

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Possible Outcomes

At the outset of the study I predicted that a possible outcome in regards to teaching instruction was somewhat similar to the results found in Mulhern's (2002) study on kindergartners' constructions of Spanish literacy learning. Mulhern discusses the great emphasis that is placed on skills learning through the use of phonics and the teaching of letters and syllables in the United States. Although this was a different type of setting and classroom my current data collection revealed the same strategies of teaching reading through the use of letters and syllables in both English and Spanish instruction.

Also, in regards to teacher instruction, I expected to find that written instruction by both participating teachers was skills based and focused on conventional forms rather than on building meaning. Therefore, I expected to observe that written classroom instruction was concerned with what Barton (1999) calls the scribal function of writing and would reveal little evidence of the development of authoring.

I predicted that literacy instruction in both classes will be similar and the teachers' teaching strategies did not precisely depend on the language of instruction. I also predicted that students would show evidence for the implementation of the reading and writing strategies used by their teachers. Therefore, they will also use the same strategies for reading and writing in their L1 and L2. With these predictions in mind I now present the results of the study.

In the following section I discuss the reading and writing strategies used by the teachers and students. I first present the students' environmental print. I also present the similarities and differences found between the English and Spanish contexts. I end

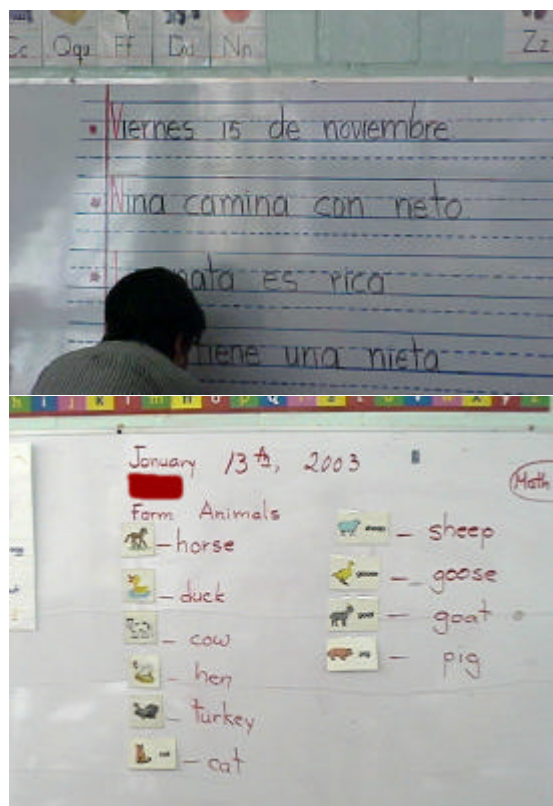
by discussing teacher strategies for student correction and student and teacher's developing theories of literacy learning.

4.1 Teacher-Produced Texts

This section describes the environmental print that students are in contact with on a daily basis. It also shows the contrast of teacher-produced texts in both classroom settings.

The photos in Figure 4.1 demonstrate the use of the white board in the Spanish classroom and the English classroom. It is interesting to compare the two, as they seem to provide different ideas about classroom text. These different formats on the white boards were consistently used throughout my observations.

Figure 4.1 Comparison of Teacher Produced Texts in the Spanish and English Classrooms



The photograph on the left of Figure 4.1 of the Spanish classroom demonstrates orthographic structure and neatness. The letters are written neatly in the lines with

capital letters always written in red ink and lower case letters in black or blue ink. Lower case letters always touch both the bottom and dotted lines. Also, each letter and word is evenly spaced on each line. The Spanish text is at the sentence level. The grid represented on the whiteboard in Laura's classroom is permanent and is an amplified reproduction of the style of paper found in the students' workbooks.

In comparison, the photo on the right of Figure 4.1 demonstrates that the English teacher's modeling of written text tends to be less focused on orthographic features and more on learning the content of the lesson. The English text is presented at the word level and is supported by a drawing or a picture. The text is written without lines and many words are sloping up or down. The letters in each word are not evenly spaced and to some extent are different sizes. There is no distinction between capitals and lower case as they are all in red ink.

4.1.1 Use of Red Pencil

On one occasion I observed a student in the English classroom approach María at the board after María had written the date and title of the work students were to copy from the board into their notebooks. On this occasion María had chosen to write with a blue marker. The student informed María that she had forgotten to write the capitals in red letters. Upon hearing this María exclaimed "Oh my God" and she quickly erased the blue ink and replaced it with red. There was less emphasis placed on the use of red pencil in Maria's class. When I asked the English teacher about the use of the red pencil and where she had learned this technique she commented the following:

Se hace con el fin de que aprendan que al principio del enunciado se empieza con mayúscula y esto les hace diferenciar las letras. Yo creo que no importa el color que fuera. Esta técnica la aprendí en el Colegio América y no es un requisito de la escuela, pensamos hace tiempo, aquí, que era lo adecuado.

The Spanish teacher's response was similar:

El lápiz rojo lo usamos para hacer mayúsculas y, éste... para escribir los números. Para las mayúsculas lo usamos para que se enfoquen en la mayúscula, para que ellos sepan que al principio de un enunciado se empieza con mayúsculas o nombres propios, para enfocárselos a ellos no precisamente porque tenga que ser con rojo. Ya una vez que ellos lo tienen bien enfocado con este color. Ya no importa que después ya no lo hagan pero ya saben perfectamente que al principio del enunciado se escribe con mayúsculas o nombres propios. Eso en primero de inglés. Que vayan aprendiéndolo de alguna forma visualizándolo y con este color que resalta, digo, puede ser el rojo, puede ser el azul, puede ser el verde, pero, bueno, el rojo se escogió porque no sé pero es un color que además a los niños les gusta.

In the Spanish classroom I observed a boy asking Laura why they could not write in pencil or with ink. Laura responded, *“Porque apenas estamos aprendiendo, entonces nos ayuda el rojo”*. Students also responded to the question about the use of the red pencil. When I observed Sara using the red pencil I asked her about it and at first she commented *“Porque es mayúscula”*. When I probed her more she simply stated, *“Porque dice la Miss”*. Alberto and Marcela both responded *“Porque son mayúsculas y para recordar ponemos rojo”*.

María and Laura both learned this technique years ago and have no concrete definition as to why red pencil has been used to mark capital letters at TBS. During my observations it became clear early on that the use of red pencil for capital letters and punctuation has become habit for the majority of the students. When I asked the preschool director when and how the red pencil technique was introduced, she could only answer that it had been in existence since she had been a student at TBS. She recommended that I ask a teacher who has been working at TBS for a greater amount of time. I approached a teacher who has been in the school for over thirty years and she remembers that María the participating teacher in this study introduced this technique to the teachers years ago and has been implemented by the First English teachers since that time. (E. Barón, November 13, 2003)

hanging on the wall above the whiteboard. The Spanish classroom was different than the English classroom as I did not observe a reading corner, books for the children and the weekly calendar in the Spanish classroom. Also, the students did not have a textbook in the Spanish classroom. Students in the Spanish classroom were surrounded by teacher-produced texts on the whiteboard and student-produced texts in their notebooks.

4.3 Reading Activities in the Spanish and English Classrooms

The following section is dedicated to describing the reading activities that took place in the English and Spanish classrooms. There are examples of choral reading, reading for comprehension, one on one reading with the teacher, silent individual reading and reading in a content class.

4.3.1 Choral Reading

The first reading activity was a class choral reading from their English textbook. Students all turn to the same page in the book and begin reading out loud in unison with the teacher. Figure 4.3 shows the English teacher and students reading together.

Figure 4.3 Group Read Along in the English Classroom



Students read in unison until the end of a short story. Upon the completion of the short story María began to ask comprehension questions in English. However, when she realized few students were raising their hands to respond she explicitly told the children that they could answer in Spanish or English. The responses that children gave in this particular lesson in English or Spanish indicated that they had understood the simple English text. Alberto demonstrated his understanding of the short story by listening to a classmate give an answer in English to one of María's questions, which he then proceeded to translate the into Spanish for a classmate who had not understood the answer in English. In this case, Alberto's response reflects his ability to use his reading comprehension skills in both the L1 and L2 almost simultaneously.

During this class choral reading activity comprehension of the short story was one of María's learning objectives. María stated, *"Primero el niño tiene que expresarse y soltar todo lo que trae adentro. Aunque en japonés o en chino, pero que lo hacen y luego van aprendiendo inglés. Pero si no, los pobres se quedan frustrados"*. When Maria discusses her goals for literacy in her classroom she expresses the importance of comprehension. *"Mis metas son que puedan hacer bien sus trazos y poder escribir y entender lo que escriban."* And in regards to reading she comments, *"Que aunque la lectura sea silbante entienden lo que están leyendo"*.

During the interviews with the children I discussed their English reading book with them. I asked them if it was an easy or difficult book for them to read. Sara commented that the book was easy to read because it was repetitive. As I observed the children during the choral reading activity the majority of the children also expected repetition while reading from the book. Many children tended to become disoriented when the pattern of the story changed. For example, during one story the repetition was as follows: "I like rainbows." "I like rainbows, too". This type of repetition continued

for a series of pages. However, at one point the repetition stopped. The teacher had read, “Talking faces” and the children responded with “Talking faces, too” even though that was not the correct text that followed.

This type of literacy work was not observed in the Spanish classroom. First, children did not have a textbook in Spanish. In fact, Laura commented that students used only worksheets with short texts related to the letter students were learning during that particular week, with a few simple comprehension questions at the end of the worksheet. These questions, however, were even simpler than the comprehension questions asked during Maria’s English literacy lesson. Figure 4.4 is a section of an example of these types of worksheets. This activity was used when Laura introduced the letter “V”. A full version of this reading worksheet can be found in Appendix D.

The texts in these Spanish language worksheets are not presented in paragraph form. Figure 4.4 shows that each sentence has a number at the beginning, but this number does not necessarily correspond to the questions that follow. Although the sentences use a variety of words that begin with the letter “V” the context and subject matter of the sentences is not appropriate for this age of students.

Figure 4.4 Spanish Reading Worksheet Focusing on the Letter “Vv”

1.- Verónica visitó Venecia.
2.- Ella está aquí de visita.
3.- Viene con un vestido verde.
4.- Tiene un vaso de vino en la mano.

Preguntas:

1.- ¿Quién vino de visita? _____
2.- ¿Qué visitó Verónica? _____
3.- ¿Cómo viene vestida? _____
4.- ¿Qué tiene en la mano? _____

For example, children at the age of six may not know where “*Venecia*” is, and the idea of “*vino*” (wine) may not be concrete for these students. The questions that follow the four-sentence text can be answered with one-word answers taken directly from the previous text. Students are not required to summarize what they read or answer reflective questions about the text. This is a skill that is not only required in the English classroom, but also completed accurately in English and Spanish by the students in the English classroom. When I asked the Spanish teacher about her students’ Spanish reading abilities, she commented that it is normal that students are still reading syllabically but that at this level a child should not be sounding out letter by letter. “*Malo cuando siguen deletreando. Entonces, sí caen en un habito malo. Porque van deletreando y al llegar al fin del enunciado o la palabra que están leyendo no se acuerdan de lo que leyeron, ni saben lo que dijeron*”. In this statement Laura is expressing the importance of comprehension.

4.3.2 Silent Reading and One on One with the Teacher

The second reading activity observed was the use of wall charts for creating a variety of sentences. During the thematic unit on the farm the wall chart contained animals, prepositions and their habitats. Students were to choose an animal and create a sentence with the correct preposition and the correct habitat. Once the sentences were completed students were asked to read the sentence out loud to María. As Figure 4.5 shows María called students up to the chart individually and worked with them until they completed the sentence correctly.

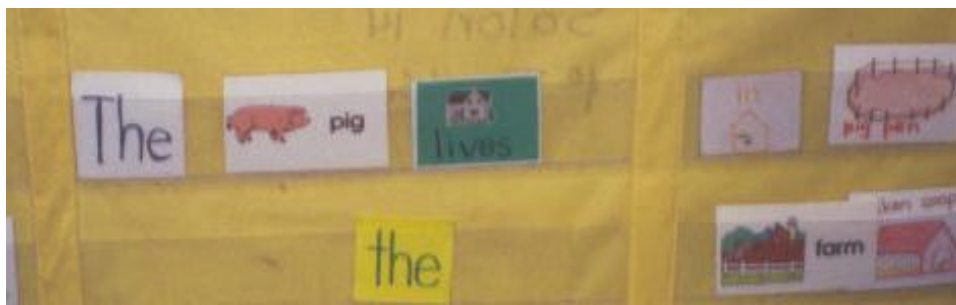
María allowed students to work on their own and only intervened if the child was struggling with the sentence. Students seemed to be quite familiar with this type of activity, indicating that they use these grammar charts on a regular basis.

Figure 4.5 María Works with a Student at the English Grammar Chart Forming a Sentence with Prepositions



Figure 4.6 shows a close up of Alberto's sentence that he was constructing for this activity, "The pig lives in the pig pen".

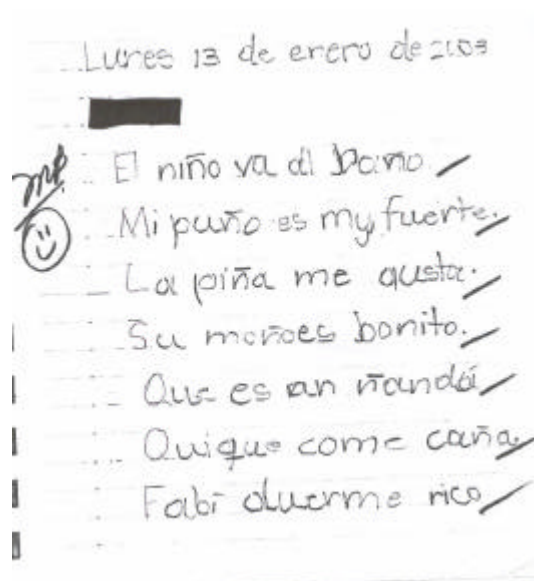
Figure 4.6 Alberto's Sentence at the Grammar Chart



Other reading opportunities were present in the Spanish classroom. However, unlike the English classroom, where group-reading activities regularly occurred, instruction in the Spanish classroom tended to focus more on individual reading or one-on-one reading activities. Often times while correcting the students' work in their notebooks Laura would ask students to read the sentences they had produced as a class or individually. These type of activities occurred on a daily basis in the Spanish classroom. Figure 4.7 is an example of the sentences students were asked to read out loud in Spanish.

Students also had many opportunities for individual silent reading. Students were constantly copying words and sentences from the board. Often times while observing the

Figure 4.7 Students *Copiado* Work



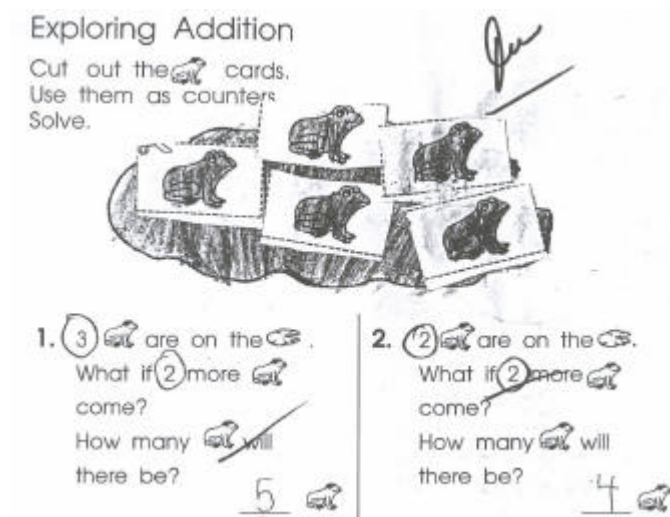
children copying from the whiteboard I noticed the children reading out loud or silently what was written on the board. However, I did not observe structured reading activities in the Spanish classroom.

4.3.3 Content Class

A third reading activity in the English classroom was completed during math class. At this grade level, math is taught in English. Students have a math workbook in English, as well as some homework assignments in their take-home notebooks. Figure 4.8 is an example of an activity in the math workbook. Students are to complete the addition problems taking place in each story problem. The skills required for the completion of this activity were interesting.

Students had to be able to read and comprehend the written text and second be able to complete the addition problem. As I observed Sara in the process of completing this task I noticed that she first paid close attention to the story problem and after reading the whole

Figure 4.8 Worksheet Containing Story Problems in an English Content Class



text she would go back and pay attention to the written numbers to complete the addition problem.

In contrast, Marcela did not read the written text. The English teacher had circled the numbers and told Marcela to just add these two numbers to find the answer. Marcela then quickly completed the task by just paying attention to the numbers.

I asked the English teacher if the objective was to focus on reading in English, student comprehension of the text or the addition problem. María's answer was, *“Las tres son importantes. Tienen que leer, comprender y sumar.”* I then asked her why she just focused on the numbers with Marcela by circling only the numbers. She responded, *“Esta actividad tiene demasiadas instrucciones. El niño se revuelve con estas instrucciones. Yo nada más quería ayudar a Marcela a ubicar los números que tenía que sumar.”* Math class, therefore, involved reading, writing and addition skills, but the focus was mainly on using addition skills and finding the correct answer.

I observed one content class in the Spanish classroom. It was a history class on the Mexican Constitution. The Spanish teacher introduced the topic and read out loud a teacher-produced text that she had copied onto the whiteboard. Students were then instructed to copy the paragraph into their notebooks. See Figure 4.11 for an example

of this text. The lesson lasted approximately ten minutes and then students had 20 minutes to copy the text.

4.4 Writing

This section describes the observed written literacy practices. This included, students' orthography, dictation, enunciados, copying from the board and creative writing.

Jiménez et al. in their study with lower to middle class schools in Mexico found that writing instruction focused mainly on the scribal functions of written language rather than authoring. (Barton, 1994) Students participate in few creative writing activities. In fact, most of their written work was composed of copying teacher-produced texts or SEP produced texts reproduced by the teachers. This study produced many similarities to Jiménez et al. in regards to student writing.

4.4.1 Orthography

The emphases the Spanish teachers place on the scribal aspects of writing are demonstrated by the Spanish classroom rubric used to evaluate students in lecto-escritura. In order to receive the "very good" rating students must demonstrate the following:

- Su letra muestra un tamaño uniforme y es legible*
- Sus letras están bien ubicadas respetando su espacio*
- Puede tomar dictado de palabras, frases u oraciones sin omitir, sustituir ni invertir letras.*
- Realiza la copia sin errores.*

The Spanish classroom writing-rubric was created by the Spanish teachers and the school principal. These expectations by the teachers reflect the importance placed on orthography. Is it even possible for students to receive a rating of "very good" in some

areas? Can a child at the age of six copy from the board without ever making any errors? The examples of work that I obtained show that even the students rated “very good” had orthographic errors when they copied from the board. The rubric does not contain a section on creative writing or individual student-produced texts.

4.4.2 Teacher corrections

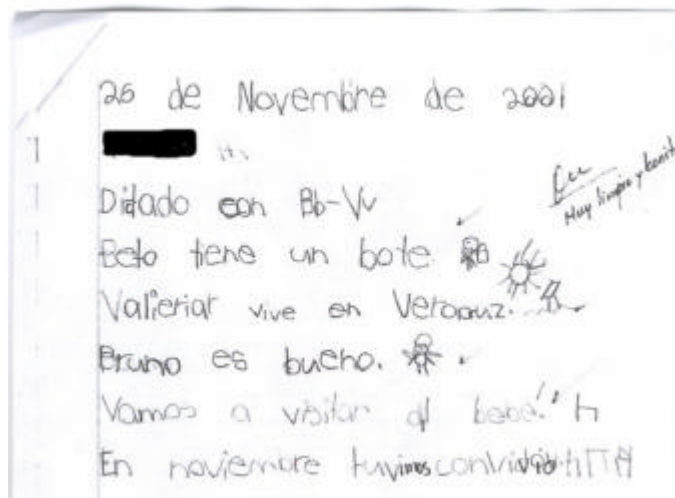
Teacher corrections on students written work are discussed in this section. The large amount of time teachers spent on correcting and marking students work is worth noting. Teachers spent approximately equal amounts of class time on correcting student notebooks and teaching a lesson. The English and Spanish teachers repeatedly commented on the importance of correcting the majority of students’ written work. The English teacher’s rationale for this type of correction was that if students’ orthographic errors were not corrected immediately they would not learn the correct spelling and would continue to make the same errors. After one particular activity I asked her if she was going to correct their work. María responded, “*Sí, porque si no, se les va a quedar grabado. Por ejemplo, “ghost” con “u” se les va a quedar grabado, se me hace que los voy a corregir. Siempre hago eso. También que pueda ver en que les ayudo y hacer que ellos noten sus errores*”.

The Spanish teacher had a similar opinion about correcting students’ work: “*Hacerles ver el error que cometieron. Hacerles ver sus errores. Se los marco no para ponerles un tache, decirles está mal sino para decirles, “Mira, este es tu error, para la próxima vez fíjate bien*”.

However, the strong emphasis placed on orthographic accuracy and the constant teacher reminders and corrections did not seem to be an effective tool for improving students written text. For example, a common error found in the participating students’

work was in regards to the use of “v” or “b” in Spanish. I observed the Spanish teachers frequently correcting these errors verbally and in written form in student notebooks. Students also often had to practice texts focusing on these specific orthographic features. Figure 4.9 shows examples of participating students’ work practicing the use of “V” and “B”.

Figure 4.9 Student-Produced Texts Practicing the Use of “V” VS. “B”



In the upper right corner of Figure 4.9 the teacher corrected the students work and commented, *“Muy limpio y bonito”*. This is another demonstration of the importance the Spanish teacher places on written form. The teacher comments in Figure 4.13 also focus on orthographic neatness rather than on content. The Spanish teacher wrote, *“Puedes mejorar tu letra, O.K.”* I frequently observed similar written and oral comments about students’ orthography in the English and Spanish classrooms. I did not observe teacher correction in regards to the content of the students written work. An illustrative example follows of the Spanish teacher’s verbal corrections during an *enunciado* activity. These corrections occurred during a five-minute period while students were writing the sentences into their notebooks and the teacher wandered around the room observing their work.

Teacher: *“Bonita letra Beto o te lo borro todo. Dije niño, no Ñoño. Dije “b” de bicicleta”*.

Beto: “Yo sé”.

Teacher: “Entonces porque pones “v” de vaca”.

The teacher turned to the student next to Beto and says,

Teacher: “Dije “b” de bicicleta, no “d” de dedo”. Rayones no. En kinder hacen rayones; aquí no. Tu ya no haces rayones”.

She turned to the entire group and reminds them to write neatly,

Teacher: *Advierto, bonita letra. No me hagan al trancazo. Si no, tacho todo. Hagan su mejor esfuerzo con cariño y con amor”.*

Girl: “¿Es con “v” chica?”

Teacher: “¡No! “b” de bicicleta.”

These types of oral corrections were made throughout Spanish classroom writing activities.

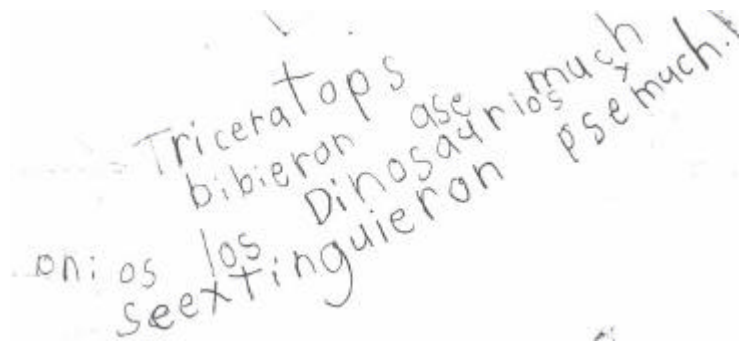
4.4.3 Common Student Errors

The following are examples of participating students’ orthographic errors found in a variety of classroom-produced texts. These examples demonstrate that the use of explicit instruction and error correction of certain orthographic features in these classrooms was not accomplishing the objectives that both participating teachers had for their students. Students continued to make the same errors on a regular basis, despite multiple correction or instruction provided by the teachers. When I asked the teachers about student errors when copying from the board both expressed the belief that the students were not paying attention.

Figure 4.10, Alex’s dinosaur activity, is another example of students’ confusion between “B” and “V”. He wrote the word “vivieron” as “bibieron”. In this text, Alex also produces two other commonly found developmental errors in student’s work. The first error is in regards to the use or absence of the silent “h” in the word “hace” which

he wrote “ase”. In the second error he had confused the letter “S” with the “C” in “hace”. In spite of frequent teacher correction, Alex made these spelling errors regularly throughout the period of observation.

Figure 4.10 Alex’s Dinosaur Activity



Although the Spanish teacher is constantly correcting students orthography she admits that students will continue to make errors because they are going through a process that will take years.

Todavía, todavía van a tener muchas faltas de ortografía como es lógico a su edad. Que esto se va corrigiendo poco a poco en el transcurso de los años. Y la fluidez, pues, es lo mismo van a ir adquiriendo poco a poco. Pero sí, una de las metas es que tengan una fluidez buena en Primero de Inglés.

In the following section I will address the writing activities observed in the Spanish classroom.

4.5 Writing Activities in the Spanish Classroom

In the Spanish classroom there was extensive use of *dictado*, *copiado* and *enunciado* activities. All written work was done in *libretas*, small notebooks containing a small grid of square boxes or, as Figure 4.13 shows, lines with a dotted line down the middle of the page. The lines in Figure 4.13 are of similar nature to the permanent grid

that is on Laura's whiteboard. According to both teachers, the small cube grid is intended as a guideline for writing words, leaving spaces, and making a distinction between capitals and lower case letters. Laura clearly states her objectives for dictation, copying and *enunciados*:

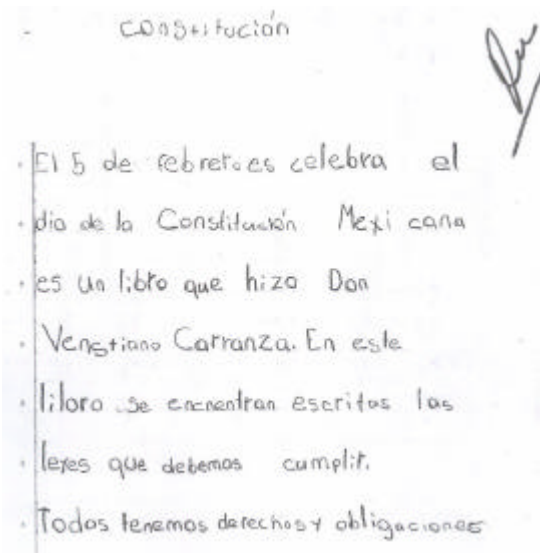
“El objetivo del dictado, pues, es conocer, conocer las letras, ¿no? Cada semana vemos una letra nueva. Ir este, como te diré, ir trabajándola por medio de dictados; Con banco de palabras que sacamos palabras con la letra que vimos en esa semana. Enunciados con palabras que comienzan con esa letra o que tengan esa letra. Para que ellos se les vayan quedando, ¿verdad?, la vayan conociendo, vayan aprendiendo, trabajando sobre lo mismo. El copiado es que se acostumbren, igual, a escribir las letras correctamente como en los trazos, este... pero aparte para igual ir... seguir conociendo las letras que ellos vayan leyendo de la misma copia, porque hay niños que a estas alturas del año se comen las letras o no copian bien o ponen uno por otro. Este es básico para irse a la primaria.”

4.5.1 Copiado

I begin by discussing the copying that students were required to complete on a daily basis. On a regular basis students had to copy directly from the board a paragraph created by the teacher about a certain topic. In the case of Figure 4.11 the paragraph was used to present information about the Mexican Constitution and why it is celebrated on the fifth of February. During these activities students did not add their own ideas to these paragraphs.

During the Primary Years Programme farm investigation students were required to do research at home and bring in a poster with information about farm products. As I

Figure 4.11 Example of Sara's *Copiado* Homework

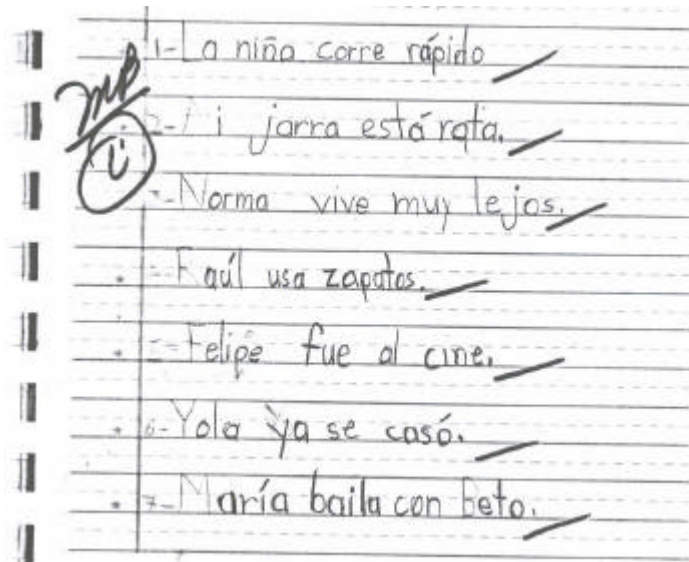


observed their final work I noticed that students were allowed to copy paragraphs from websites or “*laminas*” (small posters containing information about specific topics that are sold at *papelerías*). They were even permitted to cut the paragraphs out and paste them onto their poster. They were not expected to do the research and then create their own texts or summaries about the information they gathered on the topic. Only one child out of the two classrooms brought an authentic text summarizing the facts about the farm products she had researched.

4.5.2 *Dictado*

Another writing activity in the Spanish classroom that students participated in daily was dictation. Figure 4.12 demonstrates the type of sentences children are dictating. One of Laura’s main literacy objectives is that the students can write the dictation without committing errors. She did not discuss wanting the students to be able to freely express

Figure 4.12 Marcela’s Dictation with the Letters “B” and “V”



their ideas. She shared, “*En cuanto a lectoescritura es que logran el conocimiento de todas las letras, todo el abecedario, que tengan una fluidez en la lectura y que logran conocer todas las letras y que para poder ellos escribir lo que quieren para poder hacer un dictado correctamente.*”

A typical pattern during *dictado* was that the Spanish teacher would dictate word-by-word sentences associated with the letter of the week or previous learned letters. She would repeat a word several times while students worked at writing the word in their notebooks. After each word she would say “*espacio*” (space) as a reminder that the word was finished and that they needed to leave a space between each word. She continued to dictate in this fashion until the end of the sentence and she would remind students to end with a period. Two example sentences of a dictated sentence that I observed were as follows:

1. *Quique usa su camisa.*
2. *Ceci está en el cine.*

Typically during these activities students dictated five sentences containing approximately four or five words. These dictation exercises usually lasted 30 minutes.

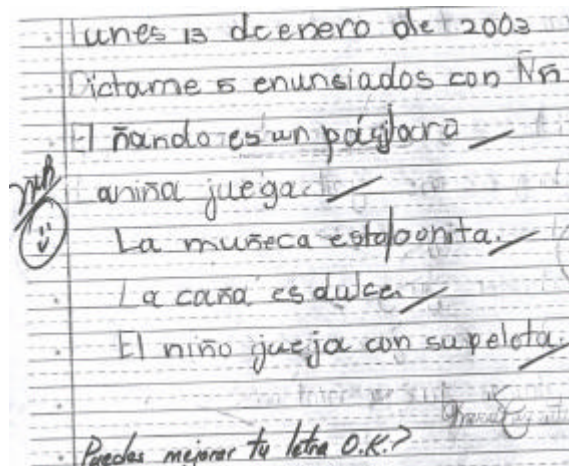
As I observed students during this activity I noticed that students worked at different paces. Some students finished writing a word quickly and waited patiently or impatiently for Laura to give the next word. Other students were missing words in the sentence because they worked too slowly, were distracted, or did not know how to write the word. These children would either look at their neighbors work or shout out questions to Laura. The words in the dictation were almost always words students were already familiar with from *enunciado* or *copiado* work.

4.5.3 *Enunciados*

During *enunciado* activities the students and the teacher formed a ‘*banco de palabras*’, a list of words that start with or contain the sound of the letter of the week. Once they formed the list of words together they created coherent sentences containing these words. Students and the Spanish teacher created the *enunciado* sentences. In fact, this was the one writing activity where student derived sentences were greater than teacher derived sentences. Laura would then write the sentences on the whiteboard and the children would copy the sentences into their notebooks. Figure 4.13 is an example of *enunciado* work completed in Laura’s class working with the letter “Ñ”.

Since these sentences are often student-generated they are at the children’s vocabulary level and are often related to the students lives. For example, in Figure 4.9 the sentences working on “B” and “V” talk about a party the students had at school in November and a few of the sentences contain names of some of the students in the class. During this study this type of writing activity was observed almost daily. For the students

Figure 4.13 Alex’s *Enunciado* Work with the Letter “Ñ”



this activity appeared to be routine. Students knew what was expected of them throughout the lesson and the only confusion on the part of the students was thinking of words that started with the correct sound.

The majority of class time students were partaking in *dictado*, *enunciado* and *copiado* writing activities. Once I observed the Spanish teacher leading the children in a song about the value of the month or a song related to the thematic unit. On rare occasions, students were asked to complete a creative writing assignment.

4.5.4 Creative Writing or Free Expression

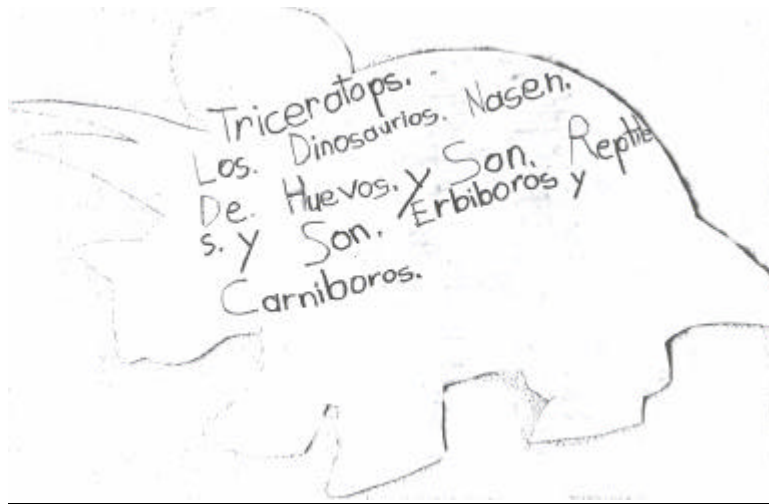
Over the course of this study I observed only one occasion in the Spanish classroom where students participated in a creative writing assignment. After a lesson on dinosaurs, students were asked to create a small text about what they know about dinosaurs. Laura instructed that it did not matter if they made errors or if they needed help with spelling. She also emphasized that they were to do this on their own and with their own creativity. Since this did not appear to be a frequent activity in the Spanish classroom and since it seemed to be an important contrast from other types of writing activities which so heavily focused on the proper use of orthographic features, I asked Laura in an interview why she did not correct students' work in this particular activity. Her response was:

“Para mí esto es algo precioso que ellos hicieron. Junto con sus errores con sus faltas de ortografía y si yo corrijo algo en este trabajo que no es el cuaderno, siento que estoy echándoles perder un trabajo que a su edad es algo precioso. Es la creatividad de ellos. Es como si fuera a destruir un trabajo que ellos crearon. Esta mal. Esto es creatividad y esto es maravilloso”.

Laura here is making a clear distinction between what is expected of the students when working in their notebook and what is acceptable when creating one’s own text. This concept was reinforced during the study when I asked a First English teacher outside of the study why she did not want the computer teacher to make corrections on students work that had been created during their weekly computer class. She made a distinction between when she corrects students’ work and when she allows errors. She called this distinction, “*libre expresión*” (e.g. students’ own words) and “*trabajos dirigidos*” (e.g. *dictado, enunciados, copiado*). She said “*Solamente cuando es libre expresión puedo dejar los errores. Los niños saben que en ciertas actividades no voy a corregir sus trabajos*”. The free expression activities allow the child to express themselves without the worry of making mistakes. Students are allowed to ask for help or call out “*pavo es con v chica o b grande*” but the teacher will not offer help or advice unless called to do so by the student.

Sara’s work in 4.14 is one of the creative writing activities. It shows a variety of different types of errors in regards to form. For example, she tends to have an over usage of capitals and periods, as well as, some spelling errors. Sara placed a period after each word unless the words were connected by “y” and she used a capital letter at the start of every word except “y”. She also made the common mistake between “B” and “V” and “C”

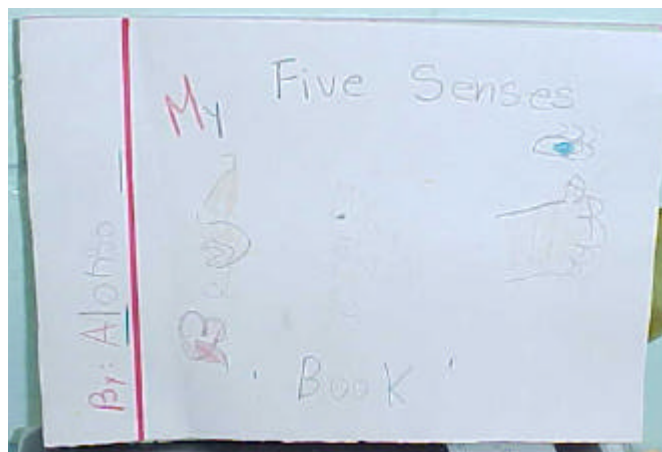
Figure 4.14 Sara’s Creative Writing Project about Dinosaurs



and “S”. The one last aspect of this writing assignment that I would like to point out is Sara’s technique of continuing the word *reptiles* by placing the “s” on the following line. This is not a strategy taught by the Spanish teacher. In fact Sara should be conscious of this error as she is constantly reminded of how to properly space and divide words on lines from all of her notebook work with grided paper. This writing assignment is, however, rich with authoring as it demonstrates Sara’s understanding of the thematic unit and expresses the dinosaur facts that most interested her. As Laura said, *“Esto es creatividad, y esto es maravilloso”*.

In the English classroom students are asked to author their own books containing information about the thematic unit they are working on. Figure 4.15 shows Alberto’s book about the five senses. On each page the book represents one of the five senses. Alberto has copied the information from the teacher’s text on the whiteboard into his own book. He added a variety of drawings that represent the sense he wrote about. The concept of the book could be labeled “authoring”. However, the finished product continues to be a “scribal” activity as the students must copy the information directly from the teacher’s text and are not creating their own texts.

Figure 4.15 Alberto’s five senses book



4.6 Children's Strategies for Writing

The strategies that students were using during both the English and Spanish classroom activities were not always the same as those instructed by the teachers. For example, Alex demonstrated an all-together different type of strategy. As I observed Alex copying from the whiteboard vocabulary about farm animals into his notebook I noticed he had written “shecen” instead of “chicken”. María corrected him and made him copy the word correctly from the board. However, I decided to ask him his strategy for copying down the words. He informed me that he sounded the word out and then wrote it as it sounded to him. I found this strategy very interesting because both teachers explicitly expressed that this was not one of their strategies used for writing instruction. In this instance Alex had used his own strategy or a strategy taught to him outside of TBS instead of what his classroom teachers had taught him.

When I asked the teachers their opinion about Alex's use of this strategy they responded, *‘Porque no crees que sea americano. Los americanos no vean mucho el pizarrón. Los extranjeros tratan de escuchar lo que tu dices y escribirlo. Como inglés es su primer idioma Alex puede usar esta técnica’*. However, she did not have an answer as to where he learned this strategy other than because he is American. I went a little further and asked her if Native Spanish speakers use this strategy in their L1. She

responded, *“No, no tienen la costumbre o no saben como hacerlo. Ya es por inercia”*. Both strategies for writing the vocabulary list from the board, whether by invented spelling or direct copying seemed to produce errors.

4.7 Children’s Strategies for Reading

Sara read whole words and captured meaning as she read in English and Spanish. She demonstrated this ability by answering comprehension questions throughout a story. Alberto continued to read syllabically and often times had to return to the text in order to answer comprehension questions correctly in Spanish. In English Alberto frequently pronounced sounds in Spanish. He also had a more difficult time answering comprehension questions in English.

Andrea read fluent in Spanish and English the majority of the time and when she would get stuck on a word she would return to reading syllabically. Alex reads fluently and comprehends what he has read. He is also able to summarize the story. In Spanish he tends to pronounce some sounds in English but his comprehension level is high in both languages. Marcela reads syllabically in Spanish and English and sometimes works through a word silently and then reads it out loud. She can summarize a story after referring back to the text in Spanish and English.

All five students tended to glance at the drawing in the book before and after reading the page in the English book. On several occasions the students would look at the drawing after I asked a question referring to the text. These were the observed strategies the selected students used during the duration of the study.

4.8 Children’s Developing Understandings of the Purpose of Literacy

The participating children's understandings about literacy tended to coincide but there were also some interesting differences worth discussing. I received interesting answers when I asked students who they thought was the best reader in the class and who had trouble reading. All five students had trouble thinking of the best reader but most had definite answers for the low level readers. However, their reasons for their answers varied.

When I first asked Alex he responded, "I never saw anyone read in this class." After I pushed him to think hard he responded that his teacher María reads the best. "She knows how to read well. She reads excellent. She's been practicing more and she reads fast. Alex had no trouble sharing his opinion about the classmate who has trouble reading. "Juan José, because he doesn't even know what he's saying. He doesn't understand the words." Alex regards his classmate's inability to comprehend text as classification of a low level reader. However, his definition of a good reader, "María", is someone who reads fluently and fast. Alex's analysis of literacy has placed a strong emphasis on fluency and comprehension.

Alberto responded that Sara was the best reader in the class. His reason was, "*Sara sabe leer más que yo en inglés y se fue con Ms. Ana (the school principal) porque va a leer en público en la graduación, en español*". For Alberto being chosen to read in public was an indication of a skilled reader. Other reasons children offered for the selection of the best reader were, "*Porque lee bien.*" "*Se escucha bien*".

Andrea and Marcela gave the following reasons for choosing the low level readers, "*Porque no pone atención*", "*Porque a veces se equivoca mucho con las letras*", and simply "*porque cuesta más trabajo leer*". These answers are focused on the form in which these students read. They do not express the importance of comprehension as in Alex's answer.

Students also shared with me, which was more difficult reading or writing. Andrea commented that it was easier to make errors while writing, *“Confundimos unas letras. Podemos equivocarnos con las letras más fácil escribiendo que leer algunas veces.”* Alonso agreed with Andrea by responding, *“A veces escribo la letra mal.”* Both children are very conscious of their written errors and appear to understand a good writer to be someone who does not make orthographic errors. They did not comment on the content of the texts they write or the meaning they are trying to convey. Their only worry seems to be on the form of their writing.

I also asked students to comment on whether it was more difficult to learn to read and write in Spanish or English. Students had varying answers but each participating student either directly or indirectly shared that reading in English was more difficult. Alberto responded honestly, *“Inglés es más difícil porque no sé pronunciar los sonidos en inglés.”* Alberto is aware of the difficulties he faces when learning to read in a L2. Andrea shared with me that learning to read in English is easy, but the accent is difficult.

Children’s developing theories of literacy also had some similarities and differences in regards to the importance and role of literacy in our lives. Children had developed varying ideas with one underlying theme. Literacy is needed for our every day lives. Children were asked about the importance of learning to read and write. Marcela responded, *“Para que seas buena en la vida”*. The act of being able to read and write made you a better person.

Alberto shared that literacy is an essential part of a person’s survival. *“Si no sabes leer te vas a perder en la calle. Pero vas a ver puros dibujos y no se entienden los dibujos”*. Sara also believed literacy was necessary for daily life. *“Si quieres escribir algo en la calle, no vas a poder”*. Marcela commented, *“Como cuando vayas a trabajar*

te pueden preguntar si sabes a leer o sumar. Y si no sabes no puedes trabajar”.

Marcela is thinking of the future and the skills she will need to be a productive member of society. Each student expressed that their ability to read and write will be an essential part of their lives.

4.9 Teachers’ Understandings about Literacy

In the Spanish teacher’s interview she presented some very clear and fundamentally sound strategies for teaching reading and writing. Laura expressed her understanding of literacy in an interview.

“Una definición no te lo podía decir exactamente porque es un proceso. Es decir, cuando comienzan y cuando llegan a su meta. La lectoescritura, es cuando ellos ya están en el proceso de aprendizaje en la lectura y escritura. Primero es la lectura y luego la escritura... Porque la escritura es mucho más difícil.”

She also went on to describe the long-term goals she has for her students in the area of literacy.

“En cuanto a lecto-escritura es que logran el conocimiento de todas las letras todo el abecedario, que tengan una fluidez en la lectura y que logren conocer todas las letras y que para poder ellos escribir lo que quieren, para poder hacer un dictado correctamente. Todavía, todavía van a tener muchas faltas de ortografía como es lógico a su edad. Que esto se va corrigiendo poco a poco en el transcurso de los años. Y la fluidez, pues, es lo mismo van a ir adquiriendo poco a poco. Pero sí, una de las metas es que tengan una fluidez buena en primero de inglés.”

The goals presented by the Spanish teacher reflect the same goals outlined in the Spanish classroom rubric. Laura does not express any concern for students’ comprehension of a reading or their ability to summarize the reading. Her concern for students’ fluency in reading and their ability to dictate properly are her main objectives for literacy.

At the end of the interview after I had asked all my questions she wanted to conclude by making one important comment. She declared,

“A mí en particular, me preocupa mucho el autoestima de los niños, más que aprendan a leer y escribir, me preocupa mucho el que ellos se sienten seguros de sí mismos, que no vayan con la autoestima abajo, porque son sus bases principales para poder seguir adelante.”

It is important to understand that this statement by the Spanish teacher was offered voluntarily as a closure to the interview. This comment expresses her motivation for being a teacher and her main objectives as a teacher of preschool age children. It demonstrates that Laura clearly believes that her teaching techniques and her manner of correcting her students is helping them to gain more self esteem, which she believes to be a fundamental base for these preschoolers.

In the interview with the English teacher she commented on the difference in the English and Spanish literacy rubrics. She commented about why students are not evaluated for their reading and writing skills in English during First English.

“Porque es su segundo idioma. Sí, es importante, pero tal vez no le damos tanto importancia en preescolar. En la primaria tienen que ir aprendiendo según su madurez. No vas a enseñar a un niño a leer y escribir en inglés en Primero de Inglés.”

The English and Spanish teachers have similar beliefs about students' maturity and the development of literacy skills occurring over time.

I also asked the English teacher in an interview about whether students had more difficulty learning to read and write in English or Spanish. She responded,

“Español. En español puedes hacer más vollos porque aprenden muy bien. Puedes enseñarles canciones de las sílabas y es más fácil para ellos en español que en inglés. Pero, claro, aprenden los dos fácilmente porque el niño es una esponja. Pero no te va a entender igual en inglés.”

This comment reflects the English teacher's idea that reading and writing can be taught by using songs and phrases that will help the students remember rules about written form and reading phonetically or syllabically. She also expresses that this type of

teaching is easier in the Spanish classroom because students have higher levels of comprehension in Spanish.

The previous comments by the English and Spanish teachers are important for understanding their theories and ideas about literacy instruction and learning for preschool age children. They both express important ideas that literacy learning is a developmental process that occurs over years.

4.10 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter it is important to return to the predictions made at the start of this chapter. It appears that the predictions were only partially accurate. I predicted that the English and Spanish classrooms would focus more on conventional written forms rather than on students' ability to create meaning through authoring (Barton 1999). In general students participated in writing activities, such as *dictado*, *enunciado*, and *copiado* that were mainly focused on improving their orthography rather than on the creation of authentic texts. The children were not entirely restricted to activities that focused on the scribal aspects of written language as two counter example activities were observed. In the Spanish classroom students were asked to create sentences that contained the letter of the week. These sentences were used for *copiado* activities. The second counter example is the dinosaur activity (Figure 4.14) that children completed in the Spanish classroom. Students were allowed to write any information about dinosaurs and the teacher did not correct the finished texts. Each student created an authentic text.

The prediction that literacy instruction would be similar in the English and Spanish classrooms was inaccurate. In fact, literacy instruction was handled quite differently in each language. Written language in the Spanish classroom focused on

improving orthographic features at the sentence level and the English classroom worked with learning English vocabulary at the word level. Reading in the Spanish classroom was either done independently by the students while they worked during *dictado*, *enunciado*, or *copiado* or one-on-one with the teacher. Students were asked periodically to read out loud the sentences they had copied into their notebooks. On the other hand, reading in the English classroom consisted of group, individual and one-on-one activities. Students consistently used an English textbook for choral reading activities. Students were also asked to summarize and answer comprehension questions about the reading. This skill was not observed in the Spanish classroom.

I also predicted that students would implement the reading and writing strategies that were taught by the English and Spanish teacher and that students would use the same strategies for literacy learning in their L1 and L2. Students did in fact implement a variety of teacher-taught strategies. When reading out loud at times students would work through a word by syllables. This strategy was taught to the children explicitly in the English and Spanish classroom. Students did, however, use strategies that were not present in the classrooms. For instance, Alex's use of inventive spelling did not follow the teachers' conventional forms for teaching writing. Alex may have acquired this skill elsewhere and he brought this writing strategy to the classroom. The dinosaur activity in Figures 4.12 and 4.14 also demonstrate that other children were using inventive spelling.

Students did seem to be using the same strategies interchangeably between their L1 and L2 during English and Spanish literacy activities. For example, Alex also used inventive spelling in the Spanish classroom during a *copiado* activity. Every so often he would stop looking at the whiteboard and he would sound out a word and write it down

as it sounded to him. Also students who read syllabically in one language also did so in the other.

In the following chapter I explore the possible meanings of these results and the differences in the literacy instruction in the English and Spanish classrooms even though the students are the same in both classrooms and the teachers are co-team teachers. I conclude with the implications for future research in Mexico and other contexts.