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The Child with Learning Difficulties and His Writing: A Study of Case

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present one child with learning difficulties writing process in multigrade rural elementary school in México. It presents Alejandro's case. This boy lives in a rural area. He shows special educational needs about learning. He never had specialized attention because he lives in a marginalized rural area. He was integrated into regular school, but he faced some learning difficulties. He was always considered as a student who did not learn. He has coursed 2 years of preschool and 1 year of elementary school. Therefore, this text describes how child writes a list of words with and without image as support. Analysis consists to identify the child's conceptualizations about writing, his ways of approaching, and difficulties or mistakes he makes. The results show that Alejandro identifies letters and number by using pseudo-letters and conventional letter. These letters are in an unconventional position. There is no relationship grapheme and phoneme yet, and he uses different writing rules. We consider his mistakes as indicators of the learning process.

Keywords: writing difficulties, learning difficulties, writing learning, writing process, special education

1. Introduction

One of the purposes of Mexican education system is that students acquire conventional writing during first grades in elementary school [1]. This purpose consists of students to understand the alphabetical code, its meaning, and functionality. In this way, they can integrate into a discursive community.

The elementary school teacher teaches a heterogeneous group of children [1, 2]. Some students show different acquisition levels of the writing. This is due to literacy environment that the family and society provide. Thus, some children have had great opportunities to interact with reading and writing practices than others. Therefore, some students do not learn the alphabetical principle of writing at the end of the scholar year. They show characteristics of initial or intermediate acquisition level of the writing. In this way, it is difficult for children to acquire writing at the same time, at the term indicated by educational system or teachers.

In addition, there may be children with learning difficulties in the classroom. Department of Special Education teaches some children. Students with special educational needs show more difficulties to learn than their classmates [3].

They require more resources to achieve the educational objectives. These authors point out that special educational needs are relative. These needs arise between students' personal characteristics and their environment. Therefore, any child may have special educational needs, even if he/she does not have any physical disability. However, some students with learning difficulties do not have a complete assessment about their special educational needs. On the one hand, their school is far from urban areas; on the other hand, there are not enough teachers of special education for every school. In consequence, school teachers do not know their students' educational needs and teach in the same way. Thereby, students with learning difficulties do not have the necessary support in the classroom.

Learning difficulties of writing may be identified easily. Children with special educational needs do not learn the alphabetical principle of writing easily; that is, they do not relate phoneme with grapheme. Therefore, children show their conceptualizations about writing in different ways. Sometimes, teachers censor their students' written productions because they do not write in a conventional way. Children with special educational needs are stigmatized in the classroom. They are considered as less favored. At the end of the scholar year, children do not pass.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present one child with special educational needs writing process in a Mexican multigrade rural school. This text describes how the child writes a list of words with and without image as support. Analysis consists to identify the child's conceptualizations about writing [4], his ways of approaching, and difficulties or mistakes he makes. These mistakes are the indicators of learning process [5].

This paper presents Alejandro's case. This boy lives in a rural area. He shows special educational needs about learning. He never had specialized attention because he lives in a marginalized rural area. He was integrated into regular school, but he faced some learning difficulties. He was always considered as a student who does not learn. Therefore, this text describes Alejandro's writing, what he does after 2 years of preschool and 1 year of elementary school.

2. Children with learning difficulties and their diagnosis

According to the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education [6], Mexican education system provides basic education (preschool, elementary, and secondary school) for students with special educational needs. There are two types of special attention: Center of Multiple Attention (CAM, in Spanish) and Units of Service and Support to Regular Education (USAER, in Spanish). In the first one, children with special educational needs go to this Center. These children receive attention according to basic education and their educational needs. In the second, specialized teachers on special education go to school and provide support to students. These teachers provide information to school teachers too. In this way, there is educational equity and inclusion in Mexican school [7].

Mexican education system proposes the psycho-pedagogical assessment to identifying students with special educational needs [3]. Teacher identifies student with more difficulties. Specialized teacher applies several predetermined tests individually. This assessment is organized as follows:

- 1. Physical appearance:** Teacher describes the child's physical characteristics. These features indicate the type of food the student eats, care his or her person, the parents' attention, among other elements.

2. Behavior observed during the assessment: In this section, the teacher should record the conditions in which the assessment was carried out: child's attitude, behavior, and interest.

3. Child's development history: This section presents conditions in which pregnancy developed, physical development (ages in which child held his/her head, sat, crawled, walked, etc.), language development (verbal response to sounds and voices, age in which said his/her first words and phrases, etc.), family (characteristics of their family and social environment, frequent activities, etc.), hetero-family history (vision, hearing, etc.), medical history (health conditions, diseases, etc.), and scholar history (age at which he/she started school, type of school, difficulties, etc.).

4. Present condition: In this, there are four aspects:

a. It refers to student's general aspects: intellectual area (information processing, attention, memory, understanding, etc.), motor development area (functional skills to move, take objects, position of his/her body, etc.), communicative-linguistic area (phonological, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic levels), adaptation and social interaction area (the child's skills to initiate or maintain relationships with others), and emotional area (the way of perceiving the world and people). In each one, it mentions the instruments he suggests, although there is not enough information about them [3].

b. The second aspect is the curricular competence level. Teacher identifies what the student is capable of doing in relation to established purposes and contents by official curriculum.

c. The third aspect is about the learning style and motivation to learn. It presents physical-environmental conditions where the child works, their interests, level attention, strategies to solve a task, and the incentives he receives.

d. The fourth aspect is information about the student's environment: factors of the school, family, and social context that influence the child's learning.

Psycho-pedagogical assessment allows to identify children's general educational needs. In this way, the school teacher could have information about the students' difficulties. However, it is a general assessment. It contains several aspects and does not go deeper into one.

Therefore, this paper does not propose a new assessment. It consists of presenting one child's writing difficulties, his ways of conceptualizing writing, and some mistakes he gets to make.

3. Students with learning difficulties and their scholar integration

Since 1993, Mexican system education has tried to offer special education services to students with special educational needs in basic education [8]. The first step was to promote the integration of these children in regular education classrooms. However, only insertion of the student in the school was achieved. Therefore, the

system of education searched for mechanisms to provide advice to teacher. In this way, student with learning difficulties can be attended at the same time in the classroom [8].

Educational integration has been directly associated with attention of students with learning difficulties, with or without physical disabilities [8]. However, this process implies a change in the school. For this, it is necessary to provide information and to create awareness to the educational community, permanent updating of teachers, joint work between teacher, family, and specialized teachers.

At present, Mexican education system looks at educational integration as process in which every student with learning difficulties is supported individually [9]. Adapting the curriculum to the child is the purpose of educational integration.

Curricular adequacy is one of the actions to support students with learning difficulties [10, 11]. This is an individualized curriculum proposal. Its purpose is to attend the students' special educational needs [3]. At present, Mexican education system indicates that there should be a curricular flexibility to promote learning processes. However, it is important to consider what the child knows about particular knowledge.

Regarding the subject of the acquisition of written language, it is necessary to know how the children build their knowledge about written. It is not possible to make a curricular adequacy if teachers do not have enough information about their students. However, children are considered as knowledge builders. Therefore, there are learning difficulties at the process.

4. Alejandro's case

This section presents Alejandro's personal information. We met him when we visited to his school for other research purposes. We focused on him because the boy was silent in class. He was always in a corner of the work table and did not do the activities. For this, we talked with his teacher and his mother to know more about him.

Alejandro is a student of an elementary multigrade rural school. He was 7 years old at the time of the study. He was in the second grade of the elementary school. His school is located in the region of the "Great Mountains" of the state of Veracruz, Mexico. It is a rural area, marginalized. To get to this town from the municipal head, it is necessary to take a rural taxi for half an hour. Then, you have to walk on a dirt road for approximately 50 min.

Alejandro's family is integrated by six people. He is the third of the four sons. He lives with his parents. His house is made of wood. His father works in the field: farming of corn, beans, and raising of sheep. His mother is a housewife and also works in the field. They have a low economic income. Therefore, they receive a scholarship. One of his older brothers also showed learning difficulties at school. His mother says both children have a learning problem. But, they do not have any money for attending their sons' learning difficulties. In addition, there are no special institutes near their house.

The boy has always shown learning difficulties. He went to preschool for 2 years. However, he did not develop the necessary skills at this level. At classes, this child was silent, without speaking. Preschool teachers believed that he was mute. Nevertheless, at scholar recess, he talked with his classmates. Alejandro was slow to communicate with words in the classroom.

When he started elementary school, Alejandro continued to show learning difficulties. At classes, he was silent too. He just watched what his classmates did. He did not do anything in the class. He took his notebook out of his backpack and just made some lines. Occasionally, he talked with his classmates. When the teacher asked him

something, Alejandro did not answer. He looked down and did not answer. He just ducked his head and stayed for several minutes.

When Alejandro was in second grade, he did different activities than his classmates. His teacher drew some drawings for him and he painted these drawings. Other occasions, the teacher wrote some letters for him to paint. The child did every exercise during several hours. He did not finish his exercises quickly. Sometimes he painted some drawings during 2 h.

Although Alejandro requires specialized attention, he has not received it. He has not had a full psycho-pedagogical assessment at school by specialized teachers. His school does not have these teachers. Also, the child was not submitted to neurological structural examination or neurophysiological studies to exclude an organic origin of his learning difficulties. His parents do not have enough financial resources to do this type of study for him. In addition, one specialized institution that can do this type of study for free is in Mexico City. It is so far from child's house. It would be expensive for the child's parents. Therefore, he is only attended as a regular school student.

For this reason, this paper is interested in the boy's writing process. This is because Alejandro coursed 2 years of preschool and 1 year of elementary school; however, he does not show a conventional writing yet. In this way, it is interesting to analyze his conceptualizations about writing and difficulties he experiences.

5. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to know the child's ways to approach writing spontaneously and his knowledge about the writing system. For this, the author used a clinical interview. He took into account the research interview guide "Analysis of Disturbances in the Learning Process of Reading and Writing" [12].

The clinical interview was conducted individually. We explored four points, but we only present two in this text: to write words and to write for image.

Interviewer took the child to the library room at school. There were no other students. First, the interviewer gave the child a sheet and asked to write his name. Alejandro wrote his name during long time. Interviewer only asked what it says there. He answered his name: "Alejandro." Next, the interviewer asked the child to write some letters and numbers he knew. Alejandro wrote them. The interviewer asked about every letter and number. The child answered "letter" or "number," and its name.

Next, the two writing tasks were the following:

1. *To write words*: The interviewer asked the child to write a group of words from the same semantic field in Spanish (because Alejandro is from Mexico) and one sentence. Order of words was from highest to lowest number of syllables. In this case, interviewer used semantic field of animals. Therefore, he used following words: GATO (cat), MARIPOSA (butterfly), CABALLO (horse), PERRO (dog), and PEZ (fish). The sentence was: EL GATO BEBE LECHE (The cat drinks milk). The interviewer questioned every written word. He asked the child to show with his finger how he says in every written production.
2. *To write for image*: This task was divided into two parts. The first analyzed the size and second analyzed the number.

Interviewer used the following image cards: horse-bird and giraffe-worm (**Figure 1**). Every pair of cards represents a large animal and a small animal.

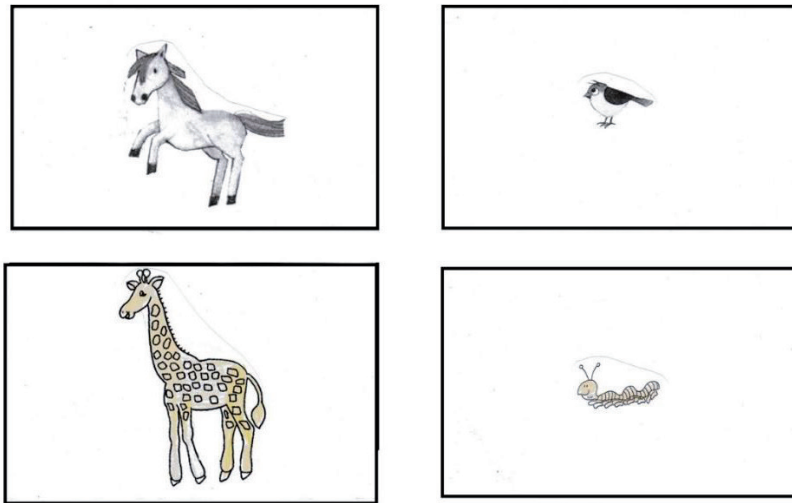


Figure 1.
Cards with large and small animals.

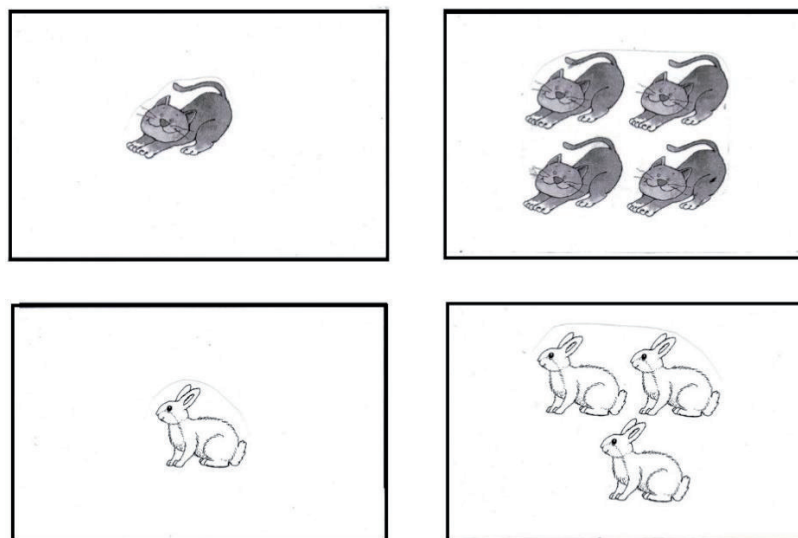


Figure 2.
Cards for singular and plural.

The purpose of this first task was to explore how the child writes when he looks at two images of animals with different size. The animal names have three syllables in Spanish: CA-BA-LLO (horse), PA-JA-RO (bird), etc. In this way, we can see how the child writes.

The interviewer used the following pair of cards for second task (**Figure 2**).

First card shows one animal (singular) and the second shows some animals (plural). In this way, we search to explore how the child produces his writings when he observes one or more objects, if there are similarities or differences to write.

The interviewer asked what was in every card. Next, he asked the child to write something. Alejandro wrote something in every picture. Afterward, the interviewer asked the child to read every word that he wrote. Child pointed with his finger what he wrote.

After, the interview was transcribed for analysis. We read the transcription. The author analyzed every written production. He identified the child's conceptualizations about writing. He compared the written production and what the child said. In this way, the analysis did not only consist to identify the level of writing development. This text describes the child's writing, the ways in which he conceptualizes the writing, the difficulties he experienced to write, and his interpretations about writing.

6. Alejandro's writing

This section describes Alejandro's writing process. As we already mentioned, Alejandro is 7 years old and he studies in the second grade of the elementary school. His teacher says the child should have a conventional writing, because he has already coursed 1 year of elementary school, but it is not like that. Most of his classmates write a conventional way, but he does not.

We organized this section in three parts. The first part presents how Alejandro wrote his name and how he identifies letters and numbers; the second part refers to the writing of words; and the third part is writing for picture.

6.1 Alejandro writes his name and some letters and numbers

The first part of the task consisted of Alejandro writing his name and some letters and numbers he knows. His name was requested for two reasons. The first reason is to identify the sheet, because the interviewer interviewed other children in the same school. Also, it was necessary to identify every written productions of the group of students. The second reason was to observe the way he wrote his name and how he identified letters and numbers.

The interviewer asked the child to write his name at the top of the sheet. When the interviewer said the instructions, Alejandro was thoughtful during a long time. He was not pressed or interrupted. He did not do anything for several seconds. The child looked at the sheet and looked at everywhere. After time, he took the pencil and wrote the following on the sheet (**Figure 3**).

The interviewer looked at Alejandro's writing. He asked if something was lacking. The interviewer was sure that Alejandro knew his name and his writing was not complete. However, Alejandro was thoughtful, and looked at the sheet for a long time. The interviewer asked if his name was already complete. The child answered "no." The interviewer asked the child if he remembered his name. Alejandro denied with his head. So, they continued with another task.

Alejandro has built the notion of his name. We believe that he has had some opportunities to write his name. Perhaps, his teacher has asked him to write his name on his notebooks, as part of scholar work in the classroom. We observed that Alejandro used letters with conventional sound value. This is because he wrote three initial letters of his name: ALJ (Alejandro). The first two letters correspond to the beginning of his name. Then, he omits "E" (ALE-), and writes "J" (ALJ). However, Alejandro mentions that he does not remember the others. This may show that he has memorized his name, but at that moment he failed to remember the others, or, these letters are what he remembers.

Subsequently, the interviewer asked Alejandro to write some letters and numbers he knew. The sequence was: a letter, a number, a letter, another letter, and number. In every Alejandro' writing, the interviewer asked the child what he wrote. In this way, Alejandro wrote the following (**Figure 4**).

A photograph of a piece of paper with the name 'AIL' written in black ink. The letters are simple and somewhat irregular, characteristic of a child's handwriting. The 'A' is a simple triangle, the 'I' is a vertical line with a dot, and the 'L' is a vertical line with a curved bottom.

Figure 3.
Alejandro's name.

The image shows five handwritten characters in a row: a lowercase 'a', a number '4', an uppercase 'A', a lowercase 'e', and a number '3'. The characters are written in a simple, somewhat irregular style with visible pencil strokes.

Figure 4.
Letters and numbers written by Alejandro.

For this task, Alejandro wrote for a long time. He did not hurry to write. He looked at sheet and wrote. The child looked at the interviewer, looked at the sheet again and after a few seconds he wrote. The interviewer asked about every letter or number.

We can observe that Alejandro differentiates between letter and number. He wrote correctly in every indication. That is, when the interviewer asked him to write a letter or number, he did so, respectively. In this way, Alejandro knows what he needs to write a word and what is not, what is for reading and what is not.

Also, we can observe that the child shows a limited repertoire of letters. He did not write consonants. He used only vowels: A (capital and lower) and E (lower). It shows us that he differentiates between capital and lower letter. Also, he identifies what vowels and letters are because the child answered which they were when the interviewer asked about them.

6.2 Writing words from the same semantic field

Asking the child to write words spontaneously is a way to know what he knows or has built about the writing system [12]. Although we know Alejandro presents learning difficulties and has not consolidated a conventional writing, it is necessary to ask him to write some words. This is for observing and analyzing what he is capable of writing, what knowledge he has built, as well as the difficulties he experiences.

The next picture presents what Alejandro wrote (**Figure 5**). We wrote the conventional form in Spanish next to every word. We wrote these words in English in the parentheses too.

At the beginning of the interview, Alejandro did not want to do the task. He was silent for several seconds. He did not write anything. He looked at the sheet and the window. The interviewer insisted several times and suspended the recording to encourage the child to write. Alejandro mentioned he could not write, because he did not know the letters and so he would not do it. However, the interviewer insisted him. After several minutes, Alejandro took the pencil and started to write.

Alejandro wrote every word for 1 or 2 min. He required more seconds or minutes sometimes. He looked at the sheet and his around. He was in silence and looking at the sheet other times. We identified that he needs time to write. This shows that he feels insecure and does not know something for writing. He feels insecure because he was afraid of being wrong and that he was punished by the interviewer for it. It may be that in class he is penalized when he makes a mistake. There is ignorance because he does not know some letters, and he has a low repertoire of the writing system. Thus, Alejandro needs to think about writing and look for representing it. Therefore, this is why the child needs more time to write.

We identified that the child does not establish a phoneme-grapheme relationship. He only shows with his finger from left to right when he read every word. He does not establish a relationship with the letters he used. In each word, there is no correspondence with the number of letters. The child also does not establish a constant because there is variation in number and variety of letters sometimes.

inpnAS gato (cat)
rFnIi mariposa
ONan (butterfly)
caballo (horse)
ETAE perro (dog)
EBBILN pez (fish)
B B D FPI El gato bebe leche
(The cat drinks milk)

Figure 5.
List of words written by Alejandro.

Alejandro used letters unrelated to the conventional writing of the words. For example, when he wrote GATO (cat), Alejandro used the following letters: inpnAS. It is possible to identify that no letter corresponds to the word. Perhaps, Alejandro wrote those letters because they are recognized or remembered by him.

Alejandro shows a limited repertoire of conventional letters. This is observed when he uses four vowels: A, E, I, O. The child used these vowels less frequently. There is one vowel in every word at least. When Alejandro wrote PEZ (fish), he used two vowels. We observed that he writes these vowels at the beginning or end of the word. However, we do not know why he places them that way. Maybe this is a differentiating principle by him.

There is qualitative and quantitative differentiation in Alejandro's writing. That is, he did not write any words in the same way. All the words written by him are different. Every word has different number and variety of letters. When two words contain the same number of letter, they contain different letters.

When Alejandro wrote MARIPOSA (butterfly), he used five letters. The number of letters is less than what he used for GATO (cat). Maybe he wrote that because the interviewer said "butterfly is a small animal." This is because the cat is bigger than the butterfly. Therefore, it may be possible that he used lesser letters for butterfly.

In Spanish, PERRO (dog) contains five letters. Alejandro wrote five letters. In this case, Alejandro's writing corresponds to the necessary number of letters. However, it seems that there is no writing rules for him. This is for two reasons: first, because there is no correspondence with the animal size. Horse is larger than dog and Alejandro required lesser letters for horse than for dog. Second, CABALLO (horse) is composed by three syllables and PERRO (dog) by two. Alejandro used more letters to represent two syllables. In addition, it is observed that there is a pseudo-letter. It looks like an inverted F, as well as D and B, horizontally.

When Alejandro wrote PEZ (fish), the interviewer first asked how many letters he needed to write that word. The child did not answer. Interviewer asked for this again and student said that he did not know. Then, interviewer said to write PEZ (fish). For several minutes, Alejandro just looked the sheet and did not say anything. The interviewer questioned several times, but he did not answer. After

several minutes, Alejandro wrote: E. The interviewer asked the child if he has finished. He denied with his head. After 1 min, he started to write. We observed that his writing contains six letters. Capital letters are predominated.

Alejandro used inverted letters in three words. They may be considered as pseudo-letters. However, if we observe carefully they are similar to conventional letters. The child has written them in different positions: inverted.

Maybe there is a writing rule by Alejandro. His words have a minimum of four letters and a maximum of six letters. This rule has been established by him. There is no relation to the length of orality or the object it represents.

We can identify that Alejandro shows a primitive writing [4]. He is still in writing system learning process. The phoneticization process is not present yet. The child has not achieved this level yet. He only uses letters without a conventional sound value. There is no correspondence to phoneme-grapheme, and he uses pseudo-letters sometimes.

6.3 To write for image

Write for image allows us to know what happens when the child writes something in front of an image [12]. It is identified if there is the same rules used by the child, number of letters, or if there is any change when he writes a new word. It may happen that the length of the words is related to the size of the image or the number of objects presented. In this way, we can identify the child's knowledge and difficulties when he writes some words.

6.3.1 The image size variable

The first task is about observing how the child writes when he is in front of two different sized images. That is, we want to identify if the image size influences on his writings. Therefore, two pairs of cards were presented to Alejandro. Every pair of cards contained two animals, one small and one large. The interviewer asked Alejandro to write the name on each one (**Figure 6**).

Based on the writing produced by Alejandro, we mentioned the following:

Alejandro delimits his space to write. When he wrote for first pair of words, the child drew a wide rectangle and he made an oval and several squares for the second pair of words. The child wrote some letters to fill those drawn spaces. It seems that Alejandro's rule is to fill the space and not only represent the word.

When Alejandro writes the words, we identified that he presents difficulty in the conventional directionality of writing. He wrote most of words from left to right (conventional directionality), but he wrote some words from right to left (non conventional). For example, the child started to write the second word on the left.

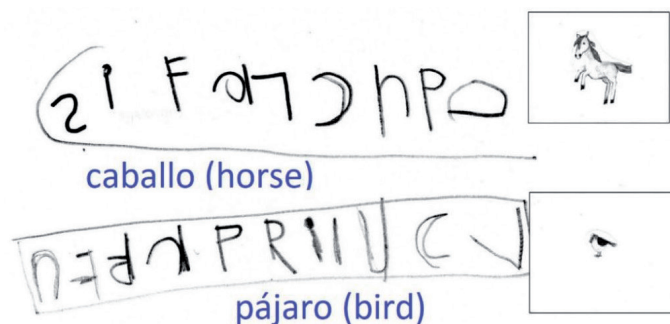


Figure 6.
Horse and bird writing.

He wrote seven letters. He looked at the sheet for some seconds. After, he continued to write other letters on the right. He wrote and completed the space he had left, from right to left.

Alejandro shows two ways to write: left–right (conventional) and right–left (no conventional). When he wrote the last word, the child wrote one letter under another. There was no limited space on the sheet. Alejandro wrote it there. The child has not learned the writing directionality.

When we compared Alejandro’s writings, we identified that the number of letters used by him does not correspond to the image size. Although the images were present and he looked them when he wrote, the child took into account other rules to write. The six names of animals had three syllables in Spanish and Alejandro used nine letters for CABALLO (horse) and eleven for PÁJARO (bird). The letters used by him are similar to the conventional ones. However, these are in different positions. There are no phonetic correspondences with the words. The child shows a primitive writing. Alejandro has not started the level of relation between phoneme and grapheme yet. We can believe that the boy wrote some letters to cover the space on the sheet. Alejandro takes into account the card size instead of the image size.

After writing a list of words, the interviewer asked Alejandro to read and point out every word he wrote. The purpose of this task is to observe how the child relates his writing to the sound length of the word. When Alejandro read CABALLO (horse), he pointed out as follows (**Figure 7**).

Alejandro reads every word and points out what he reads. In this way, he justifies what he has written. In the previous example, Alejandro reads the first syllable and points out the first letter, second syllable with the second letter. At this moment, he gets in conflict when he tries to read the third syllable. It would correspond to the third letter. However, “there are more letters than he needs.” When he reads the word, he shows the beginning of phoneticization: relation between one syllable with one letter. This is the syllabic writing principle [4]. Nevertheless, he has written more letters. Therefore, Alejandro says “o” in the other letters. In this way, we can point out that Alejandro justifies every letters and there is a correspondence between what he reads and what he writes.

When Alejandro reads the second word, the child pointed out as follows (**Figure 8**).

Alejandro makes a different correspondence syllable-letter than the first word. Although his writing was in two ways, his reading is only one direction: from left to right. The first syllable is related to first three letters he wrote. The second syllable is related to the fourth letter. But, he faces the same problem as in the previous word: “there are many letters.” So he justifies the other letters as follows. He reads the third syllable in relation to the sixth and seventh letter. And, reads “o” for the other letters.

When interviewer showed the next pair of cards, Alejandro wrote as following (**Figure 9**).

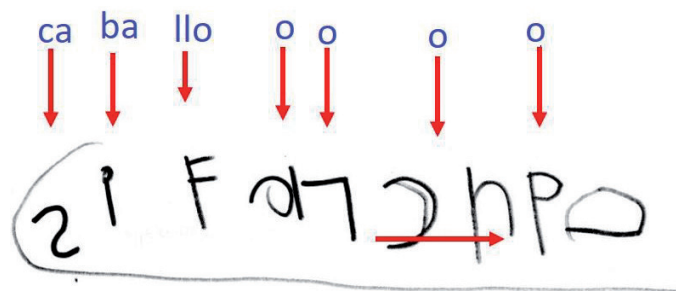


Figure 7.
Alejandro reads “caballo” (horse).

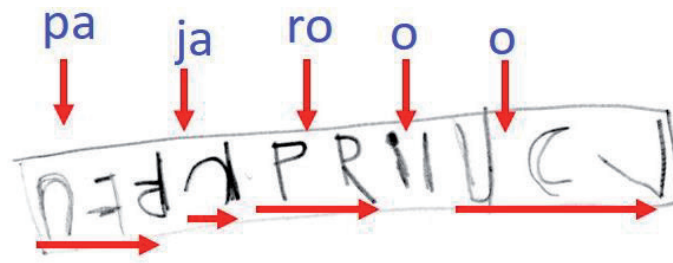


Figure 8.
Alejandro reads "pájaro" (bird).

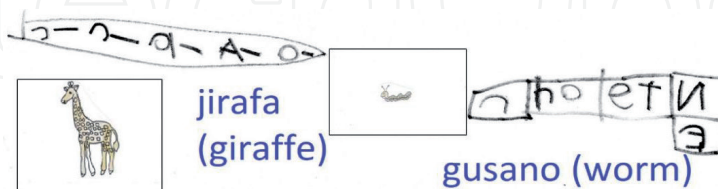


Figure 9.
Giraffe and worm writing by Alejandro.

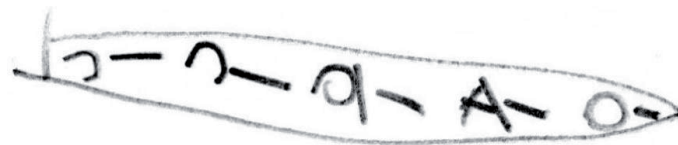


Figure 10.
Giraffe writing.

When the interviewer shows the pair of cards to Alejandro, the child said "It's a zebra." So, the interviewer said "It's a giraffe and it's a worm" and pointed out every card. The interviewer asked Alejandro to write the name of every animal. First, the child draws a rectangle across the width of the sheet. Next, he started to write on the left side inside the rectangle. He said the first syllable "JI" while writing the first letter. After, he said "ra," he wrote a hyphen. Then, he said "e" and wrote another letter. At that moment, he looked at the sheet and filled the space he left with some letters (**Figure 10**).

Alejandro shows different rules of writing. These rules are not the same as previous. He delimited the space to write and filled the space with some letters. The child tries to relate the syllable with one letter, but he writes others. There is a limited repertoire of letters too. In this case, it seems that he used the same letters: C capital and lower letter, A capital and lower letter, and O. We believe that he uses hyphens to separate every letter. However, when he wrote the first hyphen, it reads the second syllable. We do not know why he reads there. Alejandro had tried to use conventional letters. He uses signs without sound value. In addition, there is no relation phoneme and grapheme.

When Alejandro wrote GUSANO (worm), he drew a rectangle and divided it into three small squares. Then, he drew other squares below the previous ones. After, he began to write some letters inside the squares, as seen in the following picture (**Figure 11**).

Alejandro used other rules to write. They are different than the previous. Alejandro has written one or two letters into every box. At the end, he writes some letters under the last box. There is no correspondence between what he reads and writes. There are also no fixed rules of writing for him. Rather, it is intuited that he draws the boxes to delimit his space to write.

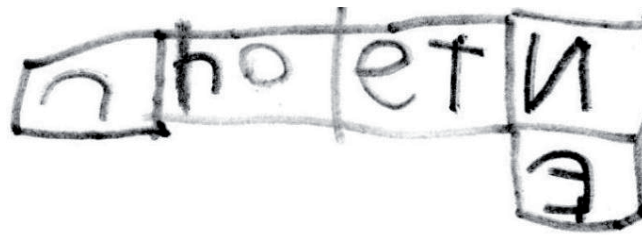


Figure 11.
Worm writing.

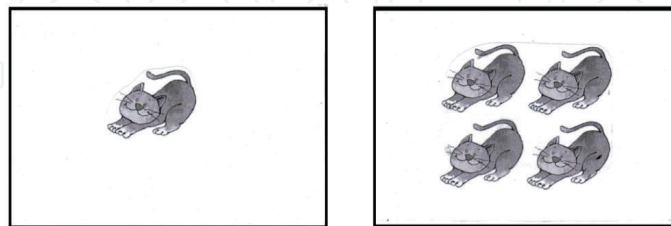


Figure 12.
Cards with one cat and four cats.



Figure 13.
Alejandro writes GATO (cat).

6.3.2 Singular and plural writing

The next task consists to write singular and plural. For this, the interviewer showed Alejandro the following images (**Figure 12**).

Alejandro drew an oval for first card. This oval is on the left half of the sheet. He wrote the following (**Figure 13**).

Next, the interviewer asked Alejandro to write for the second card, in plural. For this, Alejandro draws another oval from the middle of the sheet, on the right side. The child did not do anything for 1 h 30 min. After this time, he wrote some different letters inside the oval (**Figure 14**). He wrote from right to left (unconventional direction).

Alejandro wrote in the opposite conventional direction: from right to left. He tried to cover the delimited space by him. His letters are similar to the conventional ones. Also, there are differences between the first and the second word. He used lesser letters for first word than the second. That is, there are lesser letters for singular and more letters for plural. Perhaps, the child took into account the number of objects in the card.

The writing directionality may have been influenced by the image of the animals: cats look at the left side. Alejandro could have thought he was going to write from right to left, as well as images of the cards. Therefore, it is necessary to research how he writes when objects look at the right side. In this way, we can know if this influences the directionality of Alejandro's writing.

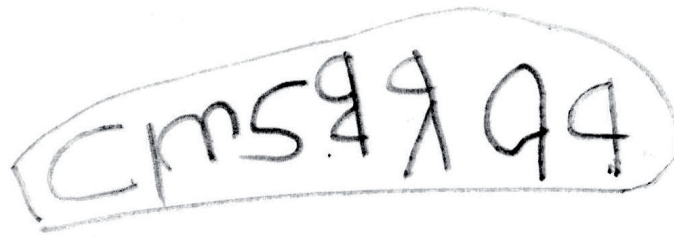


Figure 14.
Alejandro writes GATOS (cats).

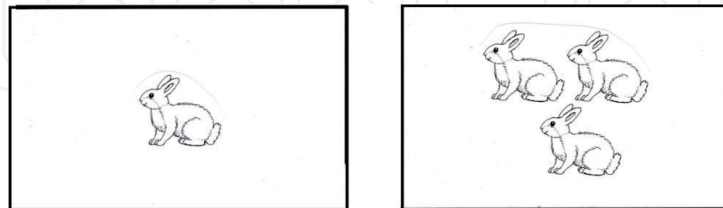


Figure 15.
Cards with one rabbit and three rabbits.

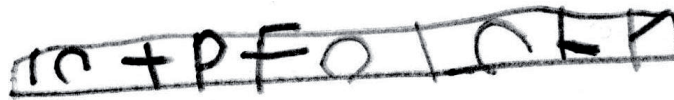


Figure 16.
Alejandro writes CONEJO (rabbit).



Figure 17.
Alejandro writes CONEJOS (rabbits).

With the next pair of images (**Figure 15**), the interviewer asked Alejandro to write CONEJO (rabbit) and CONEJOS (rabbits).

Alejandro draws a rectangle in the middle of the sheet for the first card (rabbit). He said “cone” (rab-) and wrote the first letter on the left of the sheet. Then, he said “jo” (bit) and wrote the second letter. He said “jo” again and wrote the third letter. He was thoughtful for some seconds. He started to write other letters. His writing is as follows (**Figure 16**).

At the beginning, Alejandro tries to relate the syllables of the word with first two letters. However, he justifies the other letters when he read the word. There is no exact correspondence between the syllable and the letter. As well as his writing is to fill the space he delimited.

Alejandro takes into account other rules for plural writing. He drew a rectangle across the width of the sheet. Starting on the left, he said “CO” and wrote one letter. Then, he said “NE” and drew a vertical line. After, he said “JO” and wrote other letters. His writing is as follows (**Figure 17**).

Alejandro writes both words differently. He reads CONEJO (rabbit) for first word and CONEJOS (rabbits) for the second. Both words are different from each other. But, he wrote them with different rules. This is confusing for us because there

are vertical lines between every two letters in the second word. We believe that the child tried to represent every object, although he did not explain it.

In summary, Alejandro shows different writings. He used pseudo-letters and conventional letter. These letters are in unconventional positions. There is no relationship between grapheme and phoneme yet; and, he uses different writing rules.

7. Conclusions

We described Alejandro's writing process. According to this description, we can note the following:

Alejandro is a student of an elementary regular school. He presents learning difficulties. He could not write "correctly." However, he did not have a full assessment by specialized teachers. His school is so far from urban areas and his parents could not take him to a special institution. Therefore, he has not received special support. Also, there is not a favorable literacy environment in his home. His teacher teaches him like his classmates. Usually, he has been marginalized and stigmatized because "he does not know or work in class."

We focused on Alejandro because he was a child who was always distracted in class. We did not want to show his writing mistakes as negative aspects, but as part of his learning process. Errors are indicators of a process [5]. They inform the person's skills. They allow to identify the knowledge that is being used [13]. In this way, errors can be considered as elements with a didactic value.

Alejandro showed some knowledge and also some difficulties to write. The child identifies and distinguishes letters and numbers. We do not know if he conceptualizes their use in every one. When he wrote, he shows his knowledge: letters are for reading, because he did not use any number in the words.

The writing directionality is a difficulty for Alejandro. He writes from left to right and also from right to left. We do not know why he did that. We did not research his reasons. But, it is important to know if there are any factors that influence the child to write like this.

The student does not establish a phoneme-grapheme relationship yet. He is still in an initial level to writing acquisition. He uses conventional letters and pseudo-letters to write. There are no fixed rules to write: number and variety of letters. However, we observed student's thought about writing. He justifies his writings when he reads them and invents letters to represent some words.

There is still a limited repertoire of letters. He used a few letters of the alphabet. Therefore, Alejandro needs to interact with different texts, rather than teaching him letter by letter. Even if "he does not know those letters." In this way, he is going to appropriate other elements and resources of the writing system.

Time he takes to write is an important element for us. He refused to write for several minutes at the beginning. After, he wrote during 1 or 2 min every word. As we mentioned previously, we believe that Alejandro did not feel sure to do the task. Perhaps, he thought that the interviewer is going to penalize for his writing "incorrectly." He felt unable to write. Therefore, it is important that children's mistakes are not censored in the classroom. Mistakes let us to know the child's knowledge and their learning needs.

We considered that class work was not favorable for Alejandro. He painted letters, drawings, among others. These were to keep him busy. Therefore, it is important for the child to participate in reading and writing practices. In this way, he can be integrated into the scholar activities and is not segregated by his classmates.

About children with learning difficulties, it is important that these children write as they believe. Do not censor their writings. They are not considered as

people incapable. It is necessary to consider that learning is a slow process. Those children will require more time than their classmates.

Special education plays an important role in Mexico. However, rather than attending to the student with learning difficulties in isolation, it is necessary that the teacher should be provided with information and the presence of specialized teachers in the classroom. In this way, the student with learning difficulties can be integrated into class, scholar activities, and reading and writing practices.

We presented Alejandro's writing process in this paper. Although he was considered as a child with learning difficulties, we identified he shows some difficulties, but he knows some elements of the writing system too.

Acknowledgements

I thank Alejandro, his parents, and his teacher for the information they provided to me about him.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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