable *que* or *qui*. The students read the words off the board and then copied them in their notebooks (02/11/2004).

On February 16, 2004, the first-graders were instructed to copy four sentences from the blackboard. These included:

<i>Javier es mi amigo.</i>	[Javier is my friend.]
<i>Mi torta es de jamón.</i>	[My sandwich has ham.]
<i>La jaula tiene pajaritos.</i>	[The cage contains little birds.]
<i>El jabón huele bien.</i>	[The soap smells good.]

Thus, the copying activities at this level consisted of a combination of letters, syllables, words, and sentences. In the fourth grade, the teacher was often overheard asking his students to copy larger texts for homework. For example, he once announced that the homework assignment was to “*copiar un trabalenguas e ilustrarlo abajo e investigar qué es un trabalenguas*” [copy a tongue-twister and illustrate it below and find out what a tongue-twister is] (11/17/2003). He told the children to consult books or even their parents to locate these expressions. On another occasion, his instructions were for the students to “*copiar el párrafo del libro de lecturas de la página 28*” [copy the paragraph from page 28 of the reading book]. After copying, the task was to explain the use of punctuation, specifically commas and periods, in the paragraph (01/26/2004).

All this copying seemed contradictory to what Octavio claimed in his first interview: “*(la gente escribe) pues para que...para transmitir...lo, lo que desea, ¿no? O el mensaje que quiere, este, dar...y por el otro lado pues, siempre para comunicarse, de manera escrita claro*” [(People write) well to...to transmit...what, what they desire, right? Or the message that they wish, umm, to express...and, on the other hand, well, always to communicate in written form, of course] (01/09/2004). Likewise, most of the parents interviewed in this study replied that the purpose of writing was for expression and communication, as opposed to formal aspects, such as handwriting, accentuation,

punctuation, and spelling, all of which, according to Octavio, the copying exercises were designed to improve (second interview, 2/27/2004).

4.3.5. Dictation

Aside from copying, a great deal of writing consisted of teacher dictation, most notably in the fourth grade. Octavio would read out a text, either from memory or from a book, and the students would write it in their notebooks. Many times these dictations lasted for most of the 45 minutes of the Spanish literacy class.

For instance, during one class Octavio instructed the students to find a clean page in their notebooks and to write the title *Ejercicios* [Exercises], along with the date. (Titles and subtitles were typically written in red to distinguish them from the rest of the text.) The dictation continued: “*contestar el siguiente cuestionario correctamente*” [answer the following questionnaire correctly.] “*Dejar 2 renglones*” [Skip two lines.] “*Escribir uno punto guión*” [Write ‘number 1’ and a hyphen.] “*Abrimos una interrogación*” [(Inverted) question mark.] “*¿A qué tipo de texto pertenece la poesía?*” [What type of text is poetry?] “*Se cierra el signo de interrogación*” [End question mark.] The actual dictated questions were:

1. *¿A qué tipo de texto pertenece la poesía?* [What type of text is poetry?]
2. *¿Qué expresa una poesía?* [What does poetry express?]
3. *¿Cuál es la característica de la poesía?* [What is the characteristic of poetry?]
4. *¿Qué es una rima?* [What is a rhyme?]
5. *¿Qué es un verso?* [What is a verse?] (10/20/2003)

As can be observed in this example, Octavio’s dictations were very explicit in that not only did he read out the words themselves, but also the punctuation and indications of

how many lines to skip. Likewise, the next example illustrates how he often included instructions on spelling and accentuation:

“Anoten: Ejercicio, con “j” y doble “c”. Ordena alfabéticamente las siguientes palabras y anota adelante de cada una de ellas su significado” “Avestruz, con “v”, Pecera, con “c”, Amanecer, con “c” y Ventana, con “v” [Write: ‘Ejercicio’ [Exercise], with “j” and double “c”. Order alphabetically the following words and write down beside each one its meaning. ‘Avestruz’ [ostrich], written with “v”, ‘Pecera’ [fish tank], with “c”, ‘Amanecer’ [dawn], with “c”, and ‘Ventana’ [window], with “v”] (10/27/2003).

Dictations of this sort were documented in practically all of the fourth-grade Spanish lessons. In first grade, on the other hand, there were only two dictations. During one class, Gertrudis dictated five sentences for the children to copy in their notebooks. These sentences included:

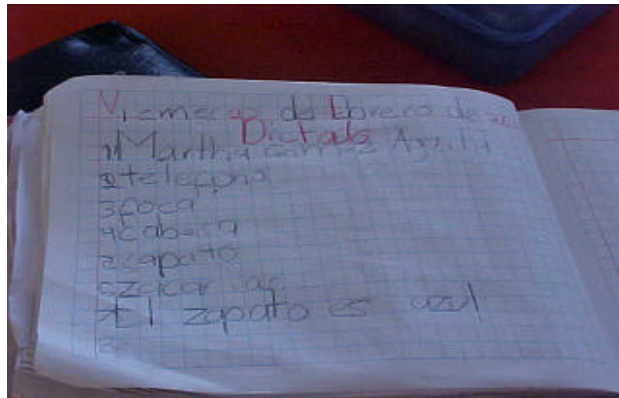
- | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Ese oso es mío.</i> | [That bear is mine.] |
| 2. <i>La sopa es de mi tía.</i> | [The soup is my aunt’s.] |
| 3. <i>Susana usa poca ropa.</i> | [Susan doesn’t wear much clothing.] |
| 4. <i>La oveja juega junto a los conejos.</i> | [The sheep plays with the bunnies.] |
| 5. <i>La oveja es de José.</i> | [The sheep is Jose’s.] (02/20/2004) |

In contrast to Octavio, Gertrudis did not provide any indication of accents, punctuation, or spelling. She simply read out the sentences and allowed the students to write them as best they could. In fact, it was noted that many of the children had trouble with the spelling, as they confused some of the letters. Nevertheless, the message of their writing was completely understandable to the researcher.

On another occasion, the first-grade teacher prepared the children for a dictation by writing the word *“dictado”* [dictation] on the board, along with the numbers from one to six. After the students had copied this information from the board, the teacher began the activity. She told them to write their whole names for number one and then the following terms and one sentence for the rest of the exercise: 2. *Teléfono* [telephone], 3.

Foca [seal], 4. *Cabeza* [head], 5. *Zapato* [shoe], 6. *Zacarías* [Zachary], and 7. *El zapato es azul* [The shoe is blue.] (02/27/2004). Below is a sample page from one student's notebook, which shows this dictation:

Figure 4.7 Example of Student Writing after Dictation



Clearly, this child did not include accents in the terms *Gómez* (her last name), *teléfono*, and *zacarías*, and she wrote the words *cabeza* and *zapato* with the letter *s* instead of *z*. These mistakes were neither pointed out nor corrected by the teacher.

4.3.6. Communicative Writing

Many of the interviewees stated that the main purpose of writing was for meaningful communication and expression. A few of them claimed that writing should be a passion. For example, Melisa said that people write “*para que sepan...Yo creo que quien escribe tiene algo que decir...tiene mucho que decir, de muchas cosas*” [so that they know...I think that those who write have something to say...They have a lot to say, about a lot of things] (01/08/2004). Susana replied that a “good” writer is “*una persona que disfruta...lo que está haciendo...Para hacer algo...te tiene que gustar...Escribir...es su pasión*” [a person who enjoys what he or she does...To do something...you have to like it...Writing...is your passion] (01/06/2004). Nonetheless, throughout the duration of

the study only two examples of authentic, communicative texts were documented, both in the fourth grade.

On one occasion, as a homework assignment Octavio asked his students to write an advertisement in which they were to announce a local event. The children had the option of working individually or with a partner. During the class each student or pair of students stood up and read out their advertisements, which dealt with topics as diverse as parties, school meetings, and sports events. Although Octavio was quite notorious for correcting students' written work, he did not make any such comments on this particular day. To the contrary, he praised all the learners for having put so much effort into their posters (12/01/2003).

For another session, the fourth-graders had read newspaper articles and were instructed to write two short articles of their own. The directions were that one was to be an example of a national news story, and the other one international. The students were encouraged to look for authentic examples in newspapers on which their own articles could be modeled, as well as to ask their parents for help in completing the assignment (01/19/2004).

4.3.7. Writing in the Home

Most of the parents interviewed in this study told the researcher that their children did not enjoy writing at home. Although five out of the six case-study children initially responded that they liked to write, they later admitted that they preferred drawing to writing. However, it was discovered that many of these drawings were often accompanied by texts, albeit short ones. For instance, three of the mothers expressed that their children would regularly draw pictures for their parents or siblings, often including

phrases such as “*para mamá*” [for mom], “*para papá*” [for dad], “*para hermano/a*” [for brother or sister] (Lucia, 12/22/2003), as well as with longer texts like “*papá, te quiero mucho y gracias por ser el mejor papá*” [dad, I love you a lot and thanks for being the best dad] (Susana, 01/06/2004).

In addition to these drawings/cards, the children reported that they sometimes wrote short stories, such as Cristina, who liked to write about hummingbirds, and Alicia, who said she often wrote about the circus. César, one of the first-graders, claimed that he enjoyed practicing the numbers and the letters of the alphabet. This was confirmed by his mother, Tania. Favorite places to write included the kitchen table (a hard surface) and each child’s room (private and comfortable).

However, these same parents and even some of the children confessed that most of the writing done in the home was related to school or homework. For example, Mario said “*Escribo un poco...mi tarea*” [I write a little...my homework] (12/19/2003). Susana, when asked about Alicia, responded “*pues la verdad ...si no es tarea pues no. Se dedica a jugar, o sea, no, no mucho*” [well, honestly, if it’s not homework, no. She passes her time playing, in other words, no, not very much] (01/06/2004). The only mother who reported that her daughter wrote a lot was Lucia, who said, “*pues sí escribe mucho ahorita como está en la etapa de que apenas está empezando a leer y a ...escribir*” [well, yes, she writes a lot now that she’s just beginning to read and....to write.] (12/22/2003).

As far as other people in the home who write, most participants told the researcher that writing was usually associated directly with employment or with household management. To give some examples, Tania, a sales agent, stated that she wrote lots of sales quotes for her clients, as well as a list of groceries and other things she

needed to buy for the home (01/17/2004). Even though Ariana admitted that she no longer wrote (she said that used to write poems), her husband, a veterinarian, had to fill out reports on the animals he treated (12/20/2003). Carla, the school monitor and nurse, said that she wrote about the students' conduct as well as medical reports (12/19/2004). All of these texts appear to be immediately relevant and useful to the participants' lives, in contrast to much of what is written by the children at school.

4.4. Limitations at School

This category includes a description of the ways in which both texts and behavior were regulated, or controlled, within the school context. As found in other studies conducted in this area of Mexico (Ballesteros, 2003; Jiménez et al., 2003), writing in particular was subject to constant correction in the classrooms, especially in the fourth grade. Reading was much less restricted, although a few points are worthy of mention. Control was likewise reported to a certain extent for the home setting, specifically with regard to writing. Lastly, scolding for misbehavior turned out to be a very notable pattern throughout the data collection process, given that practically every transcription included references to verbal or physical discipline.

4.4.1. Reading

As mentioned in section 4.2.2, many of the reading exercises consisted of reading out loud. Students would either stand up beside their desks to read in the fourth grade, or, in the case of first grade, read off the board from their seats. Both of the teachers, Gertrudis and Octavio, would often interrupt the student who was reading and ask him or her to read more loudly. For example, once in Octavio's class a girl was reading the text she had written on her poster (the advertisement described above). The teacher stopped

her and said, “*más fuerte, hija*” [louder, dear] (12/01/2003). In fact, it was noted on this particular day that many of the children appeared to read softly because they were afraid of making a mistake. In other words, it seemed to be that if the teacher could not hear them well, he would be less likely to notice their errors. On another occasion, one of Octavio’s (male) students read very softly, even to the point of incomprehensibility. Although the teacher did not interrupt him, once he finished he remarked, “*hijo, hay que leer mejor*” [son, you’ve got to read better] (01/19/2004).

Moreover, during a few class sessions, the teachers corrected students’ pronunciation and stress. In mid-October, a student in the fourth grade read out one of his sentences and happened to say “*lión*” instead of “*león*” [lion]. Octavio quickly corrected the mistake, provoking laughter from many of the child’s classmates (10/13/2003). On one visit to Gertrudis’ class, a student was called on to read out the clause *La paloma azul que del cielo bajó* [The blue dove that came down from the sky.]. This girl said “*bajo*” as opposed to “*bajó*” (stress on the final syllable), and the teacher corrected her pronunciation (01/28/2004).

Apart from volume and sometimes pronunciation, the teachers did not usually regulate the children’s reading. Only during one other instance was a student asked to repeat a sentence. According to the teacher, he needed to read more fluently (Octavio, 10/13/2003).

4.4.2. Writing

In contrast to reading assignments, written texts were constantly controlled and corrected, especially in the fourth grade. First, during dictations Octavio would typically

comment on spelling, punctuation, and accentuation. The following example illustrates this technique:

He gives the example *avión* [airplane], asking them, “*cómo se escribe ‘avión’?* [How is ‘avión’ spelled?] “*A-V-I-O-N, con /v/ y con acento en la /o/*” [A-V-I-O-N, written with /v/ and an accent over the /o/] (10/27/2003).

In practically all the dictation exercises of this sort, the teacher would remind his students of the correct spelling and accentuation. In fact, the children were so accustomed to hearing this information that they would often ask Octavio how a word was written or where to place the accent, if necessary. For instance, during one dictation a male student yelled out whether there was an *h* in *aprender* [to learn]? (11/17/2003).

Although Gertrudis seldom made comments concerning accents (perhaps because of her students’ age), both she and Octavio typically evaluated the children’s handwriting. Toward the beginning of the school year Octavio would have his students to line up around his desk so that he could grade the writing in their notebooks. On one occasion the researcher heard him tell a child that his handwriting was messy and that he would talk to him about it later (10/20/2003). That same day, he told another child that if he did not copy a certain part of his work over with better handwriting that he would be required to copy over his whole notebook. Gertrudis, not so harsh in her correction of handwriting, frequently told her students that they were going to compete to see who wrote the “prettiest”. At other times she commented to individual students that they should make an attempt to improve their handwriting. Overall, it seemed as though she was much more tolerant than Octavio, again probably due to the children’s age.

A common observation in both classrooms centered on the use of the color red for titles, subtitles, capital letters, and numbers. Indeed, all of the students were expected to

arrive to school with a box of colored pencils. The teachers would repeatedly remind them to use color to distinguish certain words and letters (uppercase) from others. Recently, the researcher questioned two first-graders on this practice. They replied, “*usamos rojo para algunas letras porque son más grandes*” [we use red colored pencils for some of the letters because they are bigger] (02/26/2004). This habit was so automatic to the children that on occasion they would not complete a writing assignment just because they had forgotten to bring their colored pencils to school. During one visit, for example, César admitted that he did not have a red colored pencil, and the teacher interrupted class to ask if someone would lend him another color so he would continue writing (01/14/2004). This practice can be observed in several of the texts included as examples in the previous section on writing.

Although such control proved to be the norm for the two grade levels, there were at least two instances in which the researcher documented a lack of correction. First, the fourth-graders once presented advertisements they had written to announce a local event (see above). Many of these posters contained misspellings, such as the word *necesitados* [needy] written as *nececitados*. However, Octavio made no comments on spelling; instead, he praised the students for their effort (12/01/2003). In Gertrudis’ class, it was noted on one occasion that a child had written the following sentence in her notebook: *El volca es hermoso* [The volcano is beautiful.]. Readers with a knowledge of Spanish will notice that the correct term is *volcán*, spelled with an *n* and with an accent over the *a*. As in the previous example, the teacher saw this sentence and chose not to point out the error (01/14/2004).

During the interviews both teachers and students were asked about the importance of the correction of student work. All of them agreed that it was necessary to control spelling, accents, and punctuation, although not so much handwriting. The quote below illustrates the fourth-grade teacher's opinion:

“Pues básicamente lo que yo hago, es, es si yo dicto, yo voy, a la hora que voy dictando, voy haciendo hincapié en cómo se escriben, eh...determinadas palabras, para que no cometan un, un error de ortografía. Posteriormente, cuando...reviso las tareas, voy checando y corrigiendo...la ortografía. Les digo el porqué. Y también si reviso el trabajo del salón hago lo mismo” [Well, basically what I do is, is if I dictate, I, while dictating, I emphasize how, umm, certain words are written so that they don't make a, a spelling error. Later, when...I check their homework, I check and correct...spelling. I tell them why. And also, if I check their work in the classroom, I do the same thing] (01/09/2004).

The parents expressed that not including an accent or misspelling a word could change its meaning and that these types of mistakes should be corrected early on. To give an example, Tania said, *“para mí sí (es importante), porque, por ejemplo, si, si tú no pones un ...punto en un...en un párrafo entonces...pues no, no entenderías muy bien la lectura. (Y los acentos)...para, para diferenciar las...las palabras...unas de otras, no?”* [to me (it's important), because, for example, if, if you don't include a...period in a...in a paragraph then...well no, you wouldn't understand the reading very well. (And accents)...to, to differentiate the...the words....some from the others, no?] (01/17/2004). A couple of the parents even confessed that seeing a misspelled word called their attention and that it bothered them.

During the focus-group interview, the teachers mentioned that one of the reasons they dedicated so much time to correcting students' writing was because they knew that the parents expected them to do so. Octavio quoted, *“no le entienden y creen que por eso el niño no...no aprende o el maestro no enseña”* [they don't understand and they think

that for this reason the child doesn't...doesn't learn or the teacher doesn't teach] (02/27/2004). They added that on past occasions some of the children had come to school commenting on how their parents were upset that the teacher had not corrected a certain mistake that for them was quite obvious.

4.4.3. A Comparison of Home and School

Given that many of the parents were concerned about their children's writing at school, they likewise responded during the interviews that they typically corrected the writing in the home. For example, Melisa commented that her daughter Alicia would write something and then show it to her for approval, specifically with reference to spelling (01/08/2004). Alejandra also mentioned that her mother regularly told her where to include accent marks on words (01/06/2004).

When asked about whether home/community texts were similar to or different from those produced in the school, a few of the parents replied that they were different with regard to both topic and stylistics. Ariana, for example, quoted,

“Es totalmente diferente...nada que ver...porque...aquí, este, trae muchas frases vulgares, no? Y...en la escuela no, en la escuela no...o los libros de texto son...son...muy, este, constructivos. No, no tiene nada...vulgar. Nada que se le parezca” [they're totally different...nothing in common...because...here, umm (in the community) they're full of vulgarities, no? And...at school, no, at school, no...or the textbooks are...are...very, umm, constructive. No, they don't contain anything...vulgar. Nothing at all] (12/20/2003).

Carla expressed the following:

“Yo creo que es muy diferente...para empezar...mal escrito, no? Mucha falta de ortografía...Este, son temas...cómo podemos decir, corrientes. Yo siento que no tienen ninguna enseñanza, ningún...ninguna aportación buena” [I think it's very different...to begin with...badly written, no? Lots of misspelled words...Umm, the topics, what would we say? Simple topics. I feel like they don't teach anything, no...nothing good] (12/19/2003).

Other parents, such as Susana, agreed that school as opposed to community texts were much more varied and educational (01/06/2004).

4.4.4. Scolding for Misbehavior

In both classrooms the researcher observed that a great deal of time was spent reprimanding the students for misbehavior. In fact, on many occasions it seemed as though the teachers wasted much of their class time trying to get the children's attention and controlling the noise level. Of all the subcategories in the study, this one yielded the most data.

As mentioned in chapter two, Gertrudis had placed three or four students at each of the tables to work together on the assignments. However, instead of completing the activities, they often took advantage of this arrangement to talk and play around with their classmates. Thus, the teacher constantly found herself interrupting the exercises to get their attention. During a couple of visits she remarked, *“recuerden que si hacemos ruido no aprendemos”* [remember that if we make noise we don't learn] (10/15/2003, 10/22/2003). She would also have to tell the students to get in their seats, to be quiet, and to pay attention to either her or their classmates. Figure 4.8 is a picture of César, who, in this particular class, was playing with a toy he had brought from home.

In response to this disruptiveness, Gertrudis utilized five strategies to control the students. First, she frequently counted from one to three, sometimes one to five, and expected them to be quiet and ready to continue the lesson by the time she reached the last number. This technique usually worked. A second strategy included having the children to count with her and move through positions with their arms at the same time.

Figure 4.8 César Playing with a Toy during Class



In the last position the students crossed their arms, which prevented them from playing around at their desks.

The third way to get the student's attention was to sing a song they all knew. Gertrudis would begin singing, and the class would eventually join her. By the end of the song, everyone was paying attention. Fourth, on two occasions the teacher had the students to clap in unison, specifically after she had called out a certain number, such as two, five, and even one-and-a-half. The final technique consisted of threatening to give people *caritas tristes* [sad faces] in their notebooks for talking. For good behavior Gertrudis would award *caritas felices* [smiley faces], and it seemed as though the children were pleased to receive them.

In the fourth grade, the students were reprimanded for similar acts of misconduct. They would often arrive late to class, given that they came from recess and could not hear the bell very well. Like the first-graders, they also talked a lot with their tablemates, often holding conversations unrelated to the class lesson. Many of them likewise had trouble paying attention, and, in some instances, forgot to bring their homework.

Unlike Gertrudis, who hardly ever raised her voice to scold the children, Octavio was immediately identified by the researcher as a strict disciplinarian. He would yell at the students until they became quiet and paid attention, and even humiliated them on occasion. For instance, during one class a boy had forgotten to write the sentences for homework. Knowing that he would be reproached, when called on to read out loud he attempted to improvise. Octavio quickly figured out what he was trying to do, asked him to stand, and said, “*El señor no hizo la tarea. Está inventando. ¿A quién quieres engañar? Eso no es honesto*” [This gentleman didn’t do his homework. He’s making it up. Who are you trying to fool? That isn’t honest] (11/24/2003). On another visit, when a girl had not brought her notebook to class, he made her stand up for a total of fifteen minutes while the rest of the class continued with the lesson (01/19/2004).

Octavio, in contrast to Gertrudis, frequently explained to the students why he was punishing them. For example, when they arrived late he yelled at them and then proceeded to lecture them on how arriving late represented a lack of respect and responsibility on their part. In other words, he informed them why he was upset (10/13/2003). On another occasion, after he had shouted for them to be quiet and to pay attention, he apologized and explained to them that, in his opinion, talking while the teacher was talking showed ill manners (01/12/2004).

4.5. Class Interaction and Teaching Styles

This section consists of a discussion of class interaction, both between the students themselves and between teacher and student. One of the most common findings during the course of the study was the high level of noise permitted in the classroom

(much more than observed in classrooms in the United States), specifically in the first grade. Similarly, the researcher documented numerous instances in which the students enjoyed considerable freedom, as opposed to the restrictions placed on their writing. Teacher praise and encouragement likewise turned out to be an important subcategory, especially given that it was much more prevalent in the first grade than in the fourth grade. The next two aspects to be discussed in this part include student-teacher and student-student interaction. Significantly, it was noted that the children at both grade levels were often encouraged to complete assignments through cooperative learning. This section ends with a summary of student and parent comments concerning the school, particularly those which relate to teaching styles.

4.5.1. Noise

Although the children's writing, and to a lesser extent, reading, were quite regulated as far as what was acceptable in the academic setting, the teachers allowed them a surprising amount of freedom to talk amongst themselves, move about the classroom, and even play around during the lesson. Such liberty was especially noticeable in the first grade, where the students would frequently get up out of their seats, walk around in the classroom, play with toys, and yell as they pleased. For example, one very common practice was for the first-grade children to complete part of their assignment and then to stand up, walk or run to Gertrudis, and show her their work. She never made them raise their hands or ask for permission to get out of their seats. In fact, on many occasions it even seemed that she encouraged and expected them to do so. During one visit early in the school year, when the students were filling in words written on the board with the

syllables *qui* and *que*, it was observed that almost all of them ran up to Gertrudis once they had finished the assignment (10/22/2003).

While most of the first graders got up from their seats every once in a while, there were two children in particular who did so much more than their classmates. Indeed, Gertrudis commented during informal interviews with the researcher that these two boys (one of which was Carlos, a case-study student) were easily distracted and that, for this reason, it was difficult for her to keep them on task. For instance, César would generally run up to the teacher and ask her to help him begin the writing assignments. On most of these occasions she walked with him to his seat, opened his notebook, and modeled the syllable, word, or sentence so that he could copy it below. However, once she had moved on to another table, he would become distracted again and play around instead of writing (see picture of César playing in Figure 4.8).

In addition to standing up and moving about throughout the classroom, the first-grade children would often play with toys. During one lesson a boy named Antonio, who was sitting with two females, made a paper airplane, bragged to them about it, and spent at least five minutes playing with it before the teacher asked him to put it away (11/19/2003). On another occasion, a girl who had brought a Barbie doll to school with her took it out of her book bag and began brushing its hair. When Gertrudis approached her table she returned it to her book bag (01/14/2004). Most recently, the researcher documented that Gabriel, an excellent student according to the teacher, played with a 10-peso coin for the first half of a class session. Only when several other children walked over to his table to watch him did Gertrudis make him return to work (02/16/2004).

Besides the constant yelling and movement in the classroom, it was noted on two visits that Gertrudis permitted her students to challenge her authority. On the first occasion, she had told César that he would have to stay in during recess if he did not finish his assignment. Upon hearing her say this he replied, “¡ah, maestra!” [come on, teacher!], and she just walked away (10/22/2003). The second time, Gertrudis was announcing which groups were going to receive *caritas felices*, smiley faces, for their effort and good work. Before she had even finished speaking, a male student yelled out, “¡a nosotros nos debes ocho caritas, ¿eh?!” [you owe us eight smiley faces, you know]. The researcher was quite surprised that she let him address her in this manner (02/11/2004).

In response to the noise level and the difficulty getting the children to pay attention, Gertrudis would sometimes make comments such as, “*se sigue oyendo ruido*” [I still hear noise] or “*si hacemos mucho ruido, no vamos a escuchar*” [if we continue making so much noise, we won’t hear]. Nevertheless, her reprimands, as mentioned above in section 4.4.4, were limited to five, non-threatening strategies. Octavio, on the other hand, was quite stern with the students, and indeed, his class seemed much more controlled than Gertrudis’. Occasional disruptions, such as talking, forgetting homework, and not paying attention (see above), resulted in his yelling at or humiliation of them.

4.5.2. Praise / Encouragement

While the first-graders received quite a bit of praise and encouragement from their teacher, the fourth-graders were rarely commended for their work. Gertrudis gave positive encouragement in a number of ways, including having the children to compete amongst themselves, making remarks like “good job” and “very pretty”, and rewarding

them with smiley faces. Octavio, in contrast, often spoke of responsibility and dedication as values that the students should already be expected to have. In other words, it seemed as though in his opinion it was not necessary for the children to receive external praise.

One of the most popular ways of encouraging the children in first grade to work quickly and to keep on task was for Gertrudis to announce that they would compete against one another. More specifically, she would regularly comment, for example, “*a ver qué equipo termina primero*” [let’s see which group is the first to finish], or “*voy a ver quién lo hace más bonito*” [I’m going to see who does it the prettiest]. These statements appeared to work very well, given that most of the children would rush to finish and then run up to the teacher and show her their work. Once the first group had completed the assignment, Gertrudis would often announce the names of these students, and, on at least on two instances, she asked their classmates to applaud them (02/11/2004, 02/12/2004). Moreover, she sometimes recognized second and third places so that after the first team had finished the others would continue working.

Furthermore, Gertrudis continually commended the children in her class by making comments like “*muy bien*” [very good] and “*qué bonito*” [how pretty]. In fact, throughout the duration of the observation sessions it was noted that she gave much more positive than negative feedback, perhaps explaining why her students always wanted her to check their work. In other words, they knew she would praise them. Likewise, she made a special effort to compliment César, who rarely participated and completed the assignments. She expressed during one of the informal interviews that by encouraging him as much as possible she hoped to show him that he was capable of doing his work independently.

The last way in which Gertrudis stimulated the students in her class was by offering *caritas felices*, or smiley faces, to those groups and individuals who worked efficiently. These smiley faces were drawn by the teacher in their notebooks. Usually, she would point out which tables were working and say that only those particular children would receive a smiley face for the day. To give some examples, during one visit she commented, “*sólo el equipo de Arlette va a tener dos caritas felices*” [only Arlette’s group is going to get two smiley faces] (11/12/2003). On another occasion, she announced that Marco Antonio’s table would be rewarded smiley faces for getting out their Spanish books so quickly (01/14/2004).

As opposed to Gertrudis, who gave continuous positive feedback and encouragement, Octavio seldom did so. He would simply tell his students that the *trato*, or deal, had been for everyone to participate, to be organized, and to work hard (11/17/2003, 01/12/2004). He likewise used the term *compromiso*, commitment, meaning that they were in school to learn and not to waste time talking or playing around. Finally, as mentioned above in section 4.4.4, he would frequently speak to the fourth-graders about respect and responsibility. Toward the end of one class, he remarked,

“Antes de cambiar de grupo, es importante reflexionar lo siguiente: todos lo hicieron bien, pero algunos se esforzaron más que otros” [Before changing classes, it’s important to reflect a little. Everyone did the activity well, but some of you worked harder than others] (01/12/2004).

He went on to say that the objective of the exercise was for them to get organized quickly and to prepare a skit based on a play they had read. Moreover, he mentioned that they should have been more respectful during the presentations (they had whispered amongst themselves while the other groups were speaking). Clearly, he expected his students to do their best without the constant praise observed in the other class.

4.5.3. Student-teacher Interaction

In this study, there were three principal ways in which the two teachers interacted with their students, both collectively and individually. First, both Octavio and Gertrudis would give assignments and then circulate throughout the classroom to the tables to check the students' progress and to keep them on task. Gertrudis did so much more than Octavio, although this discrepancy might be due to the fact that more observations were conducted in the first grade. Second, it seemed as though the weaker learners were given special attention, especially by Gertrudis. More attention meant that the teacher spent more time with them and that she ensured that they had opportunities to practice. Last, Gertrudis in particular would often model texts in the children's notebooks for them to copy. Her practices suggested that she understood that her students possessed a variety of literacy levels.

As described in chapter two, both classrooms included approximately nine tables around which the children sat with two or three classmates. Thus, the teachers encouraged a great deal of cooperative learning (see section 4.5.4) and likewise frequently gave feedback to entire tables as opposed to individual students. Octavio and Gertrudis would provide an explanation of a particular point, usually regarding writing, and then walk around the classroom to each table while the children worked in their groups. Whereas Gertrudis would kneel down to interact actively with the first-graders, Octavio would simply be available in case his fourth-graders had any questions. For example, during the activity in which the students were instructed to plan a skit to be acted out to the rest of the class, Octavio wandered around the room as they worked. Not once did he intervene to ask how they were doing. Nevertheless, he did scold them for

not organizing better once they actually presented (01/12/2004). Gertrudis made an effort to keep all the children on task, even though this typically meant moving as quickly as possible from table to table given the large number of students (28). In other words, she did not allow so much freedom and was always aware of their progress.

In addition to circulating throughout the classroom, Gertrudis also attempted to give special attention to those children who she considered needed it the most. One of these individuals was César, who, as mentioned above, generally became distracted and therefore had a hard time completing the assignments. On one occasion, for instance, the teacher called him to the board to fill in a word with either the syllable *que* or *qui*. Noticing that he was not going to succeed on his own, she approached the board, re-explained the task to him, took his hand in hers and helped him to write the syllable (11/26/2003). She commented during an informal interview that César had problems learning and that she did everything in her power to encourage him to try.

Gertrudis likewise realized that her students had begun the school year with a range of abilities and experiences as far as reading and writing. During the first formal interview she quoted, “*al entrar está el cincuenta por ciento que sí sabe, leer y escribir, y el cincuenta por ciento que no...en su preescolar aprendieron*” [when they first came to school 50% of them knew how to read and write, and 50% didn't. (Those that did) learned in preschool] (01/12/2004). As a result, she was observed permitting some of her students to write (copy) the syllables, words, or sentences only a couple of times while the others were expected to fill up an entire page. That is, each learner worked at his or her own pace with a minimal amount of pressure from the teacher (02/16/2004). Octavio, on the other hand, reproached the children in his class if they were caught lagging behind.

4.5.4. Cooperative Learning

Practically all the in-class assignments at both levels were completed in groups. The classrooms consisted of tables instead of individual desks, and the children were encouraged to cooperate among themselves in order to do their work, often much more explicitly in the first grade. An exception was found in Gertrudis' class, considering that she would often put one of the more disruptive students, such as César, at the back of the room by him/herself. She claimed that she had made this decision because it appeared that these children worked more efficiently when not sitting with others. Otherwise, the students sat close together.

A few examples documented during the observation visits illustrate the value placed on cooperative learning. On one occasion, Gertrudis announced to the class, "*los responsables de cada equipo, quiero que chequen si todos ya terminaron*" [I want the responsible people in each group to check to see if everyone has finished] (10/15/2003). The very next week, she asked the children who had already completed the assignment, which was to fill in several sentences with the correct word, to help their tablemates (10/22/2003). More recently, she gave them the following instructions: "*vayan comparando su trabajo con el de sus compañeros para ver si encontraron las mismas palabras*" [compare your work with that of your classmates to see if you came up with the same answers] (02/11/2004).

Not only did Gertrudis promote collaboration, she also offered various opportunities for the children to provide feedback and opinions to their peers. For instance, she would sometimes have students to go to the board and either write or fill in part of a word or sentence. Once they had finished, she would elicit comments (i.e.

agreement/disagreement) from the rest of the class. During one visit she instructed the children at one of the tables to read out the lyrics to a song (printed on a handout). After they had read, she asked the others, “¿qué les pareció el trabajo de ese equipo?” [What do you think about this group’s work?] (01/28/2004). Clearly, she was encouraging a form of peer evaluation. This type of scaffolding and cooperative learning was quite common in her class. Octavio, in contrast, never asked his students to work together; however, given the seating arrangement, they often chatted amongst themselves while completing the assignments.

4.5.5. Parents’ and Students’ Comments about the School

When asked why they chose the Centro Telpochcalli for their children, many of the parents gave responses such as the high level of academics, the teaching quality, the relatively small class sizes, and the individual attention received by each of the students. Lucia, for example, quoted “*simple y sencillamente, la atención que les ponen los maestros a los niños*” [simply the attention given by the teachers to the children] (12/22/2003). Tania commented on the teachers, the academics, and the subjects: “*pues el...que el nivel académico era muy, este...muy bueno, que...bueno que tenían, este...maestros de, de buena calidad...y, este...y aparte las materias que llevan pues...las materias que llevan ahí...pues también me llamó la atención*” [well the, the level of academics was very, umm, very good, that, well, (the school) had quality teachers, and, umm, also the subjects the children take, well, the subjects they take there, also caught my attention] (01/17/2004). It is important to mention that these responses regarding the school are very similar to those obtained by the linguistic census described in chapter two, and thus seem to be reliable.

The children were likewise questioned on whether or not they liked the school and why. All of them responded affirmatively, and common answers were “*porque aprendo mucho*” [I learn a lot], “*buenos maestros*” [good teachers], “*nos enseñan bien*” [we’re taught well], and “*explican bien las clases*” [the teachers explain well in class]. For instance, Cristina had the following to say about her teacher, Octavio: “*bromea con nosotros...este, nos enseña muy bien...este, me gusta cómo es su actitud...y todo lo demás*” [he jokes around with us...umm, he teaches very well...umm, I like his attitude...and everything else] (12/20/2003).

Two of the fourth-grade parents mentioned some of the differences between the Centro Telpochcalli and the previous schools in which their children were enrolled. Ariana, Cristina’s mother, expressed that in the other school the classes were large, the teachers often arrived late or not at all, and that the level of instruction was bad. She also pointed out that the students were quite repressed (not free to voice their opinions) and that the teachers could be quite abusive (12/20/2003). Susana told the researcher that for the first time her daughter Alejandra actually enjoyed going to school: “*me gusta todo el sistema que tienen, tanto como...que juegan, como que siembran, como que...su tiempo, hasta el cambiarse de salón...le, le ha parecido muy, muy...ahora sí que fantástico a ella*” [I like the whole system they have, as much, that they play, as that they provide knowledge, it’s like...their time, even changing classes...has seemed very...really fantastic to her] (01/04/2004). None of the parents had negative comments about the school, even when asked this question explicitly.

4.6. Environmental Texts

In addition to student writing at home and in the classroom, this study documented the variety of texts surrounding the children on a daily basis. Among these were the texts displayed in the two classrooms, the texts found on the school grounds, and the texts visible within one kilometer of the school. As far as the two classrooms, both similarities and discrepancies were observed regarding the use of wall space. Specifically, while the first-grade teacher often posted a great deal of writing, neither she nor Octavio displayed student work with any frequency. Most of the texts on the school grounds were concentrated in three locations: in the library, around the cafeteria, and on the bulletin board close to the entrance. Those outside the school were limited to advertisements for local businesses. This section discusses each of these contexts separately, including participant comments where appropriate.

4.6.1. Texts in the Two Classrooms

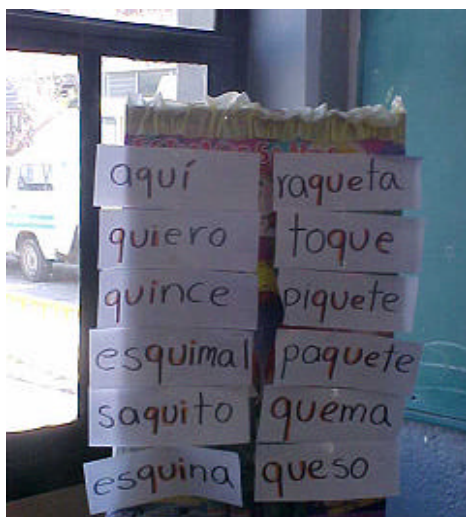
The first-grade classroom was generally filled with different kinds of texts. During initial visits the researcher noticed that each of the student's names had been written by the teacher on sheets of papers and hung below the chalkboard. On occasion these texts were used for literacy instruction, namely when Gertrudis would call on several of the children to come to the board and look for a particular letter or syllable in someone's name. For instance, when they were studying the syllables *qui* and *que*, one of the activities was for the children to identify the names of all the students, like Enrique, that contained at least one of them (11/26/2003). Aside from the names, Gertrudis had also posted cards with all the numbers from 1-40 around the room. It was assumed that

these numbers served some purpose during mathematics lessons, which were not observed as part of this study.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, above the chalkboard in the first-grade classroom the teacher had taped all the letters of the alphabet, both upper and lowercase. She mentioned to the researcher during the first few visits that having the alphabet visible like his seemed to her to be a good way for the children to learn and practice it. Indeed, she would often take a stick and point to individual letters for the students to read and pronounce (see section 4.2.1).

Moreover, Gertrudis had hung around the room cut-out pieces of paper containing the names of colors and shapes, such as *rectángulo* [rectangle], *círculo* [circle], *rojo* [red], and *marrón* [brown]. She was also accustomed to displaying on a poster board to the left of the blackboard the terms already studied during previous classes. For example, in Figure 4.9 she had posted the words seen as part of the lesson on the syllables *qui* and *que* (02/12/2004).

Figure 4.9 Example of Environmental Text in the First-Grade Classroom



Toward the beginning of the school year, this poster board contained the names of six animals, particularly *garza* [heron], *rana* [frog], *zorra* [fox], *leopardo* [leopard], *osito* [little bear], and *gorila* [gorilla].

Although both teachers were noted not to display very much student-produced work in the classroom, in the first grade there was one exception. Gertrudis had hung up the following text outlining the class rules, written by her.

Figure 4.10 Class Rules Written by Teacher

<i>¿Qué?</i>	[What?]
<i>Respetar a mis compañeros y compañeras.</i>	[Respect classmates]
<i>¿Cómo?</i>	[How?]
<i>-No pegando</i>	[-No hitting]
<i>-No insultando</i>	[-No insulting]
<i>-No poner apodos</i>	[-No nicknames]
<i>-Respetar el cuerpo de los demas</i>	[-Respect others' bodies]
<i>-No ser tramposos</i>	[-No cheating]
<i>-No abentar objetos</i>	[-No throwing objects]

The teacher failed to include the accent on the word *demás* and misspelled the word *aventar*. However, what is essential in this section are the examples of student texts which were posted directly to the right of Gertudis' rules. Among these were the following:

Figure 4.11 Class Rules Written by Students

No pegar	[No hitting]
No desir apodos	[No nicknames]
Mejor mis trabajos	[Improve my work]
Escibir bien	[Write well]
Aser mi tarea	[Do my homework]

As may be obvious to the reader, many of these words contain mistakes, such as *desir* instead of *decir* [to say/tell], *escibir* for *escribir* [to write], and *aser* as opposed to *hacer* [to do/make]. Nevertheless, these errors had not been corrected by the teacher. Also, it is

not certain whether these rules had been copied from the teacher's poster or rather if they had been completely produced by the children. Importantly, this was the only example of student work which had been exhibited in the first-grade classroom.

In contrast to the first grade, there were very few environmental texts in the fourth-grade classroom. This type of writing was limited to a poster of the class rules, a proverb about learning, and a listing of the students' grades, the first two of which are shown in Figures 4.12 and 4.13. Both of these texts had been hung above the chalkboard at the front of the room and were written by the teacher using all capital letters. Octavio admitted during the focus-group interview that he often used uppercase letters to avoid having to include the accent marks (02/27/2004), either because he was not always certain where to place them or because he did not want to have to think about them. Indeed, none of the words was accented.

Figure 4.12 Poster of Class Rules in the Fourth Grade



REGLAMENTO DEL SALON

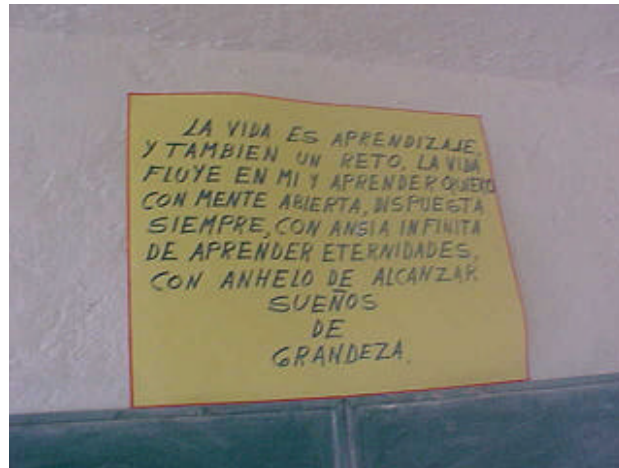
1. *EVITAR COMER EN CLASE*
2. *MANTENER LIMPIO EL SALON*
3. *EVITAR JUGAR EN CLASE*
4. *RESPETARNOS*

[Class Rules]

- [No eating in class]
- [Keep the room clean]
- [No playing in class]
- [Respect each other]

- | | |
|--|--|
| 5. <i>GUARDAR SILENCIO MIENTRAS OTRO HABLA</i> | [Remain quiet while others are speaking] |
| 6. <i>EVITAR LOS APODOS</i> | [No nicknames] |
| 7. <i>CUIDAR EL MOBILIARIO</i> | [Care for furniture] |
| 8. <i>PEDIR LA PALABRA PARA PARTICIPAR</i> | [Ask for permission to speak] |

Figure 4.13 Proverb about Learning in the Fourth Grade



*LA VIDA ES APRENDIZAJE,
Y TAMBIEN UN RETO, LA VIDA
FLUYE EN MI Y APRENDER QUIERO
CON MENTE ABIERTA, DISPUESTA
SIEMPRE, CON ANSIA INFINITA
DE APRENDER ETERNIDADES,
CON ANHELO DE ALCANZAR
SUEÑOS DE GRANDEZA.*

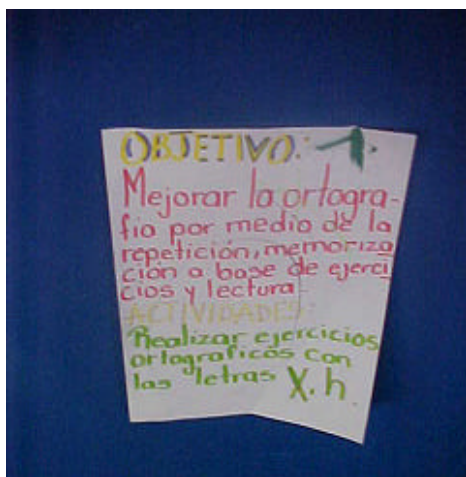
[Life is learning, and also a challenge. Life flows through me and I want to learn with an open mind, always willing with endless yearning to keep learning with a desire to achieve great dreams.]

The third environmental text, a *concentrado de calificaciones*, or listing of the students' grades, was displayed at the back of the classroom. According to the teacher, this poster was changed every month, given that the children's grades were calculated on a monthly basis. As pointed out before, students' work was not posted on the wall.

4.6.2. Texts on the School Grounds

Regarding texts found outside the two classrooms but on the school grounds, it was discovered that most of them were concentrated in three areas: the library, outside the cafeteria, and on the bulletin board close to the gate. One very interesting piece of writing in the library consisted of a sign, probably produced by the school librarian, encouraging the improvement of spelling. It is illustrated below in Figure 4.14.

Figure 4.14 Library Text Encouraging the Improvement of Spelling



OBJETIVO:
Mejorar la ortografía por medio de la repetición, memorización a base de ejercicios y lectura.
ACTIVIDADES:
Realizar ejercicios ortográficos con las letras X, H.

[OBJECTIVE:
Improve spelling through repetition, memorization based on exercises and reading.
ACTIVITIES:
Do spelling exercises with the letters X, H.]

Ironically, this sign, which talked about spelling, included two terms that were missing accents: *ortografía* [spelling – (noun)] and *ortográfico* [spelling (adjective)].

Most of the other texts hanging in the library were posters that promoted reading.

Figure 4.15 Library Text Promoting Reading



*LA LECTURA ALIMENTA
TU INTELIGENCIA*

[Reading improves
your intelligence]

*LOS LIBROS HACEN
UN BUEN HABITO
DE LECTURA*

[Books make
a good reading
habit]

The second place in the school in which texts were typically posted was around the cafeteria. Most of these writings consisted of menus, such as that illustrated in Figure 4.16.

Figure 4.16 Menus Posted Outside the School Cafeteria

*Fast Food Pizza
Deliciosas pizzas.*

Ven a disfrutar su sabor (09/15/2003)

[Delicious pizzas
Come and enjoy the taste]

¡Hello!

Tu tienda escolar te ofrece:

Comida corrida \$20.00

Cocktail de frutas

Yogurth

Licuados

Corn Flakes (11/10/2003)

[Your school store offers you:
Fast food \$2.00
Fruit cocktail
Yogurt
Milkshakes]

These texts had been written on small pieces of poster board by someone in the school, presumably a cafeteria employee. Other writings in this space included posters asking the students to keep the area clean, specifically by throwing away their trash.

In addition to the library and the cafeteria, there was also a large bulletin board near the school entrance that usually contained some type of student-produced text. As noted in the observations throughout the data collection process, the texts on this board were frequently modified, more or less once a month. For instance, it had been decorated with red, green, and white in celebration of Mexican Independence Day (September 15). The writing said “*México, Somos Todos*” [We’re all Mexico]. In October, the same bulletin board contained the text “*Encuentro de dos mundos*” [Meeting between two worlds], as illustrated in Figure 4.17.

Figure 4.17 Bulletin Board Close to School Entrance: *Encuentro de dos mundos*



In the bottom left-hand corner of the poster there was a list of the four students who had been in charge of creating the text and graphics, as well as the name of the supervising teacher.

Throughout the remainder of the school year, the bulletin board included a text promoting respect and responsibility (important values in the school) (11/12/2003), happy wishes for the Christmas vacation (12/10/2003), writing done by third- and fourth-grade students regarding opinions of their teachers (01/28/2004), and an announcement of

the social, educational, cultural, and sports-related activities which had been sponsored by the institution during the course of the academic year so far (02/12/2004). Significantly, these posters were produced by both teachers and students, usually from the middle or high schools.

4.6.3. Texts Immediately Outside the School

As mentioned in chapter three, photographs were taken not only in the classrooms and on the school grounds, but also directly outside the school (within a one-kilometer radius). These writings included texts with which the students came into contact on a daily basis as they arrived at and left school, namely restaurant advertisements, promotions at the local styling salon, announcements regarding foreign exchange programs (specifically in Canada), and postings publicizing apartments for rent. Clearly, it cannot be certain how often the children actually read these texts despite their presence.

The following two photographs are examples of the kinds of texts found right outside the school. Figure 4.18 is an advertisement for an outdoor restaurant that sold mainly *pollitos*, chicken. Apparently, it made use of the MacDonald's "M" for purposes of business. The second picture contains two pieces of writing, one produced by employees at the beauty salon and another which announces the selling of *dulces y regalos*, candy and gifts, at an adjacent establishment. The reader will notice that the promotion sign for the hair salon had been torn on the left side. However, it was left hanging like this for a number of weeks.

Figure 4.18 Restaurant Advertisement Outside School



*Pollitos Mmmm!!!
Receta Original*

[Chicken Mmmm!!!
Original Recipe]

Figure 4.19 Advertisements for Beauty Salon and Gift Store



DULCES Y REGALOS

[Candy and Gifts]

*PROMOCION:
EN LA APLICACION
DE TU TINTE
TE REGALAMOS
UNA LIMPIEZA
FACIAL.
MASAJES DE
RELAJACION
CON PREVIA CITA*

[Promotion:
with the application
of hair dye
we'll give you
a free facial
cleansing.
Relaxation
massages
by appointment]

The second advertisement (Figure 4.19), which was written in all capital letters, included three words that were missing accents: *PROMOCIÓN*, *APLICACIÓN* and *RELAJACIÓN*. Indeed, it was noted both in the school and outside it that terms written with uppercase letters rarely included the appropriate accent marks.

4.7. Conclusion

The results presented in this chapter is now analyzed with the aim of answering each of the research questions outlined in chapter one. These findings are compared to the researcher's predictions, and conclusions are drawn. The study ends with a discussion of the limitations, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.