

QUALITY

QUALITATIVE STUDY
of schools
with outstanding
results in seven
latin american countries

LLECE
LATIN AMERICAN
LABORATORY
FOR ASSESSMENT
OF THE QUALITY
OF EDUCATION



LLECE

Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education

Qualitative study of schools with
outstanding results in
seven Latin American countries

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I. Introduction

This study is among the assessment activities that have been carried out by the UNESCO, Santiago Latin American Laboratory for the Assessment of Quality of Education since its creation in 1997. It based upon the First International Comparative Study of Students in the Third and Fourth Grades of Primary Education^{1, 2, 3}. The present report treats factors associated with academic outcomes for some schools within a sample of seven (7) of the thirteen (13) Latin American countries the participated in the First Study. The schools included in this investigation were those

¹ Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education. *First Report of the International Comparative Study of Language, Mathematics, and Associated Factors in the Third and Fourth Grades*". Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean. UNESCO-Santiago. Santiago, Chile, November, 1998.

² Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education. *Second Report of the First International Comparative Study of Language, Mathematics, and Associated Factors in the Third and Fourth Grades of Primary Education*" Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean. UNESCO-Santiago. Santiago, Chile, October, 2000.

³ Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education. *Technical Report of the First International Comparative Study of Language, Mathematics, and Associated Factors in the Third and Fourth Grades of Primary Education*" Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean. UNESCO-Santiago. Santiago, Chile, April, 2001.

which, having students whose parents have low levels of education, nevertheless obtained test outcomes higher than expected for this variable.

The First International Comparative Study carried out by the Laboratory was quantitative in nature. It was based upon the analysis of statistical samples in order to determine school achievement in language and in mathematics for students in the third and fourth years of primary education. Information on achievement was obtained through the application of standardized tests in both subjects, accompanied by questionnaires that collected information on students, parents or guardians, teachers, school principals, and the schools themselves. Data underwent statistical analysis, and the results made it possible to identify academic achievement levels, desegregated by country and strata (large cities, urban, rural, public schools, private schools).

In order to identify factors associated with school achievement, the outcomes of the tests were analysed in terms of context and input variables provided by the questionnaires. With this information in hand, it was possible to identify schools that may be considered *outstanding* in their academic performance.

For the purposes of this study, we consider *outstanding schools* to be those whose students demonstrated achievement in mathematics above that which would be expected, given the educational level of their parents. The characteristic presented by these schools may be associated with the search for the answer to the following major question: What factors cause schools to rank high in the achievement of their students in spite of adverse conditions they face?

Along with the results obtained through utilisation of quantitative techniques is the following question: is it possible to identify the causes that are behind these results? It has often been noted that such techniques, although they allow us to measure and to work with factors associated with outcomes, do not allow us to precisely identify their meanings. Therefore, many prefer to work with qualitative techniques which are able to reach a “deeper” level of analysis than that provided by quantitative methods.

It is not our purpose here to discuss quantitative vs. qualitative techniques. Nor do we wish to engage in an epistemological debate regarding what can and cannot be done using one a particular theoretical-methodological perspective. Currently, science has successfully adopted a perspective which assumes that there are social dimensions that can be considered quantitatively, and others in which it is more effective to use qualitative techniques.

It is within this context, and in order to broaden the information obtained in the First Comparative International Study, that the current study was carried out. Using a qualitative perspective, we have looked carefully at factors that influence student achievement.

The analyses and results presented are not statistically representative. Therefore, inferences cannot be made to other cases outside those that constitute the base of the present study. In any case, such is not the purpose of qualitative studies. Rather than being representative, their advantage is in permitting studying cases in

depth. The conclusions of qualitative studies, even without providing a model for other cases, provide food for thought in considering prior research, for comparatively analyzing conclusions and for assessing the extent to which they may correspond to other schools. On the other hand, the design upon which the study is based, by generating explanatory models with emphasis on qualitative aspects and on the interrelationships between actors in the cases of schools that showed positive results, offers critical information on the learning environments that schools provide.

With this in mind, and considering the opportunities and limitations cited above, this information is useful for the formulation of policies that seek quality and equity in learning. With this knowledge, education managers can arm themselves with information to formulate policies or strategies that can lead to improvements in student achievement.

Through this report, once again the Laboratory, both through its coordinators at UNESCO, Santiago, as well as its National Coordinators in sixteen (16) countries in the region, offers significant and timely data on the subject of equity and quality in education in our schools. It thus continues its task of providing valuable analyses and conclusions to information about the quality of education in Latin America.

We wish to recognise the financial contribution of the Ford Foundation, which made it possible to support the work of research teams in each of the countries involved. Thanks also to the Government of Spain for its help in publishing this study.

II. Summary of Findings

School-level management

1. In regard to processes that contribute to building a positive learning environment within schools, national reports emphasise the increasingly active and key role of students themselves, the presence of parents as significant actors within the school system, and learning processes that stress teamwork between teachers and school principals, and resulting in relationships that are much less hierarchical than in the past.
Personalized support, the search for ways to encourage the individual development of each student, appears to be of utmost importance, especially in the minds of teachers. Students begin to appear as individuals, which leads to the individual being considered to be more important than the group.
The schools studied here have sought and found paths leading to innovation. They therefore are open to new programs, whether received from the central level, or those which the school community itself develops through its own initiative.
2. In regard to the organisational climate of these schools, they tend to be open to change. Interviews with school personnel reveal organisational structures that embrace all or most of the actors within the education system, structures within which the opinions and acts of teachers, principals, students, and parents are important.

In this new type of school organisation, which appears to be in transition toward a non-authoritarian model, parents and students are perhaps the new actors, especially parents. But at the same time, the organisational spirit that definitely characterizes schools whose students had outstanding test results contains a new kind of relationship established between teachers and students. This new kind of relationship is characterised by actions carried out in a non-authoritarian, emotionally positive spirit. Organisational stability is sought and achieved, expressed, for example, by lower teacher turn-over within the school. A harmonious climate between students tends to characterize these schools as well. Norms are sought that regulate student socialization and school work. These are not chaotic schools, in which rules are imposed from above, and which have no application in practice. In them, rules acquire new perspectives, seeking not to punish, but rather to instruct and to build. All of this leads to the creation of a pleasant working environment.

Schools with outstanding results offer opportunities for initiative of those who work and study therein. This includes exercising organisational control. They are institutions that have innovative capability in organising extra-curricular activities.

3. The way of doing things in the school is characterised by respect, by cordiality, and frequently by demonstrations of affection. Together with the commitment and pleasantness of those involved, an organisational ambience is created in which one can identify a collective spirit in which each member feels to be a member of the group. This, which by itself is desirable, is clearly not present in other types of schools, in which teacher absenteeism, student drop-out, and conflict impair the creation of this collective spirit.
4. The management and distribution of material, human, and financial resources is characterised by stability. This is manifested particularly in stability of tenure of principals and teachers. Furthermore, these are schools that have a satisfactory teacher/student ratio.

The schools studied do not possess a great number of teaching materials. But what they do have seems to be used efficiently. In most of the schools, resources to develop classroom activities are provided by both government and parents. The latter have acquired an increasingly important role over time.

5. The characteristics of those directing these schools, in terms of their leadership abilities, relations with faculty, and with authorities outside the school tend toward sharing responsibilities, both in administrative and academic management. The efficiency of the organisation, and of the actors within the system in general, seems to increase when principals dedicate time to analysis and to collective reflection. Personal leadership exists within the schools, but increasingly this is less centralized –in terms of a person with whom all decisions lie– becoming a leadership that guides the organisational process.

In any case, leadership is not concentrated only in the figure of the principal. We may note that teachers, especially in more isolated communities, acquire a very important leadership role, a phenomena that is a result of other cases of depersonalization of leadership.

6. School norms: the organisational environment of a school has a normative aspect. Norms frequently are expressed in formal documents.
7. Models of academic decision-making and relevant levels of decision-making that exist within outstanding schools are markedly characterised by the fact that they bring a greater number of individuals into the education system. These are not group decisions; rather a structure is created whereby decisions are discussed by different groups of people. This increases the rationality of and adhesion to decisions.
8. Organisational culture: in terms of the forms of utilisation of teaching materials and of school equipment in general, one may state that this is based on a teaching philosophy and on a positive inter-relation between those involved in education.

Of particular interest in terms of impact and innovation is the case of those schools that have a vision of a new role for students, with an emphasis on their participation.

The organisational culture of these schools is also characterised by the constant and innovative search for resources. Of particular interest is how plans, perspectives, resources, and inter-action between those involved are integrated organisationally in a harmonious manner.

Classroom teaching practice

9. The repertory of strategies and action principles utilised by teachers to foster student learning of specific curricular content in these kind of schools is an area in which they particularly stand out. For example, in the efficient use of classroom space and learning time by both students and teachers, and where the ability exists to use a variety of teaching resources within the classroom.

Routines and activities are created that go beyond the regular school hour. Not in terms of homework, but rather of activities integrated into every-day life in which school, community, and home are linked into a continuous flow.

Transformation of the classroom into a group activity of analysis and joint thought in which teachers motivate, coordinate, and direct, but are not the only active force, is key for the success of these schools.

Few if any of schools commit the traditional error of believing that the teacher is the fountain of all knowledge, who cannot and never does commit an error. This subject is covered in a number of personal testimonies, showing how mistakes can become educational opportunities.

In many interviews, play is mentioned as an effective educational alternatives. Play has not traditionally been considered to be a school activity, but rather has been relegated to the pre-school or primary school context. This study argues for a re-definition of play within the school context.

Successful teaching strategies require confidence between participants. Transforming the school into a place that is pleasant for students is also a central element in a strategy of success.

Within the same perspective, we emphasise the importance of tailoring programs to the demands of reality. We find extremely innovative contributions, that show how attention to reality and the use of its elements makes it possible to develop very useful teaching perspectives.

The importance of planning is emphasised as a central element within the repertory of teaching strategies developed by these schools with outstanding results. Similarly, the importance of daily routine, in which a class takes up a pace resulting from the conjunction of students, teacher, and the teaching activity, acts as a factor to help combat chaotic situations.

The situations diagnosed through interviews and observation show us that not everything is positive in these schools. Problems occur, but within a manageable context.

Pleasure in reading and its emphasis by teachers seems to be a central element in teaching strategies developed in this type of school.

Finally, student homework does not always appear to be among the teaching strategies of these schools. Rather, there is a tendency to develop intense classroom activities so that children continue this process outside the classroom, but not as an “assignment”.

10. In general, and as we stated above, most of these schools are characterised by the efficient administration of classroom resources.

Classroom space is used in a number of ways. In some cases, work tables are distributed in a group style. In others, the lecture seating pattern is preferred. This does not appear to be a determinant or significant element in academic outcomes.

As for pedagogical perspective, we may say that the broad set of principles of action, attitudes, expectations, ideals, convictions, and pedagogical principles are not marked by any particular perspective. The perspective most mentioned, and which seems to prevail in most of the schools studied, is that which establishes a special relationship with students, in which there is affection, respect, and confidence.

Some texts point toward an innovative perspective looking at the characteristics of teachers: those who express themselves in a clear manner, guide students toward objectives, possess mastery of their subjects, plan their work, and support students with difficulties.

As opposed to the traditional explanatory method, see heuristic, constructive dialogue in which the teacher is an advisor, not someone who possesses the knowledge. He or she is rather a guide on the road to knowledge.

The new computer technologies may be considered to be an innovative teaching approach as well. These necessarily introduce new theoretical/pedagogical elements, as well as those that are strictly technological.

However, we clearly see in these schools a teaching approach in which particular pedagogical perspectives are not clearly defined. In many cases, there seems to be an attempt to not create hierarchies, to not classify students, which undoubtedly places into question traditional forms of assessment.

One may say that the processes of change of perspective in the schools studied are centered on lack of the use of authoritarian teaching methods and authoritarian relations with students.

11. We see in the written comments a high level of commitment and vocation of teachers. Their work is gratifying, resulting in their establishing a relationship of affection with students and taking pleasure in their own work. This high level of commitment allows them to face sacrifices demanded of them by their professional activities.

The opposite of a committed teacher is a teacher who works as a means to survive. This situation does not appear to often be the case in schools with outstanding results.

The professional commitment of teachers leads them not only to want to do a good job, but also becomes intertwined with the expectations they have of their students. It is not so much the case of obtaining good student performance as it is to positively and wholly influence their students.

Teachers in these schools are innovators. They are open to new ideas, are constantly searching for new methods in order to achieve the comprehensive education of their students. A characteristic of the teacher who is committed and has a vocation for teaching is permanence through time. They tend to arrive at a school and stay there for many years.

13. Teacher expectation of their students in these schools may be described in the following terms: that students learn; that they have a high grade advancement rate; that they develop in a comprehensive manner; that they are prepared for the environment in which they live, thus avoiding displacement to other areas; that they are successful, are happy, and respect those who have problems; that they participate actively and develop social skills.
14. Material resources for classrooms: There are great differences in terms of the use of classroom materials. In schools with outstanding results there is an efficient use of resources. In most schools, resources to develop classroom activities come from both the State and from parents, with the latter having an increasingly important role.

15. According to the findings of the study, schools with outstanding results are characterised by a positive school climate, which is above all harmonious, by the physical presence of the actors of the educational system and by the establishment of intense and positive inter-relations among them. Kindness appears as a recurrent theme, being characteristic of the climate of these establishments, with non-authoritarian relationships between students and teachers. Thus, students feel good about being in school, are treated with kindness and like to go to class.
16. Extra-curricular activities. Schools with outstanding results dedicate a significant amount of attention to extra-curricular activities.
17. As for the relationship between schools and families, schools with outstanding results establish intense and permanent relations with the families of students. The consensus between parents and students is that strong school-family ties are necessary if good student results are desired. Parents of students in these schools in general have a much more participatory attitude in terms of school management and school processes, not limiting themselves to be invited once in a while to the school. Their participation appears to be structured on different levels: a) a less important, but perhaps more frequent level is that of attending certain special events at the school, b) they organise themselves to help the school financially, c) they are part of some form of school management, especially in administrative matters, and d) they are involved in classroom activities. As for who in the family maintains ties with the school, it was found that it is generally the mother who occupies this role.
18. The theme of interaction between school and community is very evident in some of the texts studied, appearing to be one of the identifying characteristics of schools with outstanding results. The establishment of these kinds of relations not only has positive effects for the school; the community is effected as well. Schools that function well, that have good student performance function as well as an important social and cultural resource for the community.
19. Heterogeneity of schools with outstanding results. What stands out strongly in the texts analysed is that there is no common pattern in terms of these schools. They may be large, medium, or small; urban or rural; private or government-supported; lay or religious.
20. In terms of links with the central administrative level, it should be noted that these schools base a good part of their success very autonomous operation, taking advantage of trends at the central level to move toward increasingly more decentralized administrative and pedagogical models.

III. The research problem

The focus of this study was on factors associated with the results of a mathematics test in some of the schools that were part of the samples used in the First International Comparative Study.

This study was carried out through qualitative research into the processes and that take place within the classrooms of schools considered to be “schools with outstanding results”. That is to say, where the students who have parents with a low level of education performed above expectations in the mathematics test.

Research questions

The following questions guided the research:

1. What factors considered as permanent or indeterminate inherent to the schools in general are those that exercised the greatest influence on the test results? (see in regard to statements on the perspective on efficacious schools, among

- others, Newman et al 1996; Owens & Wang, 1996; Arancibia et al, 1994; Jimenez & Lockheed, 1993; Bullard & Taylor 1993; Joyce et al, 1983)⁴.
2. What school-related factors in particular are at the base of these results? In other words, is there something specific in each case that explains the results?
 3. How do contextual factors perform comparatively in these schools? Do they maintain the level of significance assigned to them by the specialized literature?
 4. What specific changes occur in these schools at the classroom level that can help us in understanding the occurrence of these test results?
 5. What special characteristics do education system actors (principals, teachers, students) have that can be associated with academic results in the schools?
 6. To what extent are in-school processes a result in their effects, of interactions with the environment?

Themes of the Qualitative Study

Any attempt to carry out a qualitative study of a social situation means that the researcher become involved in the day-to-day structure of the situation being studied. It is for this reason that the study was begun with a observational strategy which resulted in a set of interviews and ended by using focus groups.

The observer must in some manner organise the complex reality to be studied. Experienced qualitative researchers use the so-called “sensitivity concepts” (Patton, 1984)⁵ in order to help guide research in the field.

This does not, however, constitute a theoretical framework that guides the research. Within the logic of qualitative research, there are no previous theories, nor hypotheses, nor variables. All of these are dimensions that emerge from the data.

For this reason, the concepts of sensitivity are guides that offer a basis to emphasise initially the importance of certain events, activities, and conduct. Thus,

⁴ Newman F (ed.) “Authentic achievement: restructuring schools for intellectual quality” Jossey_Bass Educational Series, 1996

Owens Th. & Wang, Ch., “Community-Based Learning: A Foundation for Meaningful Educational Reform” Northwest Regional Educational Community, Portland, 1996

Bullard, Pamela & Taylor, Barbara “Making School Reform Happen”, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1993.

Joyce, B., Hersch, R., McKibbin, M. “The Structure of School Improvement” New York: Longman, 1983

Arancibia C., Violeta; Alvarez H., María Inés (1994) “Características de los profesores efectivos en Chile y su impacto en el rendimiento escolar y autoconcepto académico”.. En: Psykhe. Santiago, 1994, Vol. 3, N° 2, pp. 131-143

Jimenez, E & Lockheed, M (1993) “School choice overseas: why are private schools often more effective?” Lilly Symposium on School Choice and Family Policy, Cambridge.

⁵ M. Quinn Patton (1984) “Qualitative evaluation and research methods” SAGE.

for this study, a list of sensitivity concepts was prepared which, as the research progressed, could vary significantly.

The concepts of sensitivity upon which observation, in-depth interviews, and focal groups should be centered, concentrate around the theme of *management at the school level* and *teaching practice at the classroom level*.

These are very broad dimensions that would have been difficult to employ using only one of the techniques, considering as well the limited period of observation. Thus we see the importance of using a methodological strategy that combines different data collection techniques, and to have various case studies, allowing us to compensate for the time limitation problem.

The sensitizing concepts used within the area of **school level-management** are the following:

- *Processes related to building a learning environment within the school*, considered as an organisation the objective of which is to foster student development.
- *The organisation of the school*, with its actors (principals, teachers, students), norms and school decision-making levels.
- *The particular way of doing things in the school*, its identity as a unit, the way that it is able to structure the learning environment.
- *Administration and distribution of material, human, and financial resources*, the origin of these resources, their utilisation and their quantity.
- *Characteristics of principals*, leadership skills, relations with the school faculty, and with authorities outside of the school.
- *Norms of the school* as an organisation, school rules and their interpretation by the school community, particularly by those charged with school management.
- *Academic decision-making models and relevant instances of decision-making*; that is, where decisions are taken regarding the academic life of the school.
- *Organisational culture*, in terms of the utilisation of teaching materials and of school equipment. Particular emphasis placed on relevant curricular learning, ethical programs, and extracurricular activities. Thus, analysis of the role and importance that administrative tasks have on day-to-day work by persons responsible for management, and how this exercises an influence on the general academic life of the school.

In order to analyze **teaching practices at the classroom level**, the following sensitizing concepts were defined:

- *Repertory of strategies and action principles utilised by teachers* in order to foster the learning of particular curricular content by their students within the classroom environment.

- *Management of classroom resources, of the curriculum, and of assigned time.* Class organisation and distribution, focus of the curriculum, type of school day, physical condition of the classroom, and number of students per teacher.
- *Pedagogical perspective:* the set of action principles, attitudes, expectations, ideals, convictions, pedagogical principles, publicly defended by teachers, both individually and as a group within the school.
- *Level of professional commitment of teachers,* including attribution of the core meaning of their daily activity, level of knowledge, and commitment to the life situation of their students.
- *Teacher expectations of their students,* with notions concerning performance ability, dispositions, attitudes, and the possibilities of student development.
- *Material resources for classroom activities.* Teaching, bibliographic, and physical material of the school.

IV. Methodological Design of the Study

Considering the objective of the study, and the methodological focus of studying a set of schools in depth in order to be able to examine in more detail processes and factors related to academic outcomes, and keeping in mind the financial parameters established, it was decided to request research teams to work with the following qualitative techniques: observation, interviews, and focus groups.

Observation of schools and classrooms

Observation is the technique that is most frequently used to analyze the social life of human groups. It is frequently used when, for example, one wishes to emphasise the point of view of the actors regarding social reality.⁶ In effect, observation allows us to obtain information about a phenomenon or event as it is happening. In cases where one suspects a possible deviation that affects the data (as in this case involving studying outstanding results), it is preferable to use observation rather than other methods (Rodríguez Gomez et al, 1996:149).

⁶ Guasch, O (1997) "Observación participante". CIS, Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.

Operationally, there was an effort to convert the researchers that carried out this study in “natives” through immersion in the social reality they were investigating. In this research, the intention was to not invade the personal space of those observed. It was therefore essential to delimit the type of participation that the researcher would undertake in the observation field. We note here the concept of “observation field”, which is meant to be the social reality that one wishes to study through the presence of the researcher within different contexts or scenarios in order to attain understanding of the social phenomenon in question.

Utilising the nomenclature proposed by Rodríguez Gómez, et al (1996), in this study, observation is understood as the systematic procedure through which a specialist collects information related to a particular problem. Intervening in this process are the perceptions of the subject observed and the interpretations of the observer. Thus, we may represent observation using the following formula:

$O = P + I$	<i>In which O is that which is observed, P is the perceptual system of the observer, including his or her goals, biases, framework of reference, and aptitudes, and I represents the interpretation that the observer makes of that which is observed.</i>
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Observation is for us a deliberate and systematic process directed toward a question, assertion, or problem. This problem is what gives meaning to the observation *per se*. It is what determines aspects such as what to observe, who to observe, how to observe, when to observe, when to record observations, what observations to record, and even how the data originating from the observation shall be analysed.

A key concept here is that of *informants*. It is they who provide the cues that permit us to understand the meaning of the activities of those observed. Within the framework of this study, it is with the informants that bonds of confidence and cooperation must be developed. Informants (or interlocutors) act as guides who permit the researcher to move within an unknown social *milieu*. In this context, we should recall, as Guasch (1997:44) points out, that the social situation of one who observes (age, gender, social class, ethnicity) intervenes both in observation as well as in the posterior interpretation of the data.

If we include the concept of *field notes*, we may make use of the nomenclature of Schatzman & Strauss (1973)⁷, who note that field notes are defined as the strictly

⁷ Schatzman, L & Strauss, A (1973) “Field research. Strategies for a natural sociology” Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.

technical tasks linked to analysis and drafting or final summary. Within this context, the notes are not merely aids for the organised storage and retrieval of a growing mass of information that is impossible to memorize. They are rather a living record, based upon an inter-active conception of the stages of research. Field notes do not fulfill merely the function of collecting data; rather, they help to create and to analyze data, channeling and re-orienting research. Following the field notes model proposed by Schatzman & Strauss (1973), we have distinguished three types of notes in records of schools: i) observational notes; that is, statements regarding successes witnessed principally through visual and auditory observation, containing as little interpretation as possible. Each of these observations represents a success considered sufficiently important to be included in the record of experiences; ii) theoretical notes, representing intentional, controlled efforts to derive meanings through one or several observation notes; iii) methodological notes; or communications that reflect an operative act carried out or planned, an instruction in regard to observational tactics.

Individual focused interviews

Interviews are among the techniques used to reconstitute the reality of a group or social entity. In an interview, individuals are treated as sources of information about themselves, other people, the school, and the social processes inherent to it. We assume that the information that we seek to obtain in an interview has been experienced and absorbed by the interviewee, and that it is provided with a meaningful orientation and interpretation.

The subjectivity of the data generated by the interview is its major characteristic. It is an attempt, in any case, to interview a social being; that is, in the process of the interview, the individual will view himself or herself indirectly, in function of a generalized other, that is, from the perspective of the sets of points of view of other individuals who are members of the same group, or from the general point of view of the social group to which he or her belongs⁸. From this perspective, in this study, interviews have been a place in which a “me” is expressed that has little to do with a “me” as an objective, individual, and rational reality. Rather, it is a narrative “me”, one that tells a story, within which is included a sketch of the “me” as part of the story.

Theory teaches us that interviews vary greatly in nature – from their nomenclature (according to the degree of structuring), to the objectives that they seek to

⁸ Alonso, L E (1995) “Sujeto y discurso: el lugar de la entrevista abierta en las prácticas de la sociología cualitativa” En J. M. Delgado y J. Gutiérrez (eds) *Métodos y técnicas cualitativas de investigación en ciencias sociales*. Editorial Sanitises, Madrid.

fulfill. Without entering into the technical debate in this regard, in this study, use was made of the *focused interview* (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1990)⁹ which is distinguished from other kinds of interviews in that: i) interviewees have been exposed or are exposed to a concrete situation, ii) researchers have previously studied the situation, through content analysis and theory and hypothesis on the meaning and the effects of particular aspects of the situation, iii) the questionnaire has been developed through content analysis and from derived hypotheses, iv) the interview focuses on the subjective experiences of those exposed to the situation, in order to contrast hypotheses and to verify responses or non-anticipated effects.

According to Merton & Kendall (1946)¹⁰, the focused interview is based upon the following criteria: i) it is non-directional, with most of the responses being spontaneous or open rather than induced, therefore reducing induction to a minimum; ii) it is specific, focusing responses around concrete themes; iii) it is broad, entering into a wide variety of subject responses; iv) it is in-depth and within a personal context, seeking to reveal relevant personal context, idiosyncratic associations, beliefs, and ideas.

Focus groups

The utilisation of focus groups is proposed taking into consideration that qualitative data is enriched, or in some cases may only be obtained through group procedures. Especially, data concerning concerns and the opinions are enriched through group interaction, given that individual participation can be stimulated through the presence of a group¹¹. Thus, data that is collected using focus groups can be more informative than information collected using other methods. Basic for the proper functioning of this technique is the presence of a discussion guide or coordinator. With the appropriate coordinator, a group can offer detailed descriptions of complex experiences and of the reasoning behind their actions.

Focus groups are collective or group interviews. A discussion leader guides a group interview, during which a small group of people discusses the dimensions of the theme proposed for discussion. The pertinent data or information set obtained

⁹ Merton, R.K., Fiske, M., & Kendall, P.L., (1990) "The focused interview: a manual of problems and procedures", New York: Free Press.

¹⁰ Merton, R.K., & Kendall, P.L (1946) "The focused interview" *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 51, 541-547.

¹¹ Carey M A "The group effect in focus groups: planning, implementing ad interpreting focus groups research" En Morse J M (ed.) *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*" 1994, SAGE, California.

from a group discussion comes in part from the opinions that participants offer during discussions. A focus group is normally composed of from 6 to 8 people.

In this study, moderators were professionals trained in group discussion and dynamics. Interviews were carried out using a pre-determined set of discussion topics, generally following those specified in the introduction to the study as sensitizing themes.

Basically, focus groups may be seen as a way of listening to what people say and to learn through the analysis of what they have said. In this perspective, focus groups may be seen as creating lines of communication between specialists of the study and education actors, as well as between the actors themselves. The first of such lines of communication is established within the group itself, where there is a continuum of communication between the moderator and the participants and among the participants themselves. It is also important to take into consideration that the focus group is at a midpoint of a broader communication process in which members of the research team decide what they need to hear from the participants, in which the focus group creates a conversation between participants around these topics, and in which members of the research team synthesize what they have learned through what the participants have said. By means of this process, the research team has as a key motivation the desire to listen and to learn from the participants. This is in no case a passive process. As members of the research team, researchers have the responsibility to decide which topics they wish to listen to and upon which the discussion will be focused.

Validity of data provided by the proposed techniques

A common objection regarding data originating from qualitative studies has to do with its validity. That is, to what extent do the data correctly represent the social phenomenon to which they refer?¹² Hammersley (1992)¹³ suggests in this regard that qualitative research may speak of validity in its investigations through the adoption of what he terms a subtle form of realism composed of three elements: i) validity identified as confidence in our knowledge, but not necessarily including certainty, ii) reality assumed to be independent of what the investigator assumes it to be, and iii) reality, always viewed through particular perspectives. Therefore, our concepts, measurements, and observations represent reality, but do not reproduce it.

¹² Hammersley, M (1990) "Reading Ethnographic Research: A Critical Guide" London: Longmans

¹³ Hammersley, M (1992) "What's Wrong with Ethnography: Methodological Explorations" London, Routledge

Within this context, two forms of validation of qualitative data have been suggested¹⁴, at least the first of which has been widely used in this study: i) the comparison of different classes of data and of different methods in order to see their degree of corroboration. This is the so-called “triangulation” form, in which different angles or positions provided by different methods give us the correct position of an object; ii) refer the conclusions to the subjects being studied. Our degree of confidence in these conclusions is a measure of the extent to which the subjects verify them. This is called the “respondent validation” method.

¹⁴ Siverman D (1993) “Interpreting Qualitative Data. Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction” SAGE, London.

V. Samples of the study

The countries that participated in the study were Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, and Venezuela. It was coordinated from the UNESCO Regional Office of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean in Santiago. In each of the countries, with the support of the Ford Foundation, a research team was organised, responsible for applying the proposed techniques and for developing reports of the outcomes for each country. In the case of Chile and Venezuela, the research was carried out by teams outside the national assessment systems and with the support of the respective Ministries of Education. In the other five (5) countries, the research teams were made up of members of the national assessment systems.

Based upon data from the First International Comparative Study, the Quality Assessment Laboratory at UNESCO-Santiago indicated a number of “Schools with Outstanding Results”. Operationally, the choice of schools was made according to the following criterion: *those schools that present the greatest difference between the results of tests in mathematics and the educational level of parents. That is to say, we looked for schools in which students whose parents had a low level of education had, nevertheless, good test results in mathematics.* National teams also received from the coordinators in Santiago technical guidelines regarding the framework within which application of the research was to be carried out.

For each country, the UNESCO-Santiago Laboratory, based on the First International Comparative Study, suggested a number of schools. Therefore, this study was completed based upon the data and outcomes of qualitative research of the selected schools, and carried out in each country by the respective research team¹⁵.

Sample design

The sample utilised was intentional, rather than probabilistic. Each case represented a school with outstanding results in mathematics.

As we mentioned above, it is important to understand that, when we speak of a sample design of a qualitative study, sampling decisions do not follow statistical rules¹⁶. Qualitative studies focus on selection of a sample in terms of making possible the development of concepts intended to better understand the meaning of factors associated with student tests in mathematics. Within this perspective, the intention was therefore not to draw a representative sample of a particular number of cases necessary to fulfill the probabilistic demands of representativeness.

The sample design of a qualitative study turns out, in this case, to be a multiple-case design¹⁷, in which several unique cases are used in order to study a reality that one wants to examine, describe, and explain. Operationally, one should start from the theoretical framework and from the major research questions which are used for the selection of cases that are the object of the study.

It was first necessary to define the criteria used to categorize the study, made up of a series of units or sub-units. Three basic criteria were considered: country, positive outcome in mathematics, and low level of education of parents.

Granted, then that there was no attempt for statistical representativeness. It was decided to nominate 10 (ten) schools in each country. This number was determined basically budgetary reasons. The minimum number of schools used in each country, assuming this perspective of multiple cases, was 3 schools in one country (Argentina). The highest number of schools was 8 (in Chile).

The case studies that were carried out were not based, therefore, on probabilistic considerations, but on inductive reasoning in which generalizations, concepts, or hypotheses appear through careful examination of the data. We should emphasise here that the characteristic feature of the study is the discovery of new relations and concepts more than verification or proof of previously established hypotheses.

¹⁵ The country reports contain the information collected by researchers that carried out the studies. This information is available on the Llece web page.

¹⁶ See, for example, Valles, Miguel (1997) "Técnicas cualitativas de investigación social". Editorial Síntesis Sociología, Madrid.

¹⁷ Rodríguez G, Gil Flores, J & García Jimenez E (1996) "Metodología de la investigación cualitativa" Ediciones Aljibe, Málaga.

Since representativeness was not among the criteria used to select the cases, these were more idiosyncratic, in which the special and the subjective are key, with each case having its own distinctive character. For this reason, case selection was carried out based on suggestions from the Laboratory. But it was in each country, based upon the analysis of country data, that final case selection was made. In their turn, the research teams from each country had the option of either accepting the cases proposed or substituting others, explaining the reasons for selecting them.

Case selection was carried out using the following criteria:

1. Deliberate or intentional selection criterion: the schools to be included were selected deliberately among those offering the 3rd year of primary education, since this was the basic level for the First International Comparative Study.
2. Criterion for classification of outstanding performance: the schools nominated were in general those that showed achievement in mathematics above that expected in the standardized mathematics test in the First International Comparative Study of Language, Mathematics, and Associated Factors for Students in the Third and Fourth Grades of Primary School carried out by LLECE during 1997 and 1998.
3. Criterion of cases with good results, but within normal distributions: these were not “outlying” cases which are extreme but atypical. The idea was to analyze individual cases, but within the context of all schools. Atypical cases, usually called “outliers”, are cases that are outside of the distribution, and therefore without context value. Cases that have this value are extreme cases within the distribution (of outcomes for mathematics and language); that is, cases that fall between + -2 and + -3 standard deviations. In addition, this made it possible to work with normal curves per country and to define the extreme in relation to the country’s context.
4. Selection criteria for schools within countries: each country a list of proposed schools from the Laboratory, and ratified or substituted according to considerations set out and agreed upon by National Coordinators of the Laboratory and country research teams.
5. Beyond individual cases: the case studies were schools, understood as systemic units and analysed from a holistic perspective; i.e., individual cases were studied, but always keeping in mind the context within which they functioned, and that they were selected as part of a set of schools with which, to a greater or lesser extent, they shared significant characteristics.

Finally, we can say that using this design to select the cases to be studied allowed the proposed study to have implications for the analysis of policies to foster quality and equity. By generating explanations with emphasis on the qualitative study of processes and the interaction of actors in regard to the schools that showed positive results, allows us to provide critical information on the capacity of schools to become learning environments.

Samples and techniques by country

As mentioned above, the study took place out based on qualitative research of selected schools in seven (7) countries, carried out in each country by contracted research teams.

Therefore, and given the idiosyncratic nature of the research processes within countries, this report will respect the individuality with which the research was carried out by each one of the research teams.

With this in mind, we present here the data provided individually by each team. Only thus will it be possible to preserve the wealth of analysis of the descriptions and perceptions of those who were the objects of the study.

Sample of schools studied and techniques used in Argentina

The qualitative study in Argentina was carried out in three schools that are described below.

Public School Number 4332 “7 de Mayo” located in Salar de Pocitos, Department of Los Andes, Salta Province. This is a one-teacher school who is at the same time principal and administrator. The students are few in number, some coming from immigrant families. Others are from families who change residence frequently due to the male head of household seeking employment. The village is composed of children, women, the elderly, and only one teacher. Each person, given his or her hopes and possibilities, seeks to survive and, in a sense, to break away from the conditions imposed and historically accepted with resignation. In all cases, and for all protagonists, it is a lonely experience.

Public School N° 97, “Advertano Lucio Castro”, located in Aldea Las Pampas. This school is in the border area of Rio Pico in Chubut Province. The teaching staff is united and believes in the project that they are developing. There is one teacher per grade, with a number of subjects in each, and a teacher principal who is also in charge of a grade. The school receives the visit of a traveling teacher every 6 weeks.

The village is located within a beautiful natural setting. There are about 30 modest single family dwellings which possess minimum amenities, according to the inhabitants themselves. It is difficult and costly to get to the village. The rains, and the river which transcends its banks often cut the village off from the outside. Calls from the only semi-public telephone are more costly than most can afford. The inhabitants go out little, nor do the teachers – traveling only twice a year when during vacation periods they return to their home towns. Visitors to the village are a rarity. The intense life of the inhabitants, the effervescent activity inside the school,

and the internal communications among the inhabitants contrast with both the feeling and the real existence of isolation.

Public School N° 86, “José Hernández” is in El Alamito, Department of Aconquija, within Catamarca Province. This school may be considered “large” compared to the ones listed above, due to the size of the surrounding population, the physical space it occupies, the number of classrooms, its enrollment, and number of teachers – one per grade, a principal, and a number of special teachers. But there is a special case at work here, due to the fact that the children go to school only during the peak of the tourist season. But during the hard winters employment falls sharply in the region because the houses of summer residents are vacant.

The stable and numerous families live in small and precarious dwellings, while the tourists, for a short time each year, inhabit houses that are impressive in size and comfort. Just when the school routine should be established, carnival begins. In an area in which production is limited to small agricultural and animal-raising plots, the only possibility for higher education is limited to a business course. In summary, the activities of teaching and learning take place within a scenario filled with contradictions.

The methodological procedure in this country included: i) general observation of the school, its classes, recreation periods, and participation in focus groups; ii) identification of the possible factors associated with school achievement; iii) discussion and review of the factors selected with the school management and teaching staff; iv) testing of the factors in new observations and focus groups.

Sample of schools studied and techniques used in Bolivia

The qualitative study in Bolivia was structured around 4 schools. The schools themselves, and the techniques used by the research team are described below.

Observation:

San José School. Location: Villa Tunari – Cochabamba.

Observer: a research team specialist.

Fidel Saucedo Sevilla School. Location: Los Tajibos – Santa Cruz.

Observer: a research team specialist.

Nicolás Fernández Naranjo School. City: La Paz.

Observer: a research team specialist.

República Dominicana School, City: La Paz.

Observer: a research team specialist.

San José School. Location: Villa Tunari – Cochabamba.

Observer: a research team specialist.

Interview:

Nicolás Fernández Naranjo School, City: La Paz.

Interviewee: School Principal.

Nicolás Fernández Naranjo School, City: La Paz.

Interviewee: School Teacher (3 B).

Nicolás Fernández Naranjo School, City: La Paz.

Interviewee: School Teacher.

Nicolás Fernández Naranjo School, City: La Paz.

Interviewee: School Teacher.

Nicolás Fernández Naranjo School, City: La Paz.

Interviewees: Parents.

San José School, Location: Villa Tunari – Cochabamba.

Interviewee: Teacher (2nd grade).

Fidel Saucedo Sevilla School, Location: Los Tajibos – Santa Cruz.

Interviewee: School Teacher (2^o A).

República Dominicana School, City: La Paz.

Interviewee: School Principal.

San José School, Location: Villa Tunari – Cochabamba.

Interviewer: research team specialist.

Interviewee: Teaching aid.

República Dominicana School, City: La Paz,

Interviewer: Interviewer: research team specialist.

Interviewee: President of the School Board.

República Dominicana School, City: La Paz,

Interviewer: research team specialist.

Interviewee: Physical Education Teacher.

República Dominicana School, City: La Paz,

Interviewer: research team specialist.

Interviewee: Parent.

República Dominicana School, City: La Paz,

Interviewer: research team specialist.

Interviewee: School Teacher.

República Dominicana School, City: La Paz,

Interviewer: research team specialist.

Interviewee Mothers of students.

Antonio Chiriotto School Location: Huatajata - La Paz,

Interviewer: research team specialist.

Interviewee: School Teacher (4^oA).

Focus groups:

The Nicolás Fernández, and República Dominicana Schools in La Paz, and in the Antonio Chiriotto School in Huatajata de La Paz.

Sample of schools studied and techniques used in Chile

The qualitative study in Chile focused on the following 8 schools:

<i>Participating Schools. Chilean National Study</i>	
Private and Publicly Subsidized	
<i>Name</i>	<i>Municipality</i>
San Diego Private School	Conchalí
Alberto Blest Gana School	San Ramón
Mater Dolorosa School	Huechuraba
Polivalente Moderno Cardenal Caro	Buín
Municipal Schools	
España School	Recoleta
República de Austria School	Estación. Central
Estrella de Chile d-378 School	Pudahuel
Villa Independencia School	Puente Alto

San Diego School. This school was inaugurated in 1959. It is located in the north-west part of Santiago, within the municipality of Conchalí. The schools serves children from working class families in an older part of the city. It describes itself as a lay institution that fosters Christian principles and values of the Roman Catholic Church. It is funded through government subsidies and from shared financing from student parents and guardians. The value of the monthly fee is \$7,200 Chilean pesos (approximately US\$11.50)

Robert Blest Gana School began in 1981 as a continuation of the primary school maintained since 1972 by a religious order from the Parrales Parish. Located in the borough of San Ramón, it serves children and young people from in the southern part of Santiago. It describes itself as an institution based upon human values, with a world-view that concentrates on the individual.

This school offers instruction from kindergarten up to the 4th year of secondary school. The enrollment is 1,700 students, distributed in 44 classes that meet in two

daily shifts. The school is financed by funds contributed by the government and from shared financing, which represents a contribution by parents of approximately \$11,000 Chilean pesos (US\$17.00) per month.

Mater Dolorosa School. Mater Dolorosa School offers instruction from kindergarten to the 8th grade. It serves 780 students, distributed in 16 classes that function in two daily shifts, with 1st to 4th grade classes in the afternoons and 5th to 8th grade classes in the mornings.

The school receives public funds as well as fees from parents, who pay \$4,000 Chilean pesos per month (the equivalent of US\$6.00)

Cardenal Caro Modern School. This school is part of the Liceo Moderno Polivalente Cardenal Caro, located in Buin. It was created through merger with the Education Institute administered by the Brothers of the Immaculate Conception and Santos Angeles Modern School in the 1970s. Currently, it is under the responsibility of the San Bernardo Parish. It serves children who live in communities in the southern outskirts of Santiago.

This school offers instruction from kindergarten to the 4th year of secondary education. The enrollment is 900 students, distributed in 20 classes. Third through seventh grade are full-day courses; the others are half-day.

The school is funded through government subsidies as well as monthly fees paid by parents. The latter is \$5,400 Chilean pesos – the equivalent of approximately US\$8.50.

Located in the Recoleta borough, **España School** has operated since 1945. In that year, government authorities accepted the offer of Don Luis Gamboa Perinetti to cede land on his property to build a public school. The institution serves students from poor communities such as La Pincoya, Héroes de la Concepción, and others in the northwest part of Santiago. It offers instruction from kindergarten to the 8th grade to 760 students distributed in 17 classes, operating in two half-day sessions. Kindergarten and 1st to 4th grade function in the mornings, and 5th to 8th grade classes are held during afternoons. The school receives a government subsidy, which is administered by the Municipal Department of Education.

República de Austria Municipal School. This school was founded during the 1960s. It is located in the western borough of Santiago called *Estación Central*. It serves children living in the neighborhoods of “Santiago”, “Los Nogales”, “General Bonilla”, “La Palma”, “Gabriela” and others in the area. Classes are offered from kindergarten to the 8th grade. The enrollment is 764 students, distributed into 35 classes in two daily sessions. Grades 1st to 4th meet during afternoons and grades 5th through 8th meet in the mornings. The school operates on municipal government funds only.

Estrella de Chile School. This school has operated since the 1960s. It is in the western part of Santiago in the community of Pudahuel. It serves children from working class families in the area.

The school offers instruction from kindergarten to the 8th grade, and has an enrollment of 1,168 students distributed in 31 classes. These meet in two sessions daily, with 1st through 4th grades meeting in the afternoon, and 5th through 8th grade classes meeting in the morning. Financing is through state subsidies.

Villa Independencia School. This has been a municipal school since 1981. It is administered by the Education, Health, and Children's Welfare Corporation of Puente Alto, a non-profit institution presided over by the mayor of the community. The school offers instruction from kindergarten to the 8th grade. Enrollment is 1,629, distributed in 36 classes, with grades 3rd through 8th meeting for a full day, and kindergarten through 2nd meeting for half days.

We present below a summary table with a description of the schools.

<i>School</i>	<i>N° of students</i>	<i>N° of classes</i>	<i>Average number of students per class</i>	<i>Average number of students per teacher</i>	<i>Average number of students per school staff member</i>	<i>Parents' share of financing (in Chilean pesos)</i>
San Diego School	1 526	36	42.4	46.2	117.3	7 500
Alberto Blest Gana School	1 700	44	38.7	32.0	130.7	11 000
Alma Mater School	780	16	48.7	33.9	55.7	4 000
Cardenal Caro School	900	20	45.0	17.6	69.2	5 400
España School	760	17	44.7	29.2	253.3	0.0
República de Austria School	764	35	21.8	26.3	95.5	0.0
Estrella de Chile School	1168	31	37.6	31.5	116,8	0.0
Villa Independencia School	1629	36	45.3	39.3	85.7	0.0

Sample of schools studied and qualitative techniques used in Colombia

In Colombia, five schools took part in the study. They are located in three regions: Bogotá (2 schools), Córdoba (2 schools), and Tulúa (1 school). Three of them are public, of which one is urban and two are rural. One of the private schools is urban, and the other is rural.

Observation:

<i>School</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Daily Recess</i>	<i>Teacher Meetings</i>
Villa Fátima School	2 Spanish classes, 3 rd & 4 th grades 2 math classes, 3 rd & 4 th grades	3	one
Calle Larga School	2 Spanish classes 3 rd & 4 th grades 2 math classes, 3 rd & 4 th grades	3	one
San Vicente de Paul School	2 Spanish classes. 3 rd & 4 th grades 2 math classes, 3 rd & 4 th grades	3	one
Colegio Cooperativo	1 Spanish class, 3 rd & 4 th grades 1 math class, 3 rd & 4 th grades	2	one
Ced. Antonio Villavicencio	1 Spanish class, 3 rd & 4 th grades 1 math class, 3 rd & 4 th grades	2	one

Interviews:

Nuestra Señora de Fátima Rural school			
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
	3	Students	3 rd
	3	Mothers of students	3 rd
	3	Students	4 th
	3	Parents	4 th
	3	Teachers	3 rd & 4 th
	1	Head Teacher	
Escuela Nueva Calle Larga			
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
	2	Students	3 rd
	2	Mothers of students	3 rd
	2	Students	4 th
	2	Mothers of students	4 th
	1	Teachers	
San Vicente de Paul School			
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
	2	Students	3 rd
	2	Mothers of students	3 rd
	2	Students	4 th
	2	Mothers of students	4 th
	2	Teachers	

Centro Educativo Distrital Antonio Villavicencio		
<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
2	Students	3 rd
2	Mothers of students	3 rd
3	Students	4 th
3	Mothers of students	4 th
2	Teachers	Spanish
Colegio Cooperativo Altamira y Barrios Sur Orientales		
<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
3	Students	3 rd
2	Mothers of Students	3 rd
3	Students	4 th
3	Mothers of Students	4 th
2	Teachers	Math & Language

Focus groups:

Nuestra Señora de Fátima Rural School		
<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
4	Students	3 rd & 4 th
4	Parents	3 rd & 4 th
1	Teachers	3 rd & 4 th
Nueva Calle Larga School		
<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
3	Students	3 rd & 4 th
3	Mothers of Students	3 rd & 4 th
San Vicente de Paul School		
<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
2	Students	3 rd & 4 th
2	Mothers of Students	
1	Teachers	
Centro Educativo Distrital Antonio Villavicencio		
<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
2	Teachers	3 rd & 4 th
2	Students	3 rd & 4 th
2	Parents	3 rd & 4 th
Colegio Cooperativo Altamira y Barrios Sur Orientales		
<i>Number</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Grade</i>
2	Students	3 rd & 4 th
2	Mothers of Students	3 rd & 4 th
1	Teachers	Math and Language

Sample of schools studied and techniques utilised in Costa Rica

In Costa Rica, the study was carried out in four schools. Of these, three are in San José and one is in Cartago. The latter is a rural school. Those in San José are located, respectively, in urban, marginal urban, and semi-urban areas.

Characteristics of children enrolled in mathematics classes

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Schools</i>			
	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Marginal urban</i>	<i>Semiurban</i>
Type of population	Heterogeneous, coming from in and outside the community	Heterogeneous Urban	Heterogeneous, coming from in and outside the community	Heterogeneous, coming from in and outside the district
Age	9 - 11 years	6 - 7 years	7 - 12 years	8 - 10 years
Gender	16 girls 11 boys	13 boys 8 girls	11 boys 20 girls	15 boys 12 girls
Education Level	III Year	I Year	I Year	II Year
Socio-economic condition	Middle class (upper-lower)	Heterogeneous Middle & lower middle class	Lower middle class and below	Heterogeneous Middle & lower middle class
Academic achievement	- Three children repeat the grade. - Two children with adapted curriculum.	- Two children repeat the grade. - One girl with adapted curriculum	Large number of students repeat the grade. Foreign students above age for this level	Some students with adapted curriculum

The techniques proposed for the study were applied in the following manner:

Observation:

Observation allowed the research team to enter active classrooms in the hope of establishing open relationships with informants, guaranteeing them of the security and confidentiality of the experience and informing them of the future usefulness of the information obtained.

For data collection, the research team, composed of four specialists, was organised in the following manner: one specialist was responsible for the rural school; another specialist for the urban school; a third specialist was in charge of the marginal-urban school, and a fourth specialist for the semi-urban school. Moreover, it was determined that observations would always be carried out by the investigator responsible for each school, accompanied by another research colleague. This made it possible to obtain a greater wealth of information, and to be able to compare notes.

Interviews:

In-depth interviews were carried out with the principals, the math teachers, and the language teachers at each school. They were made by appointment by the researcher responsible for each school. In some cases, the researcher was accompanied by a colleague. Beforehand, the research team developed an interview schedule upon which the task was based. Summary reports were subsequently prepared.

Focus groups:

Four **focus groups** were organised in each school: two with students in Spanish and math classes, and two with the parents of these students. The entire research team participated in this endeavor. Two activities were carried out previous to the meetings of the focus groups: a) children were requested to describe their math and Spanish classes; b) planning for the focus groups took as a main topic the descriptions that the students had prepared. Summary reports were prepared presenting the results of each focus group.

Sample of schools studied and techniques utilised in Cuba

The study was carried out in five Cuban schools that participated in the First International Comparative Study.

Data was collected utilising: 1) 15 observations of schools within the sample, 40 observations of mathematics classes, ii) interviews with 10 teachers, and iii) 8 focus groups composed of a total of 40 students of the interviewed teachers.

Geographic Location of Schools in the Sample

<i>School</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>Municipality</i>	<i>Strata</i>
Camilo Cienfuegos	La Habana city	Habana del Este	Large City
Angélica Arias	La Habana	Güira de Melena	Rural
Raúl Perozo	Sancti Spiritus	Yaguajay	Urban
Ignacio Agramonte	Ciego de Avila	Morón	Urban
Ignacio Agramonte	Santiago de Cuba	Santiago de Cuba	Large City

In each of the five schools in the study sample, two Spanish Language classes, and two mathematics classes of two teachers were observed, or a total of eight classes in all.

The ten teachers who were observed in a total of 40 class sessions were part of the sample of the First International Comparative Study. All teachers, at the time of the observations, taught a minimum of more than three classes in their respective schools.

The total number of classes was distributed in the following manner: four 1st grade classes, four 2nd grade classes, twenty-four 3rd grade classes, four 4th grade classes, and four 6th grade classes. Thirty-six (90%) of this total was in the first cycle (1st to 4th grades) of primary school, and the rest was in the last grade of the second Cuban primary school cycle.

In order to maintain consistency in the analysis, an observation guide was developed, structured in a sufficiently general manner to allow measurement of the most important teaching areas.

As part of the reference study, a total of ten teachers were interviewed from the five schools making up the sample. The grades that these teachers taught are shown in the table below:

<i>Schools</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>5th</i>	<i>6th</i>	<i>Total</i>
Camilo Cienfuegos				1		1	2
Angélica Arias				1		1	2
Raúl Perozo				1	1		2
Ignacio Agramonte (C. de Avila)					1	1	2
Ignacio Agramonte (S. de Cuba)				1		1	2
Total per grade				4	2	4	10

As part of this study, focus group interviews were carried out with four students of each of the 10 teachers interviewed, as shown in the following table:

<i>Schools</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>5th</i>	<i>6th</i>	<i>Total</i>
Camilo Cienfuegos				4		4	8
Angélica Arias				4		4	8
Raúl Perozo				4	4		8
Ignacio Agramonte (C. de Avila)					4	4	8
Ignacio Agramonte (S. de Cuba)				4		4	8
Total by grade				16	8	16	40

Sample of schools studied and techniques utilised in Venezuela

Five schools participated in the study: two in Caracas, the capital city with more than five million inhabitants. Another is in Valencia, an industrial city of almost two million inhabitants. The fourth school is in a medium-size city of 500,000 in an agricultural area. in the historic city of Tocuyo, in Lara State. The fifth school is located in a small rural dwelling in the State of Barinas, in the western part of Venezuela.

The schools studied were the following:

Madre Cabrini Parochial School, a church - administered school in the tumultuous neighborhood of 23 de Enero, a result of urban expansion during the 1950s.

Prudencio Diez School, located in another working class neighborhood in Caracas, El Cementerio. Like the community described above, this also has severe economic problems, with high rates of informal employment and suffers from high crime rates.

The Santiago Mariño School is in Valencia, the most traditional industrial city with its apogee during the import – substitution phase of the country's history. This city witnessed the installation of Venezuela's first automobile assembly and textile plants. The context is within that of the growth of the working and professional class more than of the bureaucracy in a society in which the State is the major employer. Perhaps for this reason, Valencia is the dynamic centre of one of the few states, that of Carabobo, that has actively fostered decentralization, and has been favored by continuity of the local government administration, which has given substantial support to the development agenda of education in the region. Under government administration, the school's location within a middle-class residential area, and its condition as a socially open public institution, makes it particularly interesting.

The República Dominicana School has become a cultural symbol within Tocuyo, a city that has been important since colonial times. Among other things, the city is the centre of a small agrarian middle class with a quite active intellectual life. The school has the distinction of being among those that benefited from adoption of the *Escuela Nueva* pedagogy. Currently, it is among the most prestigious within the network of national schools.

General Francisco de Miranda School is located in a small rural community, with all indications that it should be any different from other rural schools. As is the case with almost all rural schools, it is financed by the State.

Without losing sight of the fact that the purpose of the study was to analyze how schools are managed and how classes are taught, information was collected on the day-to-day activities of the schools, within the ethnographic tradition of “Grounded Theory research program”¹⁸.

For this tradition, research is based on a scheme of general recommendations¹⁹ that guide the production of data and interpretations, keeping in mind the multiple perspectives offered to researchers and members of the institutions²⁰, this research team assumed the task of collecting information that would make it possible to observe what makes the life of these schools an ideographic experience²¹ in the manner that they function, teach, and perceive their own experience.

In order to cover the general objectives, the field team sought to record episodes²² of these schools from three perspectives of their every-day lives. One is related to what they do; another is linked to how people who work within them live; the third has to do with the meanings that the members of these communities attribute to what they do.

The raw material comes from: i) observations of schools and classrooms during mathematics and language lessons in three grades, ii) interviews with teachers, and iii) focus groups of the students in these grades. Other sources of information used were documents, photographs, and files. By these means, valuable material

¹⁸ According to this qualitative research methodological tradition, theory-building is the result of the permanent confrontation between data (the constant comparison method of Glazer and Strauss) arranged in progressive syntheses –categories of systems– that are developed through induction, and never by analytic reduction, and the starting point of which are (always provisional) data and ...

¹⁹ For this school of qualitative research in the social sciences, the method is no more than a body of recommendations to order the material (emerging design) and to identify themes and construct hypotheses that appear from the same materials (grounded theory). S. J. Taylor and R. Bogdan, *Introducción a los métodos cualitativos de la investigación* (Buenos Aires: Paidós Studio, 1990).

²⁰ In the sense argued by Bogdan and Taylor, according to whom there is not truth; only perspectives. Robert Bogdan and Sari Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods* (Boston: Allyn y Bacon, 1982).

²¹ *Idem.*

²² As the term is understood methodologically by Lincoln and Guba. . Ivonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985).

was collected with useful information regarding the management of schools and teaching techniques in the classroom. Information was sought in different parts of the schools: offices, classrooms, play yard, corridors, and entrance. In two of the schools, in which there was only one teacher for 3rd grade, the principal was included. In a third school the principal requested and was included as well.

In addition to the observations and conversations (interviews and focus groups), documents, and photographs, an inventory was made using an observation check list. This was useful for recording the characteristics and conditions of the physical layout, equipment, and furniture of the schools, as well as for recording information in regard to families and their homes. Research in this country was directed at identifying “world views” through which that which is done is re-created in day-to-day activities as “knowledge” in the administration of schools and in the task of teaching, as well as giving purpose and identity to other tasks related to the organisation. All of the above, be it stated again, are considered to be areas in which a school’s “customs” are created as concrete institutions that have their own particular identity²³.

²³ Thus, in ethnographic terms, the concept of “organization” that we use is “... social establishments - or institutions in the current sense of the term [that is] places in which a particular activity is carried out” ... It should be noted, however, that in our case, the research went beyond the institution itself, and collected information regarding the social environment within which schools operate. Erving Goffman, *Internados* (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu editores, 1972), p. 17

VI. Process for Obtaining Outcomes

The process for obtaining outcomes was based upon the specific theoretical methodological orientation described below.

Typifying and non-generalizable character of the outcomes

One of the major characteristics of qualitative studies is the search for meanings that permit us to understand social processes, and in this case, educational processes, without granting to them statistical implications. That is, these outcomes are not meant to be generalized to a larger population.

The usefulness of qualitative studies might be questioned if they did not link in some way the individuality of the cases studied with generalities. It should be made very clear in this context that research in education has to do both with individuality and generality, whether the methods be quantitative or qualitative. In the case of qualitative studies, unification is achieved through the development and utilisation of general concepts called “ideal types”, in the study of individuals, occurrences, societies, or, as in this case, of school settings.

Moreover, when schools have been investigated in national studies, this has been done within a social, rather than an individual perspective; for what is characteristic of a social act is that the meaning attributed to it by the actor be related to the behaviour of others and be guided by it. Thus, education research, in using qualitative techniques, from this perspective, studies the meaning of the acts of different individuals within the perspective of how they are guided by the behaviour of others.

Thus, presentation and analysis of the results of national research is carried out within the perspective of constituting ideal types. The “ideal type” is one of the most well-known contributions of Max Weber to modern social science. An ideal type is formed by a uni-directional emphasis of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a large number of concrete individual phenomena. Many of these phenomena are diffuse, discrete, frequent or infrequent, and which are ordered according to uni-directional emphasised points of view within a unified analytic concept.

Thus, an ideal type is a concept constructed by an analyst and based upon theoretical perspectives in order to identify the major characteristics of particular social, or in this case, educational phenomena. The elements of an ideal type cannot be combined arbitrarily, such combination must be based on its compatibilities. When we speak of compatibilities, we are referred to the inter-relations between the phenomena studied.

The analysis presented below falls within the perspectives developed by the Weberian school, which asserts that the social sciences must seek to understand social phenomena in terms of “meaningful” categories of human experience, and that, therefore, the scheme of functional causality of the natural sciences is not applicable to the social sciences. *It is from here that the search for statistical representativeness is rendered irrelevant.*

From this perspective, all behaviour taking place within a school system, and which is socially meaningful, is an expression of motivated psychological states. Thus the importance of the education system actors within the analyses. Consequently, the analyst cannot be satisfied in viewing school-based social processes simply as linkages of externally-related events, nor in establishing correlation's as the final goal. Rather, within the framework of this study, “ideal types” or “motivational models” are established. Using these ideal types, one seeks to “understand” the behaviour of the actors of the education system by imputing action content to the actors in question.

Features with relational meaning: prediction of non-present components

The analysis presented here was not carried out seeking to identify repetitive features of the different national studies. We sought, rather, to detect *meaningful features*.

The process of seeking these meaningful features was based upon their relational importance – as nodes within a network of situations, characteristics, and facts within the school system, so that they lead us to other features, or that these features themselves readily lead to others of the network that typify the school system. For example, it is most likely that a relationship of type A between students and teachers is linked to a relationship of type A as well between teachers and principals. It may be possible in a national study to detect the first relationship; but its presence allows us to assume as well that the second relationship will exist, although not readily observed directly.

Therefore, the research focused on meaningful features, i.e., features with relational weight in the schools and in the relations between the actors who are the subjects of this study. In order to typify them, their presence must be identified in one or two national studies.

On the other hand, when noting the presence of a particular feature in a national study, we do not intend it to be generalizable to other national studies. Such features only have value for the construction of an ideal type. Ideal typing does not exist in any national study in particular; but it allows us to make prognoses and to postulate the structuring of models of relations between the meaningful features observed. Thus, in this analysis the reader will note that linking of explanatory concepts to themes of the study may be exemplified by either a one (1), or a two (2) or more cases – a procedure that is within the framework of this kind of research.

Validation of cases used in qualitative analysis

The analytic process employed herein uses cases supplied by national studies, choosing one or various cases from this data. As we mentioned above, however, their number is the basic criterion for validation. The basic reason for this lies in the character of qualitative research, which works with verbal descriptions or explanations of the phenomenon studied, chosen due to their meaning; that is, the extent to which they point toward the essence, nature, and behaviour of the object studied in contrast to explanations offered in quantitative research, which works with numbers.

The logic and the process of qualitative research comprises a search for information. In the national studies, it was necessary to begin with a vague impression of what was to be studied, using broad themes or concepts called *sensitizers*. From this began the process of systematization, where in the final report one or more references were chosen for their qualitative character in order to validate the findings of the study.

In the first phase of simplification of the study, the material supplied by the national studies is examined from a theoretical perspective, and only the points that are pertinent from this perspective are considered. Details that differ from one case

to another, from one school to another have been omitted in a random manner, or may have been put aside so that the general lines of the data may be more easily discerned.

Within this context, it is important to note that qualitative research does not validate empirically; but rather uses a process of logical validation in which the key is the theoretical consistencies of a text with other texts. Thus, the second phase consists of a classification of observations: seeing if there is any common denominator in the data, and begin to fashion a rule that governs all observations. This general structure would be the typical features of a particular case, or of various cases or schools.

At times, we may use only one example or case to illustrate the problem in question; other times we may continue to study, comment upon, and offer examples of a single case or a progressively growing group of objects until it becomes evident that the problem does not lend itself to further analysis.

An indication of this state of *saturation* in the study is that analysis of new elements cases no longer yields knowledge of interest. In other words, when a single example or case is used, this is because it has been concluded that this case or example *has saturated* this part of the study. In other cases, it is assumed that various examples are needed in order to *saturate* the theoretical object being analysed.

The analysis of a qualitative empirical field can be a very demanding and voluminous task. Reports may include hundreds or thousands of pages, of which we must utilise a few pages of significant findings. The task becomes easier as soon as we can specify the invariance we are seeking. Through this decision, one can omit all material which is not pertinent and condense that which is. This is what we have sought to do in this study.

VII. Results of the Study

In consideration of the above regarding the process of obtaining results, the conclusions of this study are:

Results in the area of school management (at the school level)

Theme: processes related to constructing a learning environment in the school

- In a school with outstanding results, students have an active role in the learning process.

The passive-active dichotomy is present more or less explicitly, with a positive assessment going to the latter. One of the processes that characterizes schools with outstanding results is the increasingly active role of students, in which they are not simply passive objects of the knowledge that they receive from teachers. Of special interest is the contextualization process that this participation acquires:

(Cuba) "... After carrying out various morning activities, and noting the active role of students ... one of the most questions most discussed by them was regarding the performance of the Cuban delegation at the Olympics in Sidney, Australia, and the robbery of a small aircraft flown from Cuba to the United States. In general, the students carried out this activity adequately and expressed themselves well ...".

- Another interesting aspect is that of order in the classroom. This can take a number of variants, from a harmonious climate to discipline as the first order. As one of the informants stated:

(Cuba) "... at the end of the morning session, the students went to their classrooms in an orderly manner, where during ten minutes and directed by the teacher they carried out a discussion on national, international, and local politics, culture, sports, society, economics, etc. In all cases there was good participation of students in which they and teachers demonstrated that they were informed, with the major sources being the written press, radio, and television, round table discussion that take place in the country during afternoons, and activities of the school itself ...".

- Schools with outstanding results are those in which different levels of teachers collaborate and work as teams within an environment with little emphasis on hierarchy.

Learning processes in these kinds of schools also seem to strongly emphasise teamwork in which close links are produced between teachers and principals; links that are much less hierarchical than in the past.

(Cuba) "... In the Angélica Arias School we observed a methodology preparation meeting between all teachers in the school. The meeting consisted of one of the teachers giving a demonstration class of 5th grade math, and subsequent discussion among teachers of the quality of the class they observed ... there was present in the discussion a strong critical and self-critical spirit and collaboration between teachers. No technical leadership was apparent on the part of the school principal during this work session ...".

- In these schools, the rational and the emotional are complementary. Reason and emotion acquire different weights in the presentations of national reports of schools with outstanding results. In some of them, rationality in relations is emphasised, in which the teacher has the central role in guiding reason. The two examples below show both dimensions, which appear to be complementary rather than dichotomous.

(Colombia) "... For the children, the most pleasant activities are those that develop during group work. Exercises and written dictation also aid in understanding and in having a more open mind, learning how to answer ...

games are the best form for learning, if and when teachers have patience. It is also useful when the teacher, at the beginning of each class, asks students if they are familiar with the theme to be discussed. Thus, he or she can assess the learning processes of the students and note what gaps there may be ... ”.

(Cuba) “ ... In general, the classes observed obey the principle of conscious assimilation of the teaching materials on the part of students, with teachers expressing clearly the purposes of the classes, thus helping students to understand the value of new material and guiding them toward proposed objectives ... ”.

- The appearance of parents as significant actors is very evident in most reports. Although parents appear to have a passive role in some circumstances, in these schools, the participation of parents seems to be a key factor. They not only attend school meetings and cooperate; they become involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in what occurs at school, and even within the classroom.

(Chile) “... parents are concerned, at least a little ... they have their concerns and one can reach them. There aren’t any extremely aggressive parents, although they may occasionally be difficult, but generally that is not the case ... we have had few bad experiences in regard to the parents’ centre; but we have also had excellent times, when we needed them, they were there. That lasted two or three years and was excellent. A complete commitment to the school, extremely concerned ... ”.

(Colombia) “ ... In terms of in-class time they think it is sufficient for the activities that the children carry out, but a minority group of parents believe that it isn’t sufficient and that the school day should be lengthened so the children can learn more and so they can stay in the building and not face the dangers in the streets ... ”.

- In these schools, children begin to appear as individuals, where the individual is more important than the group.

Another common feature is support for the individuality of students – the search for paths to support the personal development of each child. This aspect appears as key in the concerns of teachers and a point of departure for structuring different teaching strategies.

(Chile) (For one of the school principals interviewed, the quality of students appears as an important element. This recognition was expressed in the following manner) “... the quality of students – I mean a student with values, something that isn’t easy nowadays ... of course, we talk about many things, but when one begins to compare, I think that we do well, but we could do better ... there are some special cases in which children are not achieving, but most are. The children are responsible. We are concerned

that they understand the responsibility of the school, that they represent it well”.

(Colombia) “ ... Flexible time management also has an impact on learning, because the children don’t feel pressured by time and can move ahead at their own pace, although there are areas that they prefer and that they would like to spend the entire time doing ... ”.

- Schools with outstanding results are schools that have found the path to innovation

In these schools there is room for new programs, both those that they receive from the central level, as well as those that the community itself develops on its own initiative.

(Costa Rica) “... In the rural school observed, the value of being Costa Rican is fostered, learning environments being stimulating to this end. This is apparent in the civic activities that the whole school is involved in during the month of September. There is also Children’s Day, with active participation of all children in contests and games ... development of values learning programs; foreign language programs; computer-based programs; school exchanges; the ‘Schools of Excellence’ program ... ”.

Theme: the organisational climate of the school

- There is a process moving toward organisation that for management purposes takes into consideration all or most of the actors involved in the education system

The organisational environments of schools appear to be subject to very important changes. Hierarchical organisation, with an autocratic leader personified in the school principal is changing, and moving toward the director as a person who shares power.

(Cuba) “... The principals of the five schools share school government with teachers and students, thus using a horizontal management style ... in all schools a democratic style prevails, with very active participation of all workers, whose opinions are listened to. One of the teachers interviewed is General Secretary of the labor union section of the school; that is, of grass-roots organisation of workers at the school, and emphasizes that in the monthly school meetings she expresses the concerns of the workers – their problems and concerns which are listened to and discussed by all members ... ”.

“... in summary, decisions are collective, being discussed first by school management and then in a workers’ assembly every month ... ”.

“... Administratively, the school, being a co-operative, is organised hierarchically in the following manner: general assembly of members, adminis-

trative council, the management charged with representing the institution and the educational area is made up of an administrative council, an academic council, a student and teacher council. The co-operative has 60 members, including teachers and former students ...”.

In this new kind of school organisation, which appears to be in transition toward non-authoritarian forms, there nevertheless is no clarity in regard to what alternatives or modalities will be adopted. Parents and students are perhaps the new actors, with parents having more influence and participation than students.

(Colombia) “... School government is made up of 5th and 6th grade students, with those from the lower grades being excluded. Opportunities for primary students to participate are very limited. In theory, school government should help to improve the school; but in practice, the students don’t realize that this figure does some work. Still, there are some who think that student government serves as the direction of the school, carrying out control and discipline functions during recess ... Only one group of students selected by the directorship of the school participated in the elections for representatives of student government ...”.

(Cuba) “... The most common form of participation is the Administrative Council, made up of parents, teachers, students, former students, and community representatives. In this council, students have an active presence through their spokesperson, and have an effective voice and vote in school-related decisions ...”.

“... According to teachers, for development of the PEI, the opinions of parents were taken into account, who said that the main thing was that their children learn to read, write, and do basic math. Thus, the emphasis that has been placed in the school program, which is centered on the subjects of math and Spanish. Currently, the principal thinks that the parents’ objective, and therefore the mission of the PEI, is a reality ...”.

- The organisational spirit that characterizes these schools is non-authoritarian, and emotionally positive between actors within the school community. There is in these schools a nascent type of relations that have been established between teachers and students. This new kind of relationship emerges with characteristics and consequences in practically all the texts coming from the interviews, focal groups, and observations.

(Colombia) “... The major factor in permitting this school to maintain a good learning environment are the relations that predominate among teachers, and especially with students ... among them, relations are friendly, team-oriented, and of mutual collaboration. With students, relations are quite affectionate, with mutual confidence and respect ...”.

The texts analysed show no cases of conflictive relations between students. This indicates the presence of a very positive organisational climate among them.

(Colombia) "... There was observed among the students mutual respect and friendship, supporting each other in and outside of class. Currently, the relations observed are quite democratic in nature. Students are able to, and do, effectively influence school life ... a climate of confidence and on-going communication between teachers and students predominates throughout the school day, creating the foundation for the motivation that most students exhibit...".

- Schools with outstanding results seek the establishment of norms that regulate social interaction and student tasks.

These are not chaotic schools, or ones in which norms are imposed from above and that are not applied in practice. In some cases, very progressive innovations appear.

(Colombia) "... In four of the five schools studied, rules are stipulated in a handbook of student behaviour. Special campaigns are carried out based within social studies and ethics classes to make the rules known. In only one of the schools was it stated that not many rules were needed, since they few that do exist are clear and obeyed by all...". All of the schools agree that the application of these norms is carried out through regular channels: teachers, coordinators, directors, and parents...".

Rules are analysed and acquire new perspectives. The idea is not to penalize, but rather to instruct.

The schools studied show changes in the type of norms and their application. They are not punitive, but constructive. That is, rules are not used to penalize students, but to instruct them. Another change in norms in all of the schools studied is that their establishment has become more participatory, so that the opinions of student and parents are taken into account. Moreover, the rules do not apply only to students, but to teachers as well; for example in the matter of teacher absenteeism.

- Schools with outstanding results are able to create a pleasant working environment.

In very few cases do we see dissatisfaction expressed by teachers or administrators regarding their roles in school.

(Costa Rica) "... It is a very pleasant environment in which teachers collaborate with each other and show willingness to participate in the various activities organised by the school ...".

Moreover, these schools are organizations that have the innovative capacity to carry out extra-curricular activities.

(Costa Rica) "... The school organizes a number of extra-curricular activities ...".

- This kind of school is characterised by a seeking and achieving organisational stability.

This is evidenced, among other ways, by less teacher turnover and by principals and teachers who tend to stay longer at the same school.

(Argentina) "... The fact that the teacher of the Salar de Pocitas School has been their for 17 years, with the same commitment seems to be a positive factor for the community. From the students' point of view, a durable relationship with the same teacher has helped them receive not only information, but instruction. This can be seen in the harmonious social and working relationships observed in the school ...".

(Bolivia) "... (in the past) there have been constant changes, even in the middle of the year... now this is improving so that if we contract a teacher for an entire year, he or she can't just leave because ... (they can't) offer a teaching job near the teacher's home because the law no longer allows that ... in previous years it was allowed. So you would have a teacher doing a good job one day, and then come the next day and tell you, 'look for another teacher .. I'm moving closer to my family, I have a big problem'. By this they meant, 'I'm leaving immediately .. I have to go .. look for another teacher. Now that isn't the case ...".

(Cuba) "... Teacher experience and job stability of principals and teachers. The majority of principals and teachers of the five schools sampled have been at the institutions for more than 5 years. More than half have more than ten years of experience ...".

- Schools with outstanding results encourage initiative, even in the area of organisational control

(Bolivia) "... on Monday, my son told me 'a teacher didn't show up'; since my daughter comes here to the centre, she lets me know. The boys do as well ...".

Theme: "The way things are done here" in the schools

- Respect, cordiality, and frequent expressions of affection characterize the way things are done in schools with outstanding results.

Together with the commitment and pleasantness exhibited by the actors, we see in these schools an organisational spirit in which it is possible to identify an atmosphere in which each member feels that he or she belongs to the collec-

tivity. This, that would seem to be naturally desirable, clearly does not exist in other kinds of schools in which teacher absenteeism, student drop-out, and conflict hinder the development of this collective spirit.

(Argentina) "... the force of the institution... identify the importance of the teaching philosophy through information obtained from school documents and corroborated both in concrete practice and in informant interviews. 'The idea is that of a school which uses the idea of a collective farm as a pedagogical tool'. 'What identifies it is its school-farm philosophy, giving it institutional identity, this fortress, which gives the school strength and creates a distinct environment ...'".

(Costa Rica) "... School management, in the schools studied: processes for constructing learning environments are encouraged in order to foster the value of being Costa Rican. The organisational environment is pleasant. Buildings are adequate. Resources are well-administered. Principals practice different types of administration ...'".

(Cuba) "... It was noted as well that interpersonal relations between students, teachers, principals, and parents are very cordial and characterised by mutual respect. Parents, in general, fully participate in the activities of the school ... teachers, principals, students, and parents show great commitment to making the school function well ...'".

"With everyone in formation, three students, selected for the task due to their over-all achievement, raise the Cuban flag. All teachers and students, as well as parents and visitors present, sing the National Anthem ...'".

- Institutional identity appears to unite fruitfully with recognition of individuality.

A sense of institutional identity and respect for others as individuals are aspects that appear to be necessarily united. One cannot have a collective spirit if each individual does not feel that he or she is taken into consideration and is useful to the whole. Warm human relations cannot develop without an organisation that is alive with collective spirit.

(Argentina) "... The school is similar to others. But it has something special that others do not. Above all it is the human warmth that one finds here with the children, with the people, that makes us feel that we are very important. Because people still recognise that teachers are special people. And this, although it makes us feel a great responsibility, makes us enthusiastic so that we carry out our daily tasks with more responsibility ...'".

"... Each person, then, works with full confidence and freedom, always taking into account the work of the rest, and how one should fit into the whole ...'".

"... Innovative projects, well based in the community and which include parent participation, each according to his or her possibilities ...'".

(Chile) “ ... One teacher, referring to high achievement in the school, comments: ‘I think that one of the main motives is our collaboration ... always being attentive, not only as head teacher of the course, but also to the children of other courses, concerned to give them all we can, not only in the classroom, but also outside in the community, because the children are out there – something that is not the case for other schools. As you can see, the play yard is always clean. The bathrooms are spotless, without graffiti. That’s a rare thing, because public bathrooms are always full of writing on the walls. But these aren’t. Here, they are always well cared for. We try in every way to demonstrate to the children that they are important to us (...) We are always interacting – not in formal meetings, perhaps, but in meetings (...) ‘Look I have this ... How do you do it? Here’s how I do it .. like this and like that. What do you say we do this for that subject? I do this I’ve seen my nieces and nephews do this for such and such a subject, and it seemed a good idea. (...) We are always exchanging information among ourselves; like I said, maybe not in a formal way, but in chats in the halls ... ”.

- One notes a respect for norms that interacts with a collective spirit. Within the context of working together, there is a respect for norms in interaction with a collective spirit; for example, in information systems within the establishment.

(Venezuela) “ ... In this culture, what we might call ‘information systems’ play a decisive role. Each of the classrooms, each of the administrative offices and the support rooms (music room, libraries) has a notice board. The ceremonies transmit the ideals of these institutions. What we call the “school yard” is basically the place for meetings between the members of the communities of these institutions ... ”.

“ ... These devices operate, clearly marking what one should do and what one shouldn’t do, clearly stimulating values of responsibility and living with one another through disciplinary mechanisms, managerial procedures, classroom work, task completion, the use of school areas, respect for school hours, treatment of the community ... ”.
- Among these schools, one can find schools with a way of doing things that identifies with project management

(Venezuela) “ ... Interviews with teachers and principals suggest the existence in these schools of environments rooted in an organisational idea that has gained increasing acceptance in administrative circles. We refer to the idea of management by projects ... ”.

Theme: Administration and distribution of material, human, and financial resources

- In general, these schools have acceptable student/teacher ratios. Cuba constitutes a special case, in which teacher support personnel exist.

(Cuba) "... Teacher auxiliaries or support personnel, except in the case of the Angélica Arias rural school, considered to have a small enrollment, there are teacher aids who assist the classroom work of teachers. Among the many tasks of these people are: to review student workbooks and homework, participate in student games, care for children during teacher rest and training periods, organise activities during recess, accompany students during extra-curricular activities, develop educational games, organise appointments for parents of students with difficulties, teach rules of good behaviour and good eating habits during lunch in the school cafeteria, etc. Most teaching aids have a higher education. Generally, they are in the process of studying in order to obtain a teaching certificate..."
- Scarce teaching support material is used efficiently. The schools studied are not schools that have abundant teaching materials, but that which they do have is used efficiently.

(Chile) "... In all of the schools, one sees a concern for the cleanliness, lighting, ventilation, acoustics, and size of learning environments. Although one notes more limitations in these areas in municipal schools, it is possible to see in them as well a concern to make them pleasant place to be in ... "

" ... Three of the four private subsidized schools have covered gymnasiums and are fenced. The other has a gymnasium, but it is unfenced. In the municipal schools without gymnasiums, roofed sheds have been constructed in the main patio area, with paved flooring that serves as a multi-use court ... "

" ... Hygiene: although it appears strange, it is here that the management of resources of these schools is best reflected. Generally, when visiting a school, these facilities are found to be in very bad conditions. However, in most of the schools observed there is a clear concern for this prosaic detail. In all of the private schools visited, the bathrooms were in an excellent state of hygiene, with - large mirrors installed as a support resource for the self-esteem of students. In the municipal schools this concern was also evident. In España School such services have recently been inaugurated, as is the case in the Independence School as well where, during our visit, the municipality was carrying out general repairs of these facilities. In the Republica de Chile and the Austria schools we found modest, but clean and well-maintained sanitary facilities ... "

(Costa Rica) "... Resource management, excellent ... "

(Cuba) "... In general, teaching materials are used effectively, being adequate for the objectives and content of classes, adapted to the development of the group and responding to their interests, facilitating a closer study to the object or real phenomenon in question, stimulating the search for knowledge, being used by every student, and making best use of the didactic possibilities of the resources utilised..."

(Venezuela) "... The other school building comprises the sanitary facilities. Usually, in public schools these do not function ... in these schools, although these facilities may not be in good repair; they are well-maintained and kept clean by the cleaning staff. The same is true for drinking water and food areas. In the Republica Dominicana and the Santiago Mariño Schools there are no drinking fountains. The children quench their thirst from the water faucets used for cleaning on bathroom sinks ..."

"... with these minimal facilities, the schools add other areas for specialized activities. The Prudencio Diez School has an "integrated classroom" that specializes in working with students who present learning difficulties. The Republica Dominicana School has a Physical Education Department, a pre-school classroom (equipped for story telling, a pre-school library, educational games, and special hours) and a dental office where services are provided for both students and the community. The Santiago Mariño School has a cinema club and a computer room ..."

Theme: Profile of school authorities

- Authorities from this kind of school share responsibilities – both in administration and in teaching.

Efficiency of the organisation and of actors of the system in general appears to increase when school authorities have time available for shared reflection and analysis.

(Cuba) "... In a general sense, the principals of these schools dedicate considerable time to administrative tasks, although they still teach classes and observe other classes. They also manage methodology preparation meetings and teacher training sessions ..."

"... in all of the primary schools there is an body called the "academic cycle group" the head teacher of which meets with teachers to analyze a specific academic unit and its corresponding classes. Discussion revolves around an analysis of the objectives of the particular cycle, grade, and unit, based on those of each class and the study objectives according to the curriculum of each corresponding grade. Each teacher can then adopt the results of such analysis to the specific characteristics of his or her students ..."

(Chile) "... the quality of this relation appears to be strengthened in those schools in which the principal is willing to become involved in the interests of teachers. In the San Diego School, teachers appreciate the fact that the principal is personally the one who tests the reading skills of first year students, and who proposes remedial measures upon noting any problems in the reading skills of students. It is the principal who is in charge of organising an annual student poetry contest. In the Estrella de Chile School, the principal is practically a teacher, due to the practice of visiting classrooms and always having "direct conversation with the children". The principal of the España School, together with a group of teachers, organizes volunteer work to carry out school maintenance ... "

- In a number of countries, the figure of the principal is key for obtaining resources

When this occurs, often the principal's teaching leadership suffers and is noted by the community.

(Colombia) "... They say that the principal's leadership is based on obtaining resources in order to improve the learning processes of students, and that, unfortunately, he is not a pedagogical leader ... "

- One notes personal leadership that is not concentrated in decision-making, but rather in the necessary management of the organisational process. Efficiency organisation is emphasised by these schools, supported by the presence of personal leadership. Increasingly less in terms of a person who makes all decisions, but rather as a manager of the organisation.

(Argentina) "... We chat and arrive at agreements. Because my function as principal, is to see to it that with every teacher ... I can find a moment to talk individually, to find out how things are going in his or her life, what he or she is doing, and things that are happening to the teacher as a person. So that they feel comfortable in school ... "

(Bolivia) "... I seek them out discretely and say to them, ' professor, I would like to talk to you ... things aren't going well ... you need to think about the prestige of the school, and about your training as well ... you have to move forward ... you need to gain the confidence of the community and of the school authorities above all.'. They think about this and reply, ' yes, yes, things are going badly'. Some reflect on this, and others don't. Depending, then, the principal says to the board ' we need to make a change. We make the change. This happened in January and February ... changes in teaching staff now can only be made in February. If we don't like them, its in the hands of the directorship, of the board. They don't like the measure. They say, 'professor, I'm going to change. And they stay for the entire year. There are no more changes ... "

(Chile) “ ... a positive and trusting hierarchical relationship is created: a teacher referring to the principal told us: ‘ there is the command role; that is, things are done according to what has been planned ... (the principal) always asks our opinion, of course, but someone has to lead and you see that here – you see that the principal is very concerned about the children, aware of us, anticipating what is required. We are so involved in things that that days go by ... I think the principal does a very good job ... ”.

(Colombia) “... parents differ in their perceptions regarding leadership. Some don’t clearly see its existence. Others, on the other hand, believe that leadership is a building process involving the entire education community. Finally, there is a small group that believes that the principal is the leader due to having control over teachers and students ... ”.

(Colombia) “ ... interviews with teachers allowed us to conclude that the principal takes initiatives and consults the other two teachers in order to take decisions that effect school life. The principal then convokes the council in order to listen to their opinions regarding the decisions that will be taken and to make the necessary adjustments. Parents agree that the principal is the school leader, but a participatory leader who continually takes them into consideration ... ”

(Costa Rica) “... (the principal) is considered to be a democratic leader; there is much commitment, with the delegation of responsibilities to working groups ... ”.

- Leadership is not concentrated in the figure of the principal.

Teachers, especially in more isolated communities, acquire an important leadership role, which is a result of other levels that de-personalize leadership.

(Bolivia) “ ... The principal has worked in the school for the last 4 years, having previously worked in the same post at another school. He lives at the school with his wife, who is a 5th grade teachers, and his two daughters. The perception that teachers have of the principal’s work is that of positive recognition, although they submit that he is a bit authoritarian. For my part, I noted that he established a good relationship with teachers, and is prepared professionally to support teachers ... ”.

“ ... As for his work, the principal recognizes the different areas of management; that is, he recognizes the importance of having contact with teachers, working with parents, and look after the administrative area and its relation with higher levels such as the school district ... ”.

(Colombia) “... Due to the tradition in rural areas of recognizing teachers as authority figures, many aspects of school and community life revolve around the teacher, who exercises a strong influence on the teaching community and who is supported by all residents – especially by parents of children studying in the school ... ”.

(Costa Rica) "... a friendly principal, identifies with his work ... is the driving force and controller of the educational process. Still, in spite of being a leader, the principal delegates most decisions to an assistant, who assumes this responsibility. Both administrators have the support of teachers and the rest of the school personnel ... in general, the director supports the entire process and sees to it that what is planned is carried out ...".

"... during the last two years, this school has had three principals. They begin very well, but soon run into problems. The current principal is a temporary nominee and is an excellent person, according to teachers and parents. She is a hard worker who likes to help others. She therefore gets along very well with all personnel and with the community, and has been able to successfully solve most problems ...".

"... Communication of the principal with all personnel is in both directions – horizontal and vertical, is good. At times, small problems appear with some personnel, but they are infrequent ...".

Theme: School norms

- The organisational climate reflects the presence of norms.
If we investigate further the inter-relation between teaching processes, learning, and the norm the organisation structures for itself, it becomes evident that the presence of norms is reflected within the organisational environment.
(Cuba) "... independently of some differences of a contextual nature, in the 30 visits to 5 schools one noted a very favourable environment, and general organisation, characterised by discipline, hard work on the part of teachers and students, as well as strict respect for class hours and the work day ...".
"... in the five schools, upon entering, students went directly to the area designated in order to begin the day's classes. There was a teacher in front or at the side of each group...".
- Norms appear frequently and officially in some document.
Written rules are more effective when they are consensual and are the result of the participation of education system actors in their elaboration.
(Colombia) "... According to the children, the written behavioural guidelines are few, but very important. Four years ago, a behaviour manual was prepared by collecting various ideas which parents wanted to be recognized within the school. Recently, the school administration selected some parents with whom they developed behaviour guidelines that would be accessible to all parents, teachers, and administrators. This brought together concerns, of the school administrators (principal and coordinator), contributions from the legal advisor, and the guidelines were then voted upon. They bring

together all aspects related to the rules that different members of the school community should follow, references to tardiness, personal hygiene of students, responsibilities for the care of children, and departure from the school."

"... as for the rules that apply to attendance at school, it was stated that they are few, since a large number are not needed, but that without them the school would become disorganized. These rules are agreed upon among teachers and parents, but it is recognized that they are not static, but can be changed, depending on needs of the school community ...".

"... the rules work through agreements. The teacher calls the children together and tells them that they are to come to an agreement. Among the main rules are those regarding silence during class, paying attention, not fighting, not using bad language because this will result in sanctions ...".

"... application of the norms of the M.E.P. ... utilizes a strategic education plan developed by the Administrative Support Committee. The school has an Instrumental Plan, M.E.P. Disciplinary Rules, and School Rules ...".

Theme: Academic decision-making models and relevant decision levels

- Decision models in these kind of schools are typified by the integration of managerial structure with a large number of actors in the education system. These are not decisions by committee; but levels are created in which decisions are first considered by different people, which leads to an increase in their rationality and acceptance.

(Argentina) "... it is the best (school) because they have to decide everything for themselves ...".

(decisions are taken) "... between everyone, the administration, the teachers. Of course, things that the principal has to decide are up to her; but still, we try to get agreement from everyone so that everyone participates and works ...".

"... first of all, (decisions) are taken by the principal and we are advised. Since we are united, we do everything she asks; we are in agreement ...".

(Bolivia) "... Parents make their complaints and problems known – which teachers work or do not, some parents come openly and watch a teacher... they sit there... they watch how the teacher works ... they complain directly ...".

(Costa Rica) "... In this school the study plans of the Ministry of Public Education are used, and teachers meet by level and do planning, taking as a basis these study plans. Still, group decision-making is used among teachers. In this context, curriculum updating is carried out, with the principal meeting individually with teachers ...".

“ ... this school develops M.P.E. programs. Teachers meet by level and carry out planning, using these programs as a basis. Each teacher in class takes into account the particular problems of each student (many grade repeaters with social problems), or rather puts his or her personal touch on each group, according to the needs of the students ... ”.

Theme: organisational culture

- Schools with outstanding results are based more on a pedagogical vision and positive interaction between actors than on resources.

(Colombia) “... Teachers organise their classes using the Escuela Nueva model as a base, dividing the themes according to the needs of their classrooms. In this case, time is not an obstacle ... ”.

“... physical space of the school is comprised of two classrooms in good repair but badly maintained, and two arbors that serve as meeting places or as rest areas, two bathrooms in disuse, and a cistern for storing rain water. The total area of the school is small, surrounded by barbed wire. Students do not have a play area ... ”.

“ ... there is no office equipment. Support material consists of Escuela Nueva program guides, sufficient in quantity for the number of students usually attending, a blackboard, chalk, a limited number of geography and biology posters, games, and locally-available materials. There is no library. Furniture is in satisfactory condition, and the sanitary and kitchen facilities are minimal ... ”.

“ ... in this school, the environment aids students, who are motivated and enthusiastic about daily classes. This climate is based on relations. These relations are based on confidence, affection, solidarity, and mutual respect among all actors involved in teaching and learning, particularly between teachers, students, and parents ... ”.

Of particular importance, particularly innovative, is the case of schools which feature a new role for students, with a degree of participation that is extraordinary.

(Colombia) “... in the school we see spontaneous participation on the part of students in activities. Calle Larga children, according to the principal, take a positive role in their education, suggesting activities to teachers that involve all grades. Observation showed students to be spontaneous in their behaviour during the school day, in and outside the classroom, having organised working groups in which they carry out activities to improve the school. These groups deal with clean-up, discipline, recreation and health, and are made up of students from all grades who assign responsibilities according to the age and abilities of each ... ”.

- The organisational culture of these schools is characterised by the constant search for and innovation of resources.
(Costa Rica) “... there is a concern on the part of teachers, administrators, and parents to provide the school with needed technological resources in order to make in a pleasant place to work ...”

- Plans, resources and visions are harmoniously and organisationally integrated with good interaction between actors.
(Argentina) “... this school has clearly defined its teaching priorities. In summary, it is a school that operates in an orderly fashion, one that analyses its own achievements ...”
“... We have observed schools that function well, with clear rules, whose students learn, who have incorporated behavioural norms which they manifest by being respectful, taking care with school property and learning material ...”
(Bolivia) “... the work carried out in the school reflects the balance between newly arrived teachers and the relative permanence of the principal who suggests certain practices ...”
(Venezuela) “... insisting very much on the importance of responsibility on the part of members, with their place within the organisation, and on co-operation through participation in defined areas of operation. Fulfilment of this responsibility is seen as a value of their institutional identity and “proof” of their success ...”
“... above all within a stimulating classroom environment, as well as the use of experimental teaching techniques or of innovations in organising the classroom. Classes are delivered according to very similar models which, it should be said, are influenced by the concepts and principles of management by projects ...”
“... One notes frequent interaction between teachers and students, high tolerance by teachers in dealing with students, control of activities, few discipline problems, and students relating to teachers based upon trust rather than fear ...”

Schools with outstanding results are not schools that always have smooth relations with the central level. Conflicts occasionally occur, in the face of which the school organisation should seek to respond rationally to demands that are made in absence of necessary resources, and which are not in line with the local situation of the school in question.

(Bolivia) “... I have only touched lightly on the reforms (because) we don't have anyone here who can guide us on how to present the modules. So I'm using them in my own way, you see. I have to extract themes for units one, two ... so I have to decide by myself what themes I'm going to use. If there

were an advisor who could guide us ... look, ever since last year when the reforms were begun, we haven't had even a short course on them ... ”.

“... similarly, I use the modules, try to apply the education reform ... but it is very difficult because, as I said, there is no training for the teachers. The teaching aid shows up once a month, it seems she has to cover several schools ... we try to do all that we can for the children, the activities included in the reform we try to carry out whenever we can. But sometimes the economic factor is overriding. In this area we don't have many parks. We don't have areas for relaxation. In the module it says, 'visit the countryside ... but in order to visit the countryside you naturally need resources, money for transportation. So I have only gone on field trips twice, which isn't enough to comply with the education reform. We also lack material. There is very little for teachers or for students. Nor are there modules to work on with all the students. There are very few modules, and this has an influence also on the progress of the children. In other activities the reform says to use discarded materials. We do, but there are materials that must be purchased, and at times the children don't have money to buy them. So this, in a sense, creates a conflict in the children; the education reform isn't applicable in its entirety ... ”.

Results in the area of teaching practice (classroom level)

Theme: Repertory of strategies and action principles carried out by teachers

- Teachers in schools with outstanding results successfully innovate in their strategies and action principles for learning achievement.

In some schools, we see an emphasis on this point, with a good inter-relation between the actors of the system, in which certain innovative practices come to the fore.

(Cuba) “... we seek to note the classroom climate by identifying the nature of inter-personal relations that prevail among students and between students and teachers. In regard to the latter, we can say that in the great majority of classes observed we noted a pleasant climate in which affability and respect prevailed. This can be seen in an objective manner by noting the following data: teachers are close to, but demanding of their students (they use colloquial and affective language, call students by their first names, demonstrate confidence in the ability of all to learn, stimulate and reinforce the active participation of all students, recognise individual differences of students, show enthusiasm and good humour during class ... ”.

(Venezuela) "... Class days usually begin with a presentation – that can be a review of the previous class session, with the aid of the blackboard and then continuing with the development of exercises that encourage participation, and using continual feed-back. During class periods, students don't exhibit anxiety. When exercises are not understood, they go back over them or consult the teacher. Getting things right is celebrated. The very few instances of discipline problems are controlled by recurring to general rules more than by sanctions..."

- These schools show an efficient use of instruction time and physical space by both teachers and students.

(Cuba) "... a teaching method that prevails in most classes: teachers move around the room in order to help maintain the students' attention ..."

"... as for the kind of class that these 10 teachers give, we can conclude the following: they create a classroom climate that is very favourable for learning, basing the relationship with students on affection, respect, and confidence combined with good humour, and without order and academic discipline. At the same time, they motivate the students and raise their self-esteem. All of this helps students ask questions and additional explanations when they don't understand something in class ..."

"... They favour the active participation of students in the acquisition of knowledge. They express themselves clearly and correctly, guiding students toward the proposed objectives, and relating new content with that already presented, and utilising good teaching methods.

"... They plan their work considering who the students are and what they can do. Therefore, the teachers diagnose student knowledge at the beginning of the school year and move forward from that point ..."

"... With some exceptions, (teachers) organise classes in a traditional manner; that is, with the entire class facing them, although they may move about to different parts of the classroom in order to facilitate maintaining the attention of the students ..."

- They grant importance to the diagnosis that should be done of every student. The diagnosis makes it possible to take into consideration both individual differences and to carry out a prognosis of the potential future progress of the group.

(Cuba) "... In a general sense, they state that the first thing they do is to carry out a diagnosis of the characteristics of the group and of each student, in order to recognise individual differences, motivate them, create exercises and activities, offer opportunities for everyone to participate in class ..."

- In schools with outstanding results there is greater communication between different actors of the education system.

(Cuba) "... The results are made known to students and their parents or guardians so that they know where errors lie and what to do to correct them. This serves to help the students themselves exercise self-control and to make the work more effective ...".

" ... When we correct something the teacher has said because we have checked with our parents or neighbours, she doesn't become angry; rather, we are stimulated. These and other similar expressions are heard from nine of ten groups of students interviewed. The tenth group stated, however, that they had never entered into a dispute with their teacher ...".

" ... When some of them don't understand the class content, the teacher explains once more, doesn't become angry, uses good form in addressing the students who have difficulties, asks other students if they understand the content, asks other questions before going back to the former subject that was asked about initially, asks people to think again before answering".

- These schools create activities that are integrated into the normal life of students, linking school, home, and community.

It is very interesting to note the capacity of these outstanding schools to create activities that go beyond the regular school day. Not in terms of assigned homework, but rather in terms of activities integrated into daily life, in which school, community, and home are linked together in a continuous flow.

(Argentina) "... It keeps them busy. They think only about school. They enter at 9 in the morning and leave at 1 in the afternoon, come for lunch, and by one-thirty are already back at school. They leave school at three-thirty or four because there is farm work. And so, they arrive home with a lot of homework that goes on until 10 or 11:30 at night and they have to sleep because they are tired out from the homework. They are always thinking about school. They study and study, while in other areas this doesn't happen. They give them so much homework!".

(Colombia) "... the subject of motivation in reading has two points of view. While one of the teachers thinks that one should motivate children by talking to them about the importance of reading and of creating reading habits, the other teacher thinks that the problem of reading stems from the laziness of the children and from the lack of support from parents. It is important to begin to create strategies through the parents, so that the little reading that the children do can be put to use in the analysis of the reading itself. The children say that reading is boring sometimes, but by reading you learn a lot".

- Changes in classes can be observed in a group activity of joint thought and reflection.

The teacher motivates, co-ordinates, directs; but is not the only active person. This is key in the success of these schools.

(Colombia) "... one of the teachers interviewed develops classes through democratic participation, leadership, and co-operation – reinforcing processes of analysis, argument, communication skills, and the development of critical thought through group work ...".

"... The other teacher begins classes with a motivation session, followed by an introduction to the theme to be developed. Finally, everyone joins in discussing, constructing concepts, and concluding the session...".

- These schools utilise errors in a non-traditional manner.

Few, if any places live well with error. In a traditional classroom environment, it is the teacher who possesses the knowledge. The teacher cannot ever be wrong. This is brought up in a number experiences related in the analysed texts, in which errors are transformed into educational opportunities.

(Colombia) "... errors committed in the classroom are seen as additional opportunities to gain knowledge, in which students review the "why?" and "how?" of the error in order to seek alternatives that offer responses to the situation presented. Students view mistakes as learning tools, in that they present a mistaken mental process from which one may learn. When a student commits a mistake, the teacher corrects the mistake without chastising the student...".

- Play is considered to be an effective pedagogical alternative.

Play has not traditionally been considered to be a school activity; rather, it has tended to be relegated to the context of pre-school or primary education. This study suggests the need for a re-definition of play within school.

(Colombia) "... Among the motivation strategies utilised to develop classes, play is one of the key tools. By using play, physical abilities are developed, and classes become more enjoyable for students. In terms of reading, the students say they like to read comics in the Sunday paper when they don't have anything to do. Some of them have read such books as One-Hundred Years of Solitude and say that by reading one learns as much as by thinking writing ...".

"... Teachers organise activities using puzzles, modelling clay, games of television programs and lotteries, among others, in which the children are asked to create and in order to make classes more interesting ...".

"... Nevertheless, independently of the teaching method employed, success depends on the student's motivation ...".

Play acquires importance in the strategies of these kinds of schools. Especially in mathematics, and in the different countries, innovations are carried out in teaching strategies through play-like activities.

(Bolivia) “... Interviewer: What kinds of games?” “... Teacher: in language, I am organising a kind of puzzle and I try to make it fun for the children ...” Interviewer: “And how do you motivate the children with these activities?” Teacher: “According to what I am doing, I always assign different activities. So when I have to teach, for example, sciences, I ask them to bring objects, like maps for example, and I ask them to design maps with patches of wool and not with colours ...” Interviewer: “Have you always worked liked that?” Teacher: “Yes, and I have always achieved good results ...”. “... I think that, ever since kindergarten, if its possible to work in groups – since they have always worked individually they aren’t co-operative ... so I have tried to get them to work in groups, and since we have round tables, I’ve tried to take advantage of this ...”.

- One notes a climate of trust between students and teachers. Successful teaching strategies depend upon trust between interlocutors. Good motivation is based on the establishment of a climate of trust between students and teachers.

(Colombia) “... Among identified motivational strategies is that of creating a climate of trust so that students are able to say what they feel and so there is a relaxed atmosphere for learning. This also involves speaking to parents so they can give permission for the student to investigate in certain places as a way of overcoming timidity. Students say that during free time the teacher has them practice reading and arithmetic. They state that at school and at home they read newspapers, magazines, notebooks, books, and guides. Reading helps them to learn how to behave and to develop their memories ... those who most encourage their reading are teachers and parents ...”.

- School is a pleasant place for students. Making school a pleasant place for students is also a key element in strategies for success. On this point, the texts consulted are unanimous.

(Colombia) “... Teachers recognise that in motivating to learn, the student’s own motivation is directly involved and his or her desire to be in school. For children, the most attractive classes are English, natural sciences, and mathematics. The activities they most enjoy are reading and writing fables, as well as arithmetic exercises – especially the difficult ones because these make them think, and the have fun working them out ...”.

An interesting teaching perspective is to design the teaching of different subjects according to a survey of the community, taking into account the needs of

the local community and of students. Instruction time is then based on this diagnosis, within a dynamic that clearly may bother central administrators.

(Colombia) "... Time management in this school obeys a dynamic that follows the interpretation of teachers in response to requests from the school community. So, since the community unanimously asked to emphasise work on language and math, the time dedicated to these subjects has been adjusted to respect that request..."

- Within the same perspective, there is an emphasis on the importance of aligning instructional programs with the demands of reality.

With every-day life becoming the central focus, the result is the creation of enormously innovative experiences, which demonstrate how this focus and the utilisation of its elements makes it possible to develop extremely useful teaching perspectives.

(Argentina) "... There is within the PEI a reading and writing project ... What is hardest for them is to interpret the instructions, because since one uses other terms, other forms, they don't understand. One then has to translate into a more familiar idiom .. (...) I am very strict with reading. For me, it is the key to learning. I give them a reading to be read at home, several times. Then we will talk it – what the theme is, the characters in the story, and then we go back and re-read it ..."

"... Starting from the practical, doing things 'in situ'. I believe in the practical ... seeing reality, living it, not only imagining it. And I believe that this helps the children a great deal. I don't know if its innovative ... I believe that in school in the village, or the city, maybe one couldn't do this. I don't know if its innovative – maybe different ..."

"... I begin with a general theme, which almost always has to do with part of a farm. And then come the specific activities... it takes an effort ... and there are always different levels within the groups. They are few in number, but each is a world apart; each is a separate person. Some find it easy, and others find it difficult ... distinct, differentiated work has to be done"

(Bolivia) "... You take a subject, 'sources of water' for example, the plants in a community can be a source, right? And this is part of an improvement project from which one has to extract the most important parts. The teacher always used to dictate.

- The importance of planning is emphasised as a central element in the repertory of teaching strategies developed by the schools studied.

(Bolivia) '... They always work through planning – planning is done daily or for an entire week within a project, as we say, a weekly project or more, or under a teaching situation and no longer for just one day. And there are extra-curricular activities such as activities for historic dates. Then we cel-

celebrate in the afternoon when a unit is completed, you know? Extra-curricular would be this. And the teacher workshops are on Saturdays, and not during regular classes. We don't waste time here ...”.

- The importance of daily routine is emphasised.

During its daily routine, a class follows a rhythm set by the conjunction of students, teacher, and the learning activity – the very opposite of a chaotic situation. The text below shows how, in a class with no strict discipline, in spite of apparent disorder, daily routines predominate that make possible interaction between students and teacher.

(Bolivia) “... *The first thing the teacher does is take role. The classroom is tumultuous. There is a great deal of racket. The teacher's voice is calm. She uses no kind of strategy to control the class ... The teacher appoints a student to divide library books among the class and tells them to read for 10 minutes. Once the students have the books in hand, they open them – some with interest and some without (especially the older students. Most read aloud. Their voices are penetrating.*

“... There are 30 students. It is 9:20 in the morning. The teacher stops the lecture without prior notice and begins to distribute files. Students who receive the file close the book and take it to the shelf, crawling over desks, bothering their colleagues who are seated, or going along a narrow aisle between desks, where I arrived at the last desk; otherwise I wouldn't have made it. After distributing the files the teacher presents the Language 6 module. When the students receive the module, a few begin to read, while others do what the module indicates. Others don't open it, and others ask what the teacher is going to do, who is with the group in front, who seems to tell them what they have to do. It is difficult to hear anything. There is a great deal of racket, and it is not racket involved with sharing work, or organising discussion groups on a theme. Those who are not interested in the module are talking and making noise. The teacher says nothing. It appears that this noise doesn't bother her.

- Teacher training is valued.

Teacher training is a basis for the development of teaching strategies. This is shown in several interviews in this study.

(Bolivia) Interviewer: “Do you think that the school helps children to get ahead?..” Teacher: “Yes, but a great deal depends on the teacher and on others (and on whether) we have training, because the system is changing, and we ask, ‘how should we work?’ They should train us more ... and it would be good if they trained us all to work in teams ... it would be great if we could work together. That is what is missing most. We attend the courses that are available ...”.

- Problems are well-managed.

The situations diagnosed through the interviews and observations reveal that not everything is positive in these schools. Problems occur. But within a manageable context, and infrequently.

(Bolivia) Interviewer: “... How do you assess student behaviour?” Teacher: “... there are rebellious children; in which case I sometimes have to talk to the father. Many parents don’t come to the school. Perhaps the children don’t tell them, or they forget ... I have a boy who is a terror, and a girl who is a problem, but a problem because she has had problems with her parents fighting. It was chaos. I didn’t know what to do with this girl. She bothered everyone. No one wanted to sit next to her. I think that every school should have a psychologist to treat the children because we work with so many students ...”.

- Teachers place much emphasis on the students’ reading skills.

Pleasure in reading and the emphasis placed by teachers on reading practice appears as a key element in the teaching strategies developed in these kinds of schools.

(Bolivia) “... (the students) love it, and the games as well. Yesterday I didn’t bring these games because I had to work with the books because there are children who are failing in reading ...”.

“... we are doing silent reading for 10 minutes per day at the beginning of classes. The children read, according to their preferences. At least in my class we work with numbered cards. There are 33 books, and my objective up to the end of the year is for each child to read the 33 books. They read them and mark off in their notebooks how many they have read, which books they haven’t yet read. They come back and ask to read the same book ...”.

- One notes an effort to contextualise what students learn in math classes.

(Bolivia) “... In mathematics we work with reasoning ability so they can master subtraction, because math is abstract for children. If we don’t get the child to understand we may make him or her hate this subject as many people now do. ‘Mathematics!’ they say, and become frightened. So with the children we need to always begin with intuition ... and give them an idea of what mathematics is. Not just go to the blackboard and learn by rote as before. They need to know ‘why’ two and two are four, but to explain to them why ... this reasoning skill is important. They need to be able to think through these operations so the child can apply them to everyday situations like making purchases and selling things. Children already know, those just starting already know ... they are now more open, and they know how much meat they are to bring. I think, then, that this helps us more than anything ...”.

“... I have seen progress, especially in mathematics. With the traditional program, the children had to recognise what kind of operations they had to carry out. But now in this case we have given them problems which even the less capable are able to solve. We have obtained a response because, as my colleague said, we don't just do an assessment each semester. Assessment is done daily, and the children respond ...”

- Another element favouring learning in mathematics is working in groups. Group work in mathematics is mentioned in various texts, and by teachers who make reference to the effectiveness of working collectively to solve problems, where each child helps the other.

(Bolivia) (referring to work in mathematics) “... it is in groups because, if someone can't solve a problem, another will show him or her what they have learned. Learning is from one to another, because we learn from the children ...”.

“... in the case of math, assessment has to be of how they think, reason for themselves, trying not to be egoistic, but it has to be individual. When we can, we encourage sharing in a class. But every human being must be an individual ...”.
- Homework is not emphasised. Homework does not appear as a constant in the teaching strategies of these schools. It would seem that the trend is toward developing intense activity within the school so that the child will continue this process outside the school, but not as “homework”.

(Bolivia) “... I think that children don't like homework. In-class activity, at least in my classroom, there is more activity within the course. We take more time to carry out activities and homework in mathematics, is one problem for each – one of addition, one of subtraction, and another of multiplication. Its the same for writing. For example, at first, we assigned two pages, four pages for each exercise. The child isn't going to do it. The best thing would be to repeat five or seven times. I think activities should be completed in the classroom. There, help is available from the teacher, from colleagues, there is always someone who knows more than the others ...”.

(Bolivia) “... Homework consists of exercises and practice ... as they say, ‘practice makes perfect’, so homework is good, but it shouldn't be excessive. Depending on the grade, since the little ones start with sentences ...”.
- These schools emphasise adapting study plans and programs to the characteristics of the students.

Emphasis is on the need to fit curricular plans and programs to the child's needs. This is mentioned constantly in the texts, and is a comment on the lack of realism of central administrations.

(Argentina) "... I look for a basis for integrating the three years, selecting content according to the year. At times it gets a bit complicated because there is a great difference between the 1st and 3rd years. But I always try to seek a balance. I adapt activities to each year of the cycle ..."

(Bolivia) (question to a principal, referring to practices considered to be most valuable) What, valuable practices should be kept? "... I think that for content, first of all the child needs to be able to read and to write, do sums, at least that is what I saw to first – ask them to make up little stories, and the children were clever ... I think that the as for program content, what the education reform should do is to revise program content and to look for subjects that are useful for the child, and based upon this plan activities, also taking into account the experience of the teacher ..."

"... The teacher knows how each subject should be treated ... the reform only states that things should be done dynamically and creatively; teachers were already doing this. I mean, the reform isn't a novelty; it has only put a few things on paper, things that teachers were already doing ..."

Theme: Administration of classroom resources, curricula, and of class time

- Physical space is used as a resource in a number of ways.

In some cases, tables are distributed in a group pattern; in others, desks face the front of the room. This does not appear to be a determining or significant factor in obtaining results.

(Cuba) "... In the great majority of classrooms visited, student desks were aligned toward the front of the room facing the teacher ... only 20% organised students into small groups or teams to which separate or common tasks were assigned. Only 12.5% could be classified as individualised classes. On the other hand, the distribution of students within the classroom varied according to the task at hand ..."

"... all of the above was accompanied by one teaching method that prevailed in most classrooms: teachers moved about the room as a way to maintain the attention of the students ..."

"... all classes have two-student desks, a bit time-worn, and built-in blackboards. They also have simple, hand-made display stands upon which teachers place objects fashioned by students. There are also new assembled bookshelves which contain classroom libraries and modules. Teachers also have chairs and desks where they can keep their things ..."

“... Teachers organise students in different ways: in groups, with desks facing each other or around the room. One teacher says that being able to place desks about the room allows her to open up a central area for activities with the students. Teachers also say that sometimes they place the desks in a traditional pattern”.

- As stated above, most of these schools are characterised by efficient management of classroom resources.

(Costa Rica) “... In this school, resources are very well-managed. The principal has very good relations with the Education Council, as well as with the members of the School Association, which functions quite well ...”.

“... There is a general curriculum management model: principals monitor its progress, see to it that the plan is followed, observe classes, and stimulate planning by level or in parallel groups ...”.

“... an advantage of this situation is that they provide curricular planning; but they don’t actively participate in it. They also foster in-house training of teachers, which is very important for education as a whole. But in some cases this interferes with the normal class schedule ...”.

- In various cases, school hours tend to extend to the entire day.

(Argentina) “... The school offers classes for half of the day, and parents permit the children to stay for the entire day to do workshops ... they don’t mind ... since they have placed high expectations on the school ...”.

- Material conditions are generally satisfactory, especially due to the care that teachers take in this matter.

(Bolivia) “... first, second, and fourth grade primary classes operate under good conditions. Classrooms are spacious (7x8 meters) and well-ventilated, with large windows in three of the four walls. Therefore, there is a refreshing breeze which, according to the teachers, doesn’t permit student papers to be displayed on the walls. For such display, papers are hung on lines that have been strung from one wall to another ...”.

(Venezuela) “... the classroom is rectangular, with a window in one wall. The front wall has a blackboard, with student desks facing it, organised in rows or with work tables distributed in blocks. The teacher’s desk is next to the blackboard. On the other walls, posters containing regulations create an institutional image ...”.

“... Besides the student desks and the teacher’s desk, there are one or two fans, waste baskets, and shelves that are used at times for classroom libraries. The areas are well-ventilated and lighted. They are comfortable for the number of students, that varies from 30 to 35. Only in the Madre Cabrini School are the dimensions such that this number of students cannot move

about easily from one area to another. The other classrooms have dimensions that are adequate for the groups they house, making it possible to change the arrangement of school desks for different kinds of activities – for group work, for example. Even so, the school desks here and those at the Republica Dominicana School are attached to one another in rows, making it difficult to change the organisation of the classroom ...”.

“... in summary, the five schools possess the equipment necessary to carry out their educational activities. Although it is generally minimal, some differ in the variety and quantity of equipment available. Some schools are better-equipped, with a large variety of teaching resources. This is particularly the case of the Santiago Marino School, followed by the Madre Cabrini and Republica Dominicana Schools. The Francisco Miranda School is sufficiently equipped for the number of students served, the kind of activities it carries out, and the length of the school day. It could, undoubtedly, be improved and enlarged ...”.

- As stated above, the number of students per teacher is generally satisfactory in these classes, and lower than average in the Latin American context.

(Bolivia) Teacher “... During the ten years that I have worked here the number of students has always been low, as has the number of courses. This favours both teachers and students because, as my colleague stated, we are concerned for each student. We know the problems that they have, in order to help them and teach each one of them ...”.

(Bolivia) “... The number of students per classroom is between 20 and 25 ...”.

Theme: pedagogical perspective

- Particular pedagogical perspectives are not clearly identified within the teaching situation.

(Colombia) “...There is no institutionalised pedagogical model. Each teacher follows a structure depending upon his or her tools ...”.

(Colombia) “... In the 3rd grade, the pedagogical model used is related to constructivism – a theory that gives teachers the opportunity to organise activities according to the children with whom they are working ...”.

“... In 4th grade, teaching practice is guided by a “hexagons” model which is oriented toward achieving objectives through didactic measures, themes, classroom resources, and assessment ...”.

“... Parents are not very familiar with the methodology used by teachers. But they believe that teachers communicate very well with their students. Writing skills are emphasised, with children being encouraged to write in their notebooks, on the board, and creating a dynamic, keeping them very

active. Many games are employed – teaching uses puzzles, and the children learn much more, developing things like mental agility at the same time ... ”.

Note should be made of the pedagogical model called “Escuela Nueva” in Colombia, one which seems to be strongly related to successful results.

(Colombia) “... Activities such as this have resulted in closer ties to the community and to parents, and are attributed to the “Escuela Nueva” model which is currently being used. Teachers say that one of the advantages of the model is that it has an impact on the life of the community and involves parents in the school, leading them to learn along with their children ... ”.

Some texts recognise the influence of the pedagogical perspective called “conductivism”.

(Costa Rica) “... The methodological structure is that of ‘conductivism’. Teachers use directive methods, centred on copying dictation. They exercise strong control through review of their students’ workbooks. The relationships with students are authoritarian, with students obliged to follow all directions ... this stimulates convergent thinking, fostering the same exercises and the same results. However, they at times carry out activities that foster student participation, such as cutting articles out of newspapers, or work in groups ... ”.

“... in teaching Spanish, teachers use a traditional pedagogical perspective, illustrating an approach that assumes “I know that you (the students) don’t know”. At no time is the children’s’ knowledge utilised. It is important to note, however, that at times some attempts have been made to innovate, such as having students make a collage with newspaper clippings, or recite poetry ... ”.

“... no moving about is permitted during lessons. Students may not interact ... most times, student desks are in rows, with silent students listening to their teacher or doing exercises. On one occasion, there was an innovative activity that consisted of constructing a grammar album using newspaper clippings ... ”.

- Interesting trends appear, such as the maximum use of natural materials found outside the school, working with the concrete, use of play as a central teaching resource, incorporation of computers ...

The above notwithstanding, there are descriptions in the texts examined which combine diverse elements without clearly defining any particular pedagogical perspective.

(Argentina) “... See to it that the children, who are our natural material, the material we have to work with, learn, are educated, in the best way possible ... give them the tools so that in the coming years they can survive ... everything that one believes is the best ... ”.

(Colombia) “... Parents, although they are not familiar with the model used to education their children, think that one of the activities that most contributes to the learning of their children is the time they spend with computers; as well as all of the activities they see as dynamic ...”.

(Costa Rica) “... When teaching mathematics, the teacher has a very different perspective – relating the child to everything that surrounds him in order to prepare him both intellectually and socially ... she doesn’t believe in planning. For developing her work, she begins working individually with students so that each one feels secure and has self-confidence, thus increasing academic achievement ...”.

(Venezuela) “... Comments made by the children indicate that the environments we have described are also the result of use made by teachers of attractive teaching tactics: story-telling, drawings, materials to be put together, interactive math, and investigation, as well as emotional intelligence techniques ...”.

“... Working from the concrete to the abstract, using everything around us as resources. Writing exercises on the blackboard, and the children copy them and work them out, distributing material written on a variety of subjects, playing games with simple answers so that students can answer out loud ...”.

“(the teacher)... likes to use concrete materials, with posters made into collages. Parents help by sending clippings from magazines, bottle caps, lids, tokens, and other things. Each day, tasks are assigned to be done at home ...”

“... Students say that they enjoy studying math: numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. This is emphasised by parents as well, who say that their children ‘spend time every day doing sums and counting’, ‘although it is not easy for him, I see that my son enjoys doing math homework ...’”.

- The explanatory method, in which only the teacher is active, while students remain passive appears undesirable compared to the use of heuristic dialogue.

(Cuba) “... It is interesting to see that only in 15% of the classes observed was an essentially explanatory method used- characterised by the active participation of teachers and a passive role of most students. In 75% of the classes a heuristic dialogue method was used, in which knowledge was constructed with active participation of the students ...”.

- The most frequently mentioned method, and the one which seems to prevail is that which establishes a different relationship with students, and where there is affection, respect, and trust.

(Cuba) “... A classroom climate is created that is very conducive to learning, with teachers basing their relationships with students on affection, re-

spect, and trust, along with good humour without this resulting in a loss of order or academic discipline. Thus, students are motivated and their self-esteem is raised. All of this facilitates their asking questions, requesting explanations when they don't understand something in class ...”.

Some texts describe this perspective by listing characteristics of teachers: those who encourage student participation, who express themselves clearly, who are objective-oriented, who exhibit mastery of their subjects; who plan their work and support students with difficulties. Is it enough, in any case, for these positive attitudes and behaviour come basically from teachers?

- Teacher characteristics mentioned in the texts:
 1. Favour active student participation in acquisition of knowledge; express themselves clearly and correctly; guide students toward proposed objectives; relate new content with that already presented; utilise effective teaching methods.
 2. Demonstrate sufficient mastery of content and teaching techniques; as well as confidence in their treatment.
 3. Present class objectives clearly, and in general see to it that students understand the value of new content.
 4. Plan their work, taking into account student characteristics and abilities. In so doing, they evaluate individual student skills at the beginning of the term and track these skills during the school year.
 5. They concern themselves with students who demonstrate learning difficulties and support them in overcoming their problems. They review and correct student in-class tasks and homework in detail.
 6. With few exceptions, they organise classes in a traditional manner; that is, in a lecture-style arrangement, although they move about the classroom in order to maintain the attention of *students*.

(Bolivia) “...(a teacher talking about how to motivate students) ... Well, we now try to work with them using more material, more structures where the class has to be attractive to the student ... the student must construct his or her own knowledge ... when we speak of ‘constructivism’, because here we have been working with change-focused programs for four years. So we are trying to take an essentially constructivist approach ... and holding on to the positive things from traditional methods, because you can’t reject everything they offer ... there is something good to be used and integrated into the new approach ...”.

“... before, they talked about the teacher being the model, right? For teachers, they were the ones who led ... if we take into account that in our country, unfortunately, we have very few creative people ... I think this is due to the former approach in which we spent the whole day with pre-packaged programs that never got anywhere. On the other hand, in this new approach,

students produce texts, children are more creative, and I think children are going to produce more, so we will have well-prepared graduates who are more aware of what they are doing, and will have much better-prepared professionals as well ...”.

(Colombia) “...The most important thing in the use of the Escuela Nueva model is that teachers become advisors – not people who possess the knowledge, but rather people who direct and guide children within the educational process. Within the pedagogical model, instruction continues to be the main element of knowledge, why remembering to see students as whole beings ...”.

(Cuba) “... “... It is interesting to see that only in 15% of the classes observed was an essentially explanatory method used- characterised by the active participation of teachers and a passive role of most students. In 75% of the classes a heuristic dialogue method was used, in which knowledge was constructed with active participation of the students ...”.

- The trend predominates to not classify students.

Of note is a perspective that attempts to not rank or classify students. This naturally places into the question traditional assessment techniques.

(Bolivia) (Teacher referring to her own way of classifying students) “... I don’t try to classify them by, ‘these are the best, these are average...’ because the kids themselves do it among themselves – saying so-and-so is this or that way. Nor do I reprimand them. Other (teachers) use rough language, but I don’t treat them like that ...”.

- At the heart of the change in perspective in the schools studied is the absence of authoritarian methods in teaching and in relating to students.

(Bolivia) Teacher “ ... I can say that every teacher has a way of helping students to improve, because we try to introduce games or some other activity to they can understand, because in real life its like that, as constructivism says. We don’t limit them. We get the children to express themselves because before, with the cane they learned, but not any more. Children now are more aware, with television and everything. So you can no longer treat them in the old way ...”.

- In some cases, pedagogical orientations coming from the central level are not well-received, however new they may be.

(Bolivia) “... Enrolments have dropped... some of the old students are here, and 50% are new. Therefore, we decided to use (mixed) methods because this course was totally reform-based. They were so far behind ... parents didn’t like the Education Reform ... (asked how she knows this) ... the direction comes from the parents ...”.

Theme: Level of professional commitment of teachers

- One notes a high degree of commitment of teachers with their tasks. A high level of commitment on the part of teachers allows them to face many sacrifices and overcome the fact that much is lacking in their professional lives. The cases studied confirm the high level of teacher commitment. They find their work gratifying and attempt to establish a relationship of affection with students.

(Chile) "... A teacher attributes success in school primarily to the commitment of colleagues and to teamwork of teachers: "... I think that due to the personal commitment of each colleague because when one takes over a classroom, that's your classroom and so you defend the interests of your children ... its not important if they didn't receive it during the previous year. You accept them as your own and try to move them ahead as best you can ... at least here there is team work, working along the same lines at the subject level ...".

(Colombia) "... In general, teachers find much satisfaction in their activities, which has generated a feeling of commitment in face of the needs of children in area 10 ... their hopes are centred here, which leads them to not think about transferring ...".

In contrast to committed teachers are those who teach as a means of survival. The latter situation is not found, it appears, in the outstanding schools.

(Colombia) "... Another variable that impacts the learning processes of children is related to the level of commitment that teachers have to their profession. When a teacher. When a teacher finds in his or her profession the need for daily knowledge in relating to children, that is a teacher who will mark their lives. But when the opposite is the case – a teacher who simply understands that teaching is a way to survive, he or she is limited to putting in time without being involved in the process of all of us, affecting the learning of children ...".

The commitment of teachers leads them to not only do a good job professionally, but also is linked to the expectations they have for their students. It is not a case, however, of achieving good results, but rather of having a positive and comprehensive impact on the children under their tutelage.

(Argentina) "... Everything that I have built here has been the result of many hours of reading, much information... I don't know if it is what many other teachers do. Some people are not interested in their careers and in obtaining good results ...".

(Colombia) "... In general, some teachers hope, that with their support and the support of the school, that children and their families will be happy and that however much or little they learn will be useful to them in the future ...".

- Parents attribute outstanding results to the work of teachers.

In these schools, parents, as mentioned above, generally remain aware of what happens in them, and particularly attribute outstanding results to the committed work of teachers.

(Argentina) "... because here the teachers who are currently working are very industrious. For example (teacher X) is a man who, ever since he arrived ... has always been active. Those of us who were born and raised here, we don't have his kind of dedication to work. Because the truth is, the kids are learning what is going to be useful to them always. Learning little, surely, because the rest one learns by working. But they go ahead ... they have the possibility of learning to till the earth, learn to rear animals, all of this ...".

(Colombia) "... On the other hand, parents feel that the school lacks many things, the classrooms are ugly, deteriorated, there aren't enough books for the children, almost no water, the cafeteria is no great shakes. In spite of this, the children have improved by 100% because the teachers are excellent ... their achievement is also due to the help that parents give ...".

(Costa Rica) "... The teacher is very concerned for the learning of the children. She is constantly concerned that they learn. She repeats things as many times as necessary and reviews all of their work. Parents speak of the teacher as a person who is truly concerned for the learning of her students ...".

"... Commitment is very high, which is reflected in daily planning. The teacher is flexible with the children ...".

"... The commitment of the teacher to the school and to the students is very high. She has a knack for teaching, an almost mystical sense of service ...".

"... The teacher is always concerned that her students learn and wants all of them to have the best marks. She has a permanent concern. This is confirmed by parents and by the children in focus groups ...".

"... she enjoys her work. According to parents, 'she chose her profession very well' ... she is a very outstanding person, very professional and demanding ...".

Differences in commitment and vocation, which seem to exist among teachers, are often attributed to the training they receive at specialised schools that are traditional in Latin American countries, such as the so-called "normal schools".

(Colombia) "... as for human resources, they are envied by other schools due to the quality of the teachers who work there and due to the commitment that these teachers generally show toward the school. Some teachers attribute this commitment to the fact that these teachers are normal school graduates, where one learns to work with commitment ...".

(Bolivia) Teacher: "... I am a normal school graduate, working since '93, and have done my two years in the provinces" (she tells me where she has

worked). Interviewer: “Do you like your profession?” Teacher: “Yes, teaching them something, so they are happy ...”.

At times, outstanding results are attributed exclusively to activities of teachers. (Argentina) “... Everything depends on the teacher – 100% of the level of teaching in any school depends on the teacher. If the teacher is good, industrious, and likes the work, I can assure you that the result will be students with a very high level. Where there is no industriousness, where teachers don’t have a vocation for the work, the level is not good, that I can guarantee ...”.

“... the commitment of teachers to their tasks and to their profession, you can see expressed in the interest in ‘obtaining good results’. This as a shared objective in all cases ... this, together with their level of community involvement are quite exceptional in these isolated, poor areas ...”.

Teachers who are committed and possess a vocation base much of their teaching strategy on close and friendly contact with students.

(Argentina) “... So when you see a child who might have some difficulty ... because we know the family histories of each student, and when one thinks about the child, one thinks about all the variables (so) before anything else, the first thing I do is to talk to them and try to reach their hearts, the affective part...”.

Committed teachers generally establish a good relationship with parents, who eventually perceive the teacher’s level of commitment.

(Bolivia) A father “... Parents, all parents, expect that their children learn well. Here I see the teachers who are teaching well; I see the achievement of the youngsters, of my children ... Right? ...”.

Theme: Teacher expectations of students

- In these schools, teachers expect students to learn a great deal and that grade advancement rates will be high.

(Costa Rica) “... the teacher is very hopeful that students will learn much, and her wish is to have a very high grade advancement rate. Parents comment that she helps them so they may study with their children at home ...”.

“... they are very high; she wants to have high advancement rates in mathematics. This is shown in the effort taken with content acquisition and in constant review of student notebooks. Parents are very satisfied with this teacher’s work, as are her students who like her a great deal ...”.

- One sees a concern for the comprehensive development of students.
(Costa Rica) “... In general, the teacher expects that children will pass the reading course; not only to obtain a grade but also that they will learn to use words and wholly incorporate them. She is also concerned that the children learn to work independently. For this reason, she assigns homework, making sure it is the children, and not their families, who do the work ...”.
“... contribute to the intellectual and social development of children; not only so they will pass the grade, but also to aid in their comprehensive development ...”.

- One notes that teachers seek to prepare students for the environment in which they live, avoiding out – migration.
(Argentina) “... Although we have to prepare the children so they know how to develop their abilities here, there, or anywhere ... we know that ... but above all we have to prepare them as well as possible for the place in which they live, so they won’t leave – in order to avoid out-migration...”.
(Argentina) “... and this genuine concern of teachers ... that they take as a personal challenge, that the experience of each child in the school will be one of success, that the school be a happy place in their lives ...”.

- Respecting students who have problems, teachers try to have them be as the others.
(Argentina) “...theoretically, she would be a candidate for a special course. But I try to offer her an abundance of possibilities so she won’t be discriminated against, so she will be like the other girls. Her pace is slower, but it bothers me because she’s a girl, and for me, she has to be a girl like the others; she has to learn ...”.

Theme: material resources for classroom activities

- There are major differences in the use of classroom material.
(Argentina) “... The availability of all kinds of teaching and bibliographic material and economic resources is shared by the three schools, and makes possible effective functioning of the school due to the possibility of receiving as well money, fuel, gifts, technical assistance for the greenhouse and livestock pens...”.
“... from the point of view of the students, the availability of learning materials, books, etc., makes possible becoming familiar with different stimuli in order to increase their knowledge and to compensate, in part, for their lack of cultural and social capital...”.

(Bolivia) “... in Cochabamba, ... in populated areas, there are two schools on each street, with all the necessities, or they say, ‘we’re going to build another one over there’ ... with modern infrastructure, with everything required, including a full range of courses, desks, tables, everything necessary ... computers ... I think it would be more beneficial for the children... but in schools like this one in the countryside, were there aren’t even individual desks ...”.

(Bolivia) “... in this school, in this area in general, there is no electricity or potable water – only a well that is not very deep to supply teachers and students. The well is near a privy at the side of the school (in the afternoons the teachers go to a relatively quiet river some 300 meters away from the village where they bathe and wash their things ...”.

(Bolivia) “... Currently, the infrastructure conditions of the school are very good. The building is new, having been inaugurated in 1999. This included installations in line with the education reform program. Classrooms have hexagonal tables, chairs, large bookshelves which are empty. Recently the reform program delivered storage dressers that are being kept in the school office. The teachers were assigned to organise them, some during the winter vacations or the last day of classes. The teachers store their smocks, chalk and class notebooks there, although we know that the purpose of these furnishings is to store the education reform materials such as classroom libraries and learning modules ...”.

“... the classrooms are large and well-ventilated, with windows facing the street and the walkway which is covered with a material to let light through. Electric lighting consists of 9 fluorescent lights per classroom. There are waste baskets in each. Teachers have desks and chairs ...”.

(Chile) “... in the government-subsidised private schools the infrastructure is better, more modern and more spacious compared to the municipal schools visited. The private subsidised schools are in buildings made of reinforced concrete and on two levels, first and second floors. In contrast, the municipal schools are one story in groups of 4 or 5 rooms. They are “temporary structures designed to last no more than 15 years, and built in the 1960s ...”.

(Costa Rica) “... The classroom is spacious, clean, and newly painted, with desks, a window, and shelving...”.

“... the room is of appropriate dimensions (height and width) to house the students. It has natural light and sufficient ventilation ...”.

“... The school has a blackboard, stencil machine, photocopy machine, a television set, tape recorder, sound equipment, VHS, and fax ...”.

“... The school is constructed on flat and spacious terrain. It has five modules on one floor and 26 classrooms: 3 for resources (2 for learning problems and one for emotional problems), 2 integrated rooms (for the mentally retarded). It also has a large cafeteria, snack room, video room, kitchen,

computer lab, dental clinic, 7 rest rooms, a faculty room, sports area, and library. In the front there is a multi-use facility (gymnasium, student body meeting area) ... ”.

(Cuba) “... The physical state of the schools included in this study varies; one cannot generalise, therefore, and it will be better to describe each case. The Camilo Cienfuegos School in the city of Habana is a provisional structure that has ended up being permanent due to the inability to construct another building in its place. The roof is composed of fibre tiles, with small cracks that allow the rain to come through. During summers, the roof radiates a great deal of heat. In spite of this, the general physical environment of the school is pleasant ... ”.

“... as for equipment, we note that all schools have television sets and new VHS videocassette machines, as part of a nation-wide audio-visual program which provides all school with a weekly supply of instructional and cultural videocassettes which are intended to support curricular development and the general preparation of students and teachers ... ”.

“... all schools have the same textbooks and workbooks for each student and in all subjects, which they receive free of charge ... ”.

(Venezuela) “... All present a basic minimum infrastructure, and are relatively comfortable and clearly differentiated for school tasks, independently of the size of the physical plant. This basic infrastructure consists of administrative offices, classrooms, an auditorium, a central library, a courtyard used for recreation, and sanitary facilities ... ”.

- The resources of schools with outstanding results are used efficiently. These schools probably do not stand out for the quantity of resources, but rather for efficient use that teachers make of the resources available to them.

(Colombia) “... According to teachers, the school has a library which is the most adequate for the space involved. It has some sporting equipment and a few computers that are used by students when there is computing class; that is, once a week and under the supervision of a teacher. To use the library, students must sign in. In order to take books home, they must receive permission and return them the following day ... ”.

“... Parents differ in their estimates of school resources. One group says that the infrastructure is good and that it has favoured the learning processes of the children. The other group of parents agree that the facilities have problems with lighting, ventilation, plumbing, and that these do not contribute to the learning processes of students, although one parent thinks that when one wishes ... ”.

“... as for materials that teachers use in class, they note that they only use the blackboard, and the language teacher uses the teacher’s guide and readers. Materials used are from the library; others are purchased by students and

others are on loan ... the markers used for the marker board are supplied by the principal ... ”.

“... The school has no materials other than its physical plant and those from the annual supply consisting of chalk and cleaning materials. Therefore, they use what is at hand. For example, in reading they tell children to read rice packages, magazines or newspapers. They also make use of arithmetic examples that children, from an early age, use to sell articles at the gas station ... ”.

“... in all schools there was evidence of teacher creativity as a major tool to compensate for scarce resources. In rural schools, teachers supply material resources for classroom work ... ”.

(Costa Rica) “... The classroom is spacious, clean, and well-painted. It has 26 student desks, a large desk, a wide window, and a shelf ... ”.

(Cuba) “... In general, teaching materials are used efficiently, well-suited to class objectives and content and adapting to the development of the group, responding to their interests, and permitting the closest possible link to the object or real phenomenon, stimulating the search for knowledge, making possible use by each of the students, and taking advantage of the didactic possibilities of the resources utilised ... ”.

“... In spite of economic limitations, all teachers create other didactic materials necessary for classes in different subjects. They even ask that students supply some or contribute in making them ... ”.

(Venezuela) “... In spite of limited resources, these schools are eager to innovate. In all of them there are widely accepted innovations which enrich the activities of students. In schools with computers –particularly in Santiago Mariño– there is a good response Interactive math is eagerly awaited by students in the rural school ... ”.

- In most schools, the resources for carrying out classroom activities come from both the government and from parents, with the latter appearing to have an increasingly important role.

(Costa Rica) “... Besides those that the government provides through the federal budget, in the school parents pay voluntary quotas for the purchase of additional teaching materials. Moreover, existing resources are used to the fullest. The information lab is used for teacher training after 6 p.m. Funds collected from tuition go to pay for water, electricity, telephone, and cleaning materials. There is audio-visual equipment, TV, VHS and sound equipment ... ”.

“... Teaching materials come from the School Fund and School Committee. Parents provide a monthly voluntary quota ... ”.

Other themes

Research teams identify other themes besides those that were suggested to them as guidelines by the study organisers. The ones presented below are the most significant.

Theme: School Climate

- Schools with outstanding results are distinguished by a positive, and above all a harmonious school climate.

(Bolivia) "... In observing the 4th grade primary school class of Nelly we saw how the children work in a calm environment. On their desks they each have a photocopied sheet, and work with the usage of the letters "v" and "b". The teacher writes sentences on the blackboard that are incomplete on the photocopies. She then walks about the room observing the work of the children, going from group to group. The students from other groups approach her confidently and ask her questions. The teacher responds and clarifies their doubts. There is neither shouting nor reprimands to make the working environment tense. She corrects, gives permission to go to the restroom, corrects and makes recommendations ...".

"... While they work calmly ... the class is involved in its work. There is no racket. One notes no bored students. They are all involved in and concentrating on what they are doing ...".

"... The teacher is precise and calm, reviewing student notebooks one by one making corrections. The children pay attention. Some smile when the teacher shows them a mistake. The relationship between teacher and students is good. After half a semester they know each other well enough. They have adapted to the work pace and know how to carry tasks forward together ...".

(Cuba) "... In all schools we noted that students speak well, wear complete uniforms, are clean, well-groomed, and happy. They are generally courteous and friendly with each other. This is shown, among other things, by the fact that they share with their classmates the lunches that they bring from home ...".

(Venezuela) "... The children, contrary to what some people think, like to go to school. There are various reasons. One of them is that they view the school as a place where they learn new and useful things. Another is that for them, school is a place to play. A third reason is that they see the school as a pleasant and pretty place. The fourth is they like the companionship of their classmates. Finally, they prefer going to school to staying at home. Most certainly, we can conclude from the reports that the schools have been able to make the students feel better there than in their own homes.

- The school climate of these schools is characterised by the presence of education system actors physically in the school and by the establishment of intense and positive interactions among them.

(Chile) “... Moreover, we are not only classmates; we are friends. We are friends with the teachers as well. The relationship with the teacher isn’t so much one of student and teacher. We tell secrets, talk about life, the problems we have ... the good thing is that, for example, if we have any doubts in class, they listen to us. Since we are so many, they have to wait until everyone understands ...”.

(Costa Rica) “... A characteristic of this school is the participation of parents in different activities. Of special note is the school cafeteria that offers this service to students thanks to the help of parents and of some teachers on the cafeteria committee. At times, they approach the local government to obtain help ...”.

(Cuba) “... We seek to evaluate the classroom climate by identifying the nature of interpersonal relations that prevail among students and between students and teachers. In regard to the latter, we can say in short that in the great majority of classes observed we noted a pleasant climate with friendly and respectful relations”.

“... The relations of teachers with the students interviewed are very good, according to the latter. Teachers address students by their first names, are friendly, pleasant, co-operative, and trust in the students’ abilities. None of the students interviewed recall any instance of having been offended by a teacher. Moreover, when they have any doubts, they ask questions freely without fear of receiving a sharp or non-respectful response”.

- Discipline is a subject that is acted upon and taken into account.

(Colombia) “... On the other hand, when a student is very unruly, when children make a great deal of racket in class, the teacher punishes them by requiring them to stand still in the patio. This applies when a student interrupts the teacher in class. If the breach of discipline is serious the student can be suspended from school ...”.

(Cuba) “... relations among students are characterised by mutual respect. In the classes visited, we observed excellent discipline and steadfastness and concentration on the part of students in activities guided by the teachers ...”.

- Demonstration of affection appears as a recurrent and characteristic theme in the climate of the schools visited.

(Colombia) “... We have improved relations with the children ... teachers were not kind to them. They shouted and harassed the students. Parents complained, and the treatment of children began to change. Relations among students are good, as they are with teachers ...”.

“... regarding relations, teachers state that those between teachers, principals, students, and parents are good. These relations are marked by demonstrations of affection and kindness – especially with children. For them especially it is important to show a smile, give a hug or a pat on the back. Being friends with them helps to generate trust ...”.

“... in general, the schools coincide in that internal relations are good. These relations are marked by affection and kindness, especially with the children. . For them especially it is important to show a smile, give a hug or a pat on the back. Being friends with them helps to generate trust, according to several teachers. Relations have not always been thus. In the case of urban one, these relations are currently very good thanks to the intervention of parents, since teachers constantly shouted and insulted students. A timely complaint from parents caused a change in the treatment of the children ...”.

- There is a positive school climate, with students caring about the school and attending classes with pleasure.

(Argentina) “... For the children in the three locales, school is a stimulating place, where they meet their friends, play, and which occupies practically all of their social life. With the exception of the El Alamito School, the school brings together all of the children in the village (we prefer to have classes) ... ‘because if not we just hang around, not doing anything ... you have to study because if you don’t, it is worse ... you repeat the grade and don’t finish school ever’. (focus group, Salar de Pocitos)...”.

(Chile) “... Expressions of the richness that this relationship acquires is seen in the schools visited: ‘ I believe that the children are happy. They are always content. They don’t want to leave ... at the end of the school day we have to see that they leave. They don’t want to because here they have Ping-Pong tables, volleyball, basketball. You can see the basketball hoops, Ping-Pong tables out there that we bought last year, and they are already very worn from so much use ...”.

“... the teacher-student relationship keeps the children in school. They feel a part of a pleasant learning environment which is characterised by cordiality, warmth, and respect. As we can see in the following lines: ‘ I like this school because I have been here since I was little, since kindergarten. These are the people I know best. Since we have all been here since kindergarten, we are friends, all of us; we trust each other. Also, the teaching is good. I suppose that the teaching is good in all schools, but here we know all of the teachers. Starting at another school would be like starting a new life. It would be like changing homes’.

(Colombia) “... Relations within the school are generally good. This is verified by the students, who see the school climate as good because teachers

listen to them and speak to them. They therefore are happy studying there. Their friends are there as well, by whom they feel wanted and for whom they say they have special fondness. For their part, parents say that the climate is very good and that the children show their happiness by going to school and because the teachers have very good methods for teaching the children ...”.

“... The children have the freedom to express themselves, while before, according to the principal, ‘they didn’t have the opportunity to express what they felt’. Permitting them to freely express themselves has resulting in the fact that the children like school more and like to spend more time there ...” (Costa Rica) “... Excellent human relations, participatory, with good communication between personnel, good human relations ...”.

- Meaningful and mutual relations are established with external elements that impact the school.

We see from the above that school climate is not something that can be isolated and created for and by the school.

(Argentina) “... the climate is friendly, relaxed, and calm – both between students and the teacher and among the students themselves. This environment, undoubtedly, may be considered to favour learning outcomes. Moreover, the calm tone seems to be not only characteristic of the school, but outside the school as well ...”.

- The climate within these schools is the result of teamwork.

(Bolivia) Interviewer: “...Do you work in teams?” Teacher: “Yes, we work in teams ... we always do the annual planning in teams ... we have met together with other teachers of the same grade to do annual planning ... but where we have problems is in developing the themes because we don’t always agree about the themes we are going to use during the year ... different teachers interpret them in different ways and have different ways of teaching ... so each of us is different ... we don’t team teach ... but we do fashion a plan ...”.

(Chile) “... the quality of inter-personal relations between teachers is noticed and appreciated by the students... (here) ‘they all teach us, and not just the head teacher ... for all of the subjects others are needed ... since all the teachers are united and all of them help the students. We are all united here ...’.”

- Materials do not appear to be a necessary or sufficient condition for the existence of a good school climate.

(Bolivia) “... I feel comfortable here. As I said, I’m a recent arrival and I feel comfortable in the school. The only thing lacking is materials. There

aren't many (resources) and they don't support us ... paper, cardboard, wool yarn ... you ask them, and two or three bring them ... or it comes out of my pocket sometimes... I don't want the work to suffer ... making wool dolls, for example ... we have a dialogue between the dolls ... so sometimes I have to bring things from home or have to buy them for the work not to suffer ...”.

Theme: Extra-curricular activities

- Schools with outstanding results reserve a significant part of their time for extra-curricular activities.

(Colombia) “... According to teachers, activities carried out away from school, at different parks, museums, and other places where children can place classroom concepts in perspective with the real world favour academic achievement ...”.

(Costa Rica) “... The school carries out many extra-curricular activities and special programs that offer students greater academic growth ...”.

“... this school carries out extra-curricular activities and special programs in co-ordination with other schools: math Olympics, cultural activities such as a ‘creativity festival’, science fair, and participation in local parades ...”.

(Cuba) “... extra-curricular and extra-instructor activities ... in the schools included in the sample, just as in all schools in the country, students participate in various activities of this kind such as: science and technology groups in which students with such interests receive guidance of a vocational character; cultural events (dance, music, theatre, fine arts, speech, literature, chorus), activities of such organisations as the Jose Marti Pioneers, the Pioneer Explorer Movement (through which the children cultivate love, protection, and knowledge of nature and of the nation), participation in sports, Marti classes (fostering the life and works of Jose Marti, the Apostle of Cuban Independence), productive and socially useful activities (gardens, plots), etc. ...”.

Theme: The school-family relationship

- Schools with outstanding results establish close and permanent relations with families.

(Cuba) “... in the other provinces, school-family relations are very good. Parents participate in cleaning and beautifying the school, as well as in meetings and parent classes that are organised depending on the needs of the school and of the parents. They also are concerned with the learning

and development of their children and help them at home when they study or do their homework ... ”.

(Venezuela) “... in this area, the schools, besides their on-going contacts with families to treat student-related subjects, take the initiative in organising parents for festivals and for extra-curricular activities ... ”.

“... similarly, families often take the initiative or respond favourably to requests for collaboration from the schools. Although this varies, in all relations between schools and communities (this participation) seems to be an established fact taken for granted by both parts and carried on continuously ... ”.

“... perhaps the most important fact in this regard is that, independently of the formal contacts between communities and schools, there are informal contacts and links due to the frequent presence of mothers at the schools. This fact involves something that seems to us to be very important – continuous follow-up of student achievement and awareness of what is happening in the schools ... ”.

- According to the diagnosis of both teachers and of parents, in order to obtain good academic results, strong links should be established between schools and families.

(Bolivia) “... a teacher upon being asked about the major barrier to student academic progress: ‘ Perhaps, more than anything, they need the support of their parents, because most parents work or are out of the house, and the children are left alone... not all of them are responsible and do their homework ... so there are problems with parents ... ”.

(Chile) “... a school principal, when asked about parent participation in the education of children, told us: ‘ well, we have this under control ... as far as the parents are concerned, they should actively participate in terms of supporting the students. This support is essential. And not only supporting the students; the ideal thing is that parents give their support. The problem is the social, economic, and cultural level within which we are developing is a bit conflictive and they are not clear about what they should be doing. So they may make demands that are not in line with the processes ... ”.

- Parents of students who attend these schools have, in general, a much more participatory attitude and opinion regarding school administration and school processes, not limiting themselves to be called occasionally to the school.

(Colombia) “... the opinions of parents regarding school policies are divided. One group of parents claimed to know nothing of the subject; the other group of parents stated that the school trains students to be good people ... ”.

“... according to one of the teachers interviewed, both students and parents have been given opportunities to participate, since they are invited to meetings in order to discuss the features of the PEI and the School Regulations ...”.

- Parent participation appears to be structured on different levels: a) a less-important level, but perhaps the most common is that of attending certain special events at the school; b) parents who organise themselves in order to aid the school financially; c) those who are in some way part of school management, especially in the administrative area; and d) those involved in classroom activities.

(Bolivia) Interviewer: “Do you parents meet?” President of the School Council: “Yes, parent meetings”. Principal: “... Every two months – it is scheduled every two months ...” Interviewer: “And do they come to the school to watch their children?” Principal: “... Yes, we invite them at the meeting to check on the work of the teacher and to see their children perform in class, where they might be weak, if the child arrives on time in class. We tell them to ask questions. And the teachers have their role books which show the days absent. We tell them to ask questions because if not, they will say that the student isn’t progressing ... isn’t learning. We invite them, and they come ... go from class to class ... talk to the teachers ... so the teacher can say, ‘on such and such a day the student didn’t come to class, that he didn’t turn in his homework. So we involve the parents ...”.

(Colombia) “... there is a parent association, but the parents interviewed do not attend due to lack of time, although they do participate in activities such as Family Day, cultural events, etc. ...”.

“... The support that parents provide for their children depends, first, on the time they have available and the kind of work that has to be done, according to the activities that the parents support their children. These are divided into sports, cultural activities, and homework. Basically, parents help their children in research projects, give them money to buy materials ... parents state that the support they give their children is fundamental in the learning process ...”.

“... Parents participate actively in the life of the school. The parent meeting is understood to be the Executive Council. Meetings are frequent and are concerned with making decisions that have an impact on the life of the school. The school principal stated during the observation that no decision is made without the support of parents ...”.

(Costa Rica) “... A trait that characterises this school is the intense participation of parents in different activities. Of special note is service in the cafeteria which offers, thanks to the help of parents, a lunch for all children...”.

- In general, it is the mother who maintains the link with the school.
(Colombia) "... According to parents, their support for the development of school activities of their children is more concentrated in the mothers and in siblings than in the father. The support of fathers is more in accompanying presentations of their children. It is common for children to do their homework without any help from family members ...".

- The influence of parent participation on schools is positive, in spite of possible conflicts that occasionally appear, especially when parents move from the simple support level to the levels of school management or of the classroom.
(Argentina) (My children go to this school) "... because it is the closest to home and it is good ... they are happy and I always go to speak at the parties ...".
"... I think that (the students learn) because the teachers are concerned, we are with them, we have good relations with families because we frequently visit the parents at home. (...) The first students that I had, I know they have continued in their studies, that they have finished secondary school, and that now they are 20 and 22 years of age and are at the university. I know this because I have contact with them. I follow their progress, and also because I always ask their parents ...".
"... Yes (I give them a great deal of homework) and they always come to class with the homework finished. I have two children who have no mother at home and I see in them a lack of concern. They are being raised by their sisters who go to school as well, that is, they take their homework home and bring it back undone. Because of attendance problems, I went to their home and talked to the father. He responded very well, but nothing happens ...".
"... Yes (parents expect teachers to visit their homes), they are used to the teacher coming by and having some tea. They don't expect us to go their only when there are problems, but to tell them where the child is doing well, and where he or she needs help ...".
(Colombia) "... This has contributed to the growth of teachers in that the report that they are gratified by seeing parents participate and understand what they, the teachers are doing. Moreover, communication channels with parents have improved to such an extent that teachers now are more concerned in knowing the personal situation of students, so much so that the teachers now make home visits ...".
(Costa Rica) "... Parents express their satisfaction, calling the teacher 'an excellent professional'. 'She reviews all of the homework' and 'assigns extra-class tasks' ...".

The inter-relation between school and family positively appears to favourably impact attitudes toward school inside the home, especially when problems are

detected in reading habits, in terms of the degree of attention that parents give to their children.

(Argentina) "... The children don't tire me; as you have seen they are good, they work, they are obedient ... sometimes they can't bring things that I ask for, (...) but for me, the difference is in the incentive that the child feels to study at home. The children who receive help at home have a better attitude toward school. In general, for those who come here, that is not the case. I am the one who teaches them, the one who explains things to them, the one who has to make them read – not the parents, because, unfortunately, sometimes parents a 2nd or 4th grade education. Some only know how to sign their names and nothing more. That is the difference for me ... the stimulus that the child receives ...".

"... The biggest problem that we have is with language, because they don't read. They might have the material at home, but there is no interest, or they have a TV that absorbs their attention. Now, in spite of the economic situation, DirecTV has invaded and they all have cartoons which entertain them ...".

Theme: School-Community Relations

- The type of inter-relation between school and community appears to differentiate schools with outstanding results.

(Argentina) "... as a resident here, from this area, I think the students do a great job with the co-operation of the teachers. This is impressive, because when you go to the Las Pampas school you see they have sheep, poultry, that they till the land. You can go there and buy fresh vegetables. This is marvellous, and I see this, and always say this to the people here in the village ...".

"... I can say that in this concrete case, that people here have cultural aspirations – if we define 'cultural' as knowledge – they have many aspirations. It is for this reason that class attendance is 100% every year, even when it rains and snows, the children come to school just the same...".

(Colombia) "... as for relations with another institution, the only one the school has is with the community Action Committee. This link is the result of efforts of the principal with community leaders. The children say that there are relations with Rembrant School and with the Secretary of Education. The latter teaches them games and is involved with these workshops ...".

(Cuba) "... the teachers interviewed from the rest of the schools say that there is much community support and that the situation is improving because currently, the school is better able to take advantage of improvements in living conditions in the community. As an example, they mention the "Au-

dio-visual Program”, a nation-wide effort that has been supplied all schools with colour TV and video cassette recorders as well as cultural and recreational video programs. On weekends, this equipment is used for recreation and cultural presentations for the neighbours of these schools ...”.

(Venezuela) “... The same is the case in terms of the involvement of those who live near the schools. Given the fact that they are accepted in the small neighbourhood societies, we can say, generalising, that in this world they at least represent “zones” that should be protected ...”.

“... in the neighbourhoods in which they live, the school is the institution that allows them to do what they can’t do in the neighbourhoods and perhaps in their homes, to judge by what children in the rural school relate ...”.

- We may say that the establishment of this kind of relationship in the school not only has a positive effect for the school, but for the community as well.

(Argentina) “... The active role of the school in the community ... both in the case of Salar de Pocitos and of Las Pampas schools, the school is the most important institution in the community in terms of involving the entire population ...”.

(Colombia) “... relations with the community are good as well. People participate in school activities, and besides the Monteloro community, inhabitants of surrounding areas have been integrated as well. The school as the centre of activities to integrate the community ‘has given new life to the village; people were shy about coming at first, but they overcame them and now participate’ according to the school principal ...”.

“... the involvement of teachers in the community and their knowledge of the community ... in both cases the school principals say they have lived most of their lives in the region, which seems to have generated a strong link between them and the community ...”.

- Schools function as important parts of the social and cultural capital of the community.

(Bolivia) “... From the beginning we have co-ordinated efforts to collect (school) materials, both from the local government, from the Ministry of Education, we co-ordinate and both of us go, because if something requires the signature of the director of the (school) committee, signature and seal, plus that of the school director ... also, the school director does nothing separately, but always in collaboration, not only with the committee, but with other authorities as well, the union, directors ... we meet. If it is a larger problem we don’t meet. How can we resolve things (when the) school director can’t (when she) needs consensus? So there are different opinions. They say, ‘we can do it this way’ ...”.

Theme: Heterogeneity of schools with outstanding results

- One factor observed is that there is no common standard in terms of the type of school: there are large schools, medium-size schools, small schools; urban and rural; private and public; lay and parochial.

(Venezuela) "... We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that organisationally, the schools differ in formal terms. The Prudencio Diez and Republica Dominicana Schools are public, but the latter is part of the tradition of the "Golden Age" of public instruction, which produces a formidable public image. The Madre Cabrina School is parochial and administered by the church. The Santiago Marino and Francisco de Miranda Schools are public, but they have different forms of administration. While the former receives a strong stimulus to innovate, the latter is a typical rural school ...".

Theme: Links of the school with the central level

- In these schools, one notes a trend toward autonomy and decentralised operation.

It appears that these schools base a large part of their success either on very autonomous operation or because they take advantage of impulses generated at the central level to move toward increasingly decentralised managerial and pedagogical models.

(Venezuela) "... Under terms of (reform projects) critical of the traditional form of bureaucratic administration, conditions and resources have been provided enabling schools to be responsible for an good proportion of decisions and to significantly improve performance. This, has involved organising school management around the idea of a shared education concept in each school, in recognition of cultural needs and of the school-related problems of communities, converting management itself into a tool to improve learning results of students ...".

VIII. In-Country Research Teams

In order to make this study possible, it was necessary to utilise research teams composed of professionals who specialise in qualitative assessment methodology. In Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Cuba the teams were made up of professionals drawn from employees of National Assessment Systems or of people directly related to such systems. In Chile and Venezuela, the research was carried out by professionals from organisations specialising in qualitative assessment not directly related to national assessment systems, but with the approval of the latter.

The composition of the National Research Teams was as follows:

Argentina.

Study Co-ordinator and Principal Researcher

- Ana Diamant, B.A. Degree in Education.

Assistant Researchers

- María Ester Arrieta, B.A. Degree in Sociology ; Researcher.
- Jorge Novello, Education Psychologist; Researcher.

Bolivia

Co-ordinator of the study & Principal Researcher

- Tereza Reinaga, B.A. Degree, Simecal Technical Team.

Assistant Researchers

- Ximena Sánchez, B.A. in Education, specialisation in ethnographic research.
- Gilberto Vera, former anthropologist, experience in qualitative research.

Chile

Co-ordinator of the study & Principal Researcher

- Mariana Bravo Martínez, teaching specialist, psychologist, researcher.

Assistant Researchers

- María Alicia Iturriaga, teaching specialist, researcher.
- Luis Peña Rojas, sociologist, researcher.

Colombia

Co-ordinator of the study & Principal Researcher

- Piedad Caballero Prieto , M.A Political Science, researcher.

Assistant Researchers

- Vilma Gomez , Specialisation in Childhood, Culture, and Development.
- Rocío Durán, Assistant Researcher.
- Mireya Ardila, Educational Psychologist, assistant researcher.

Costa Rica

Co-ordinator & Principal Researcher

- Dr. Luis Ricardo Villalobos Zamora (Consultant).

Assistant Researchers

- Sandra Arauz Ramos, M.A. in Social Sciences.
- Maritza Herra Vindas, M.A. in Education.
- Aurora Bogantes Porras. Assistant Researcher.

Cuba

Co-ordinator & Principal Researcher

- Dr. Héctor Valdés, Researcher of the Instituto Central de Ciencias Pedagógicas and Nacional Cuban Co-ordinator for the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education.

Assistant Researchers

- Silvia Puig, Researcher of the *Instituto Central de Ciencias Pedagógicas*.
- Francisco Pérez, Researcher of the *Instituto Central de Ciencias Pedagógicas*.
- Eduardo Torres, Researcher.
- Digna Rivera, Professor of the Universidad Pedagógica de Ciudad de la Habana.

- José Bermúdez, Professor of the Universidad Pedagógica de Ciudad de la Habana.
- Miriam Hernández, Professor of the Universidad Pedagógica de Sancti Spíritus.
- Bania Sosa, Professor of the Universidad Pedagógica de Ciego de Ávila.
- Adia Gel, Professor of the Universidad Pedagógica de Santiago de Cuba.

Venezuela

Co-ordinator & Principal Researcher

- Dr. Ramón Casanova. Researcher, CENDES.

Assistant Researchers

- Urupagua Villegas, Researcher, CENDES Education Group.
- Verónica Carrodegua, Researcher, CENDES Education Group.
- María Elena Manjarrés, Doctoral student, CENDES Education Group
CENDES.
- Beatriz Ramírez, Doctoral student, CENDES Education Group.

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