

# The Formation of a School Text Genre Using Collaborative Writing

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**Abstract** In this paper I analyze some examples of collaborative writing in Portuguese, as a mother tongue, resulting in the production of a school newspaper characterized by me as a hybrid text genre. In other words, I investigate the mixing of genres in school and non-school environments resulting from the process of writing in the classroom setting. The name 'hybrid text genre' is justified by the fact it appears semiotically similar to other text genres that are familiar to the individuals who took part in the process described here. These genres are formed in part by literacy events that take place in students' everyday life in different social contexts. In terms of educational planning, the analysis of data shows that one can hardly predict when a text genre will show similarities to others and that this is triggered by the actions of the numerous individuals in the complex classroom environment, resulting in new usage and reflection about writing. This experience can trigger innovation in the teaching of a mother tongue.

**Keywords** Literacy, Mother Tongue, Learning Gap

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“Let's face the truth: this is not a chronicle at all. I mean not only a chronicle. It is not characterized by any genre. Genres do not interest me anymore. I'm interested in mystery. Do I need a ritual for mystery? I think so. To understand how things work. However, I am somehow attached to the ground: I am nature's daughter: I want to touch, feel, be. And all as part of a whole thing, a mystery. I am only one person. Previously there was a difference between me and my writing (or was there? I don't know). Now there isn't anymore. I am a being. And you can be too. Does this scare you? I believe so. But it is worth it. Even if it hurts. It only hurts at the beginning” [1. p. 157].

## 1. Introduction

For Clarice Lispector, the mystery involving writing supersedes the potential interest in classifying a text shared with readers. The meaning of the word *mystery*, when used to characterize the act of writing, highlights how important writing is and differs from the definitions found in dictionaries. Mystery in this case is like a secret, unshareable and unattainable. Writing is described by Clarice as a capturing and involving process that develops during the events experienced by both writers and readers. The mystery in writing is the capturing of moments and things in life as well as becoming materially involved, implicating the use of bodies and tools.

Even though Clarice does not allow herself to become a prisoner of pre-established forms and patterns, her texts are qualified as a certain genre. Actually, the editor of her collection insists on calling them chronicles (editor's note) [1. p. 5]. I have no doubt that Clarice is aware of how her texts would probably be qualified. I however think that her major interest consisted of experiencing the need to write, which did not end at a full stop. To the contrary, this need was reinforced as her texts were read by her readers. The choice of the epigraph of this study and the fact that Clarice's text was published in a book of chronicles give life to the ritual characteristic of writing. Without extending my arguments, this study has been slightly updated considering that the environment in which it is now being received is different from that of the original publication in a daily newspaper.

As a researcher in the field of Applied Linguistics, I am particularly interested in the contribution that text genre can make whilst used by students who are learning how to read and write in Portuguese as their mother tongue. These students were considered behind in terms of learning by their teachers. The action research, based on a different approach of mother tongue teaching through pedagogical work with text genres was used to undermine existing stigmas about the students.

In this study, this interest is translated into the ritual involved in producing a school paper from text genre references found in non-school environments. Such references enable a type of writing strongly affected by multimodality as the collaborative writing of a school paper analyzed here takes place verbally and visually.

Focusing on the way a teacher participated or mediated during the production of a school paper, I studied its

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structure by analyzing the text, semantics and pragmatics of discourse of the characteristics of genres familiar to the students who made the school paper. These characteristics shape the school paper as a hybrid genre with its own features, which I intend to demonstrate in this study.

Hybridism refers to a network built through the interconnection of points that link the usage of writing inside and outside the school<sup>1</sup>. In the school setting, the points are the distinct text genres used in exercises involving reading, writing and linguistic analysis. Outside the school, the points are genres used by people participating in daily activities involving writing. The connection between the aforementioned environments is established when daily activities are used as a teaching tool in writing exercises as scaffolds or models in the production of a school paper.

The main theories used in my research are arranged here to be utilized as methodologies in *studies about literacy* [10; 11; 12] as well as *systemic functional linguistics* on text genres [13; 14; 15; 16]. The studies from the first group of theories substantiate the analysis about the functionality of writing in school and non-school environments and the roles played by their writers. The studies from the second group of theories provide the types of analysis to demonstrate the linguistic features found in different writings on textual, semantic and discourse-pragmatic levels, covering the multimodal aspect of the analyzed genre.

This text is divided into three main parts: (i) data and research methodology; (ii) the school paper as a multimodal genre; (iii) scenes of a text being produced. In the first part, I characterize the research data within the context of the action research carried out, when the data investigated was generated through a pedagogical intervention developed in a Brazilian primary and junior high school. In the second part, as I explain the theories used in this text, I also analyze the school paper as a hybrid genre made up from texts that link to different social backgrounds and are inspired by the daily regular use of writing produced by the participants of this study. In the third part, I try to rebuild the scenes or moments of the teacher's work that produced or triggered the many network connections included in the materiality of the text of the school paper. To do that I investigated the different research registers generated during the action research process.

## 2. Data and Research Methodology

The research data, which I will use in the attempt to demonstrate the connections that form the network previously mentioned in this study, were created using a methodology based on *action research* [3], developed during a period of five months, in a public school in Brazil<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> With regards to how writing works in both school and non-school environments, I suggest reading [2]. According to [2], 'through time and space writing provides us with the means to attain new methods to share our thoughts, to interact, to influence and to cooperate' [2, p. 11].

<sup>2</sup> The fact that this study is characterized as action research is initially

During this period of action research, the teacher who was contributing to this and I jointly prepared a themed teaching unit with instructional exercises including reading, writing and linguistic analysis. These exercises were suggested as a scaffold or model to the production of the school paper analyzed in this study. The paper is the last part of the unit which had *labels found on products* as its subject. In addition to ingredients, instructions, tables describing nutritional information and barcodes, which are types of genres found on labels, reportages, questionnaires and graphics were various linking points built into the lessons.

The themed unit with instructional exercises worked as a *catalyzing genre* during the aforementioned application as it allowed the use of a number of text genres during the production of the school paper, contributing to students' learning process. According to [7, p. 8], "catalyzing genres help to trigger and add potential to actions and attitudes considered more productive in the creation process. Signorini also believes that catalyzing genres become spaces controlled with linguistic and discursive structures, made of paths and frameworks that are indispensable in the creation of something new".

The teacher taking part in this study has a degree in Modern Languages and a Bachelor's degree in Journalism. At the time the exercise took place, she was working as a teacher and had a contract for an indefinite period of time. She would also undergo a continuous training course, offered by the state government. I was a professor in the group attended by the teacher who supported me in this research in the aforementioned course. It was then that we both expressed interest in carrying out the research. During the exercise, the theoretical and methodological guidelines of the course regarding the teaching of Portuguese as a mother tongue, based on the concepts of genre and text, were applied. As I supported the teacher to implement activities during the lessons taught during the exercise, as well as elaborate the themed unit with instructional exercises, I think that some allusions made to her work must also be made to mine in the analysis of the research data presented here. In fact, at times our work cannot be detached.

Our research was carried out in a 6<sup>th</sup> grade group of 22 students that due to their learning gap, were made part of *Project ABC* created by the state government to reduce this gap. According to the teachers who taught these students during the year prior to the exercise, they were truly limited when asked to execute school activities carried out by other students from the same institution, for example, the identification of grammar categories and production of

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justifiable by the creation of research data and the reflection upon the actions, which were cooperatively carried out by myself and the teacher who was taking part in this. Reconciling my interests with hers is a fairly significant aspect of this study. This type of reconciliation is even highlighted in specific studies about the methodology based on action research, such as those carried out by [3] and [4]. This aspect of the action research methodology allows the search for answers to problems that either concern or interest the teacher taking part in the study whilst working, becoming a commitment to research developed in the field of Applied Linguistics [5, p. 189; 6].

traditional narrative texts, which were commonly required during the lessons. The spelling and grammar inadequacies found in the writing of the students, as I will present ahead, were also mentioned to justify their referral to the aforementioned project. In some cases, family problems were used as justification by the teachers for the aforesaid limitations, which resulted in the preconceptions that I perceived during my time at the school.

These types of exercises as well as social stigmas are some of the *technological apparatus*, term suggested by [8. p. 164 and 181], responsible for producing learning gaps. These “cultural aspects work as a means of codifying, stabilizing and invoking” us even if neither “an essential driver of actions nor a passive product or a puppet manipulated by cultural forces; the ability to take action develops from practicing it, bound by a series of restrictions and powerful relationships. They can be reasonably challenging and explicit, punitive or seductive, reasonably disciplinary or passionate”. Whilst a *facilitating genre*, the themed unit containing instructional exercises enables students to be less affected by absence or lack of knowledge, abilities or competences as it mobilizes new *technological apparatus* to work as mediating elements<sup>3</sup> in the learning process as well as students’ development.

I will investigate some interactions from the lessons recorded during the action research process, as well as some of the records made by students in their notebooks. This, in addition to the school paper itself with its sub-genres, such as news, assembling instructions, graphs, photographs and advertisements, will demonstrate the connection between the different types of writing that constitute the text representing the genre analyzed here. The different versions of sub-genres created from notes written by the teacher, suggesting changes to the students’ writing, as well as the notes themselves, are investigated here. My interest in the notes is justified by the fact the students are requested to rewrite their original texts strengthening links to writing from different social backgrounds.

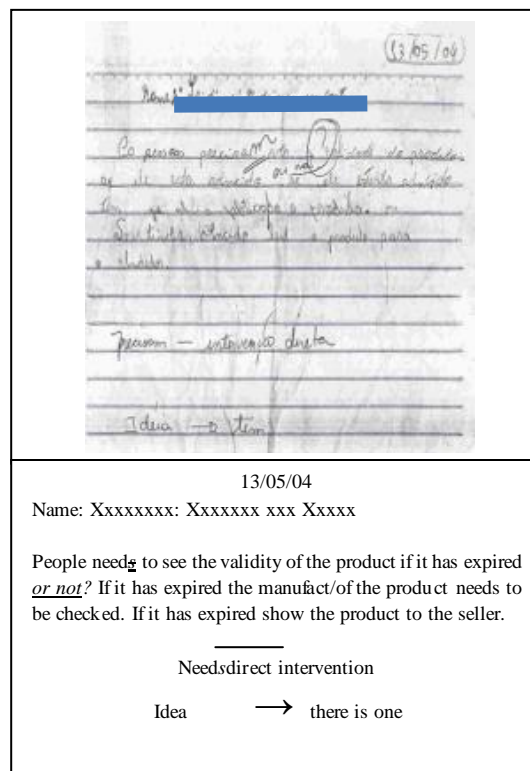
### 3. The School Paper as a Multimodal Genre

Considering the progress in literacy research in applied language studies, I think it is not original to say that activities involving writing are not restricted to schools. In fact they embrace various social environments. It is not original either to say that, usually, literacy in the school environment can be rather different from literacy in other social domains [17]. Knowing how writing in schools can contribute to students’ literacy in non-school environments is still a challenge to applied studies. This work attempts to contribute to these studies by investigating the production of a school paper through collaborative writing whilst rebuilding events of the mediation work carried out by the teacher.

<sup>3</sup>I understand mediation as an activity carried out through symbols or tools to trigger the development of an individual’s superior or advanced mental processes, according to [9].

People read or write to carry out rather precise activities when interacting in writing on a daily basis. These activities are rarely restricted to the evaluation of writing and reading abilities as in the case of school-based literacy practices. With regards to writing at schools, mother tongue teaching traditionally works with a reduced number of text genres, which usually stay in the schools. This could be verified in the lessons prior to the exercise that generated the research data analyzed in this study [18; 19; 20; 21; 22]. In non-school environments, literacy practices<sup>4</sup> take place through a great diversity of text genres, and each genre is used for very specific purposes [12].

To illustrate a literacy practice of the school focused here, I will reproduce a draft below written by a female student and corrected by the pedagogical coordinator. The draft<sup>5</sup> and its transcription<sup>6</sup> are as follows:



Example 1. Draft

In this situation, the student’s text is simply used as a marker to attest to her ability to write. In this case, its direct interlocutor is a specialist, a teacher of the Portuguese

<sup>4</sup>According to [10. p. 37; 11. p. 5], I understand literacy practices as culturally standardized forms to use writing in society. Literacy practices involve regular daily activities in which writing plays a role. Also according to [10. p. 37; 11. p. 5], these activities are called *literacy events*.

<sup>5</sup>I used the word draft because the text was taken by the teacher from the classroom’s garbage bin as the student had not handed in the final version, which will be analyzed at the end of this study. According to the teacher, the coordinator asked the teacher to read the text when she was opening the screwed up sheet of paper where the text was written. Considering how the teacher had access to the text, I highlight that the student was not aware of the intervention carried out by the coordinator.

<sup>6</sup>Italics are used in the transcriptions of the texts demonstrated here to show the interventions carried out in the students’ texts.

Language who was also the pedagogical coordinator at the time. The intervention carried out by the coordinator was used to correct grammar inadequacies as well as to guide the intervention that would be carried out by the teacher. The initiative taken by the coordinator, after the text was shown to her, involving the decision to intervene and use a red pen to write on the student's text as well as add suggestions that the teacher should be making, represents school literacy practice.

According to [23, p. 43] proposition in the field of ergonomics<sup>1</sup>, the coordinator's attitude reproduces the rules involving teaching work developed with students at that time. These rules limited the dynamism that is characteristic of writing in non-school environments. For [23] *work rules* are "what connect professionals with one another. They are common memories and, at the same time, a *tool box* which can, with time, trigger transformation and also be a source for professional controversies, when used for its specific purpose" (author's italics). In an attempt to avoid reproducing such rules, the coordinator's suggestions were ignored by the teacher, which created tension. According to the teacher, even though she disagreed with the suggestions, she could not speak her mind in order to carry on intervening with students' texts and, at the same time, not discouraging them from writing. The grammar or spelling corrections were dealt with by the teacher in another instance. Her initial interest was to help the students to organize every part of text information more coherently to produce the group's paper.

The teacher focused especially on the macrostructure of the text. Either directly or indirectly she discussed the following aspects that characterize a text genre: structure, function and support. By intervening in the microstructure of the text, the teacher focused especially on the content of the student's writing. The focus on the content of the text as well as on what characterizes genre shows a very fine line between concepts of text and genre regarding the theory of systemic functional linguistics engaged in this study.

Inspired by the functional perspective of the language [13; 14], I understand text genres as semiotic forms or models built within social interaction with specific purposes. In other words, genres are abstract models that can be analyzed through the materiality of the text in which they are created. The aspects that characterize genres motivate the linguistic choice and organization superficially, enabling these aspects to be recovered from text analysis, which explains the semiotic features of genres. Even though I tried to focus on these aspects separately for analytical and instructional purposes, they are interconnected.

A preliminary analysis of the school paper reproduced in *Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4*, reproduced below, can clarify the aforementioned aspects (structure, function & support). Photocopied on a two-sided-A4 sheet of paper, this school paper is made of four pages, given that the sheet of paper was folded in half. This medium motivated the organization of the sub-genres contained in the structure of the school paper, which resulted in a layout very similar to that used in Brazilian institutional bulletins. Together with elements that

form the institutional bulletin, such as identification, date and rectangles with credits for the participants, sub-genres create the structure of the paper.

The elements that form the structure are vertically organized. For example, in *Figures 1 and 2* found on the paper's front page, the identification and the date are at the top of the page; the photographs, some titles shifted from the sub-genres such as headlines and a small text summarizing the research are in the center; and a rectangle containing the names of the students is at the bottom of the page. Despite the titles being juxtaposed with the photographs, the latter are used as illustration since verbal and visual information are independent. Like photographs, advertisements also illustrate the paper and fill empty spaces. The mismatch between the date the course was going to be offered (20/03/2004), found on page 3, and the date the paper was released (*Campinas, 31 May, 2004*) shows the roles played by advertisements.

By divulging the study about 'reading product labels', the school paper became more similar to Brazilian daily newspapers or newsletters. Presented to the students as a model, a newspaper from a university in the state of São Paulo is a good example of an informative vehicle to publicize the research developed within institutions. However, by publishing assembling instructions on page four of the school paper, as shown in *Figures 3 and 4*, the reader is reminded of institutional bulletins such as those of community groups' or churches'. These references to genres from different social backgrounds, besides other particularities listed here, give a new lease of life to writing and characterize the analyzed paper as a genre belonging to the school environment. Triggered by pre-established rituals involving writing, such references are efforts made in an attempt to contribute towards students' literacy in non-school environments.

Guided by the multimodal approach to language, proposed by [16], this preliminary analysis is based on *ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual* functions of language, used by the authors to elaborate the grammar involved in visual language and originally proposed by [15] to analyze the grammar in verbal language. These functions take place through the linguistic choice and organization in the materiality of a text, and the scope of their analysis is restricted to the structures of the language or the visuals provided. When the analysis is not restricted to verbal and visual structures, the meanings expressed by language functions are examined through the register concepts of *field*, *tenor* and *mode*, respectively. While focusing on the semiotics of the language to analyze text genre through systemic functional linguistics, there are three interdependent levels of analysis: the language functions at the structural base; register at the intermediate level of semantics and aspects that characterize text genres at the superior pragmatic-discourse level.

I make reference to ideational function and field register whilst considering the elements that form the structure responsible for references to genres from other social

backgrounds. Attained through the transitivity system of a language, this function is responsible for the meaning of the established process, the participants and the circumstances in which the process occurs. The school paper plays the main role, which prompts a relational process in which the sub-genres in the layout play an attributive role as they are

part of the school paper and refer to genres from other environments. The identification, the date and the rectangles with credits to the participants play an onlooker role as they place collaborative production in space and time, and also refer to genres from different environments.

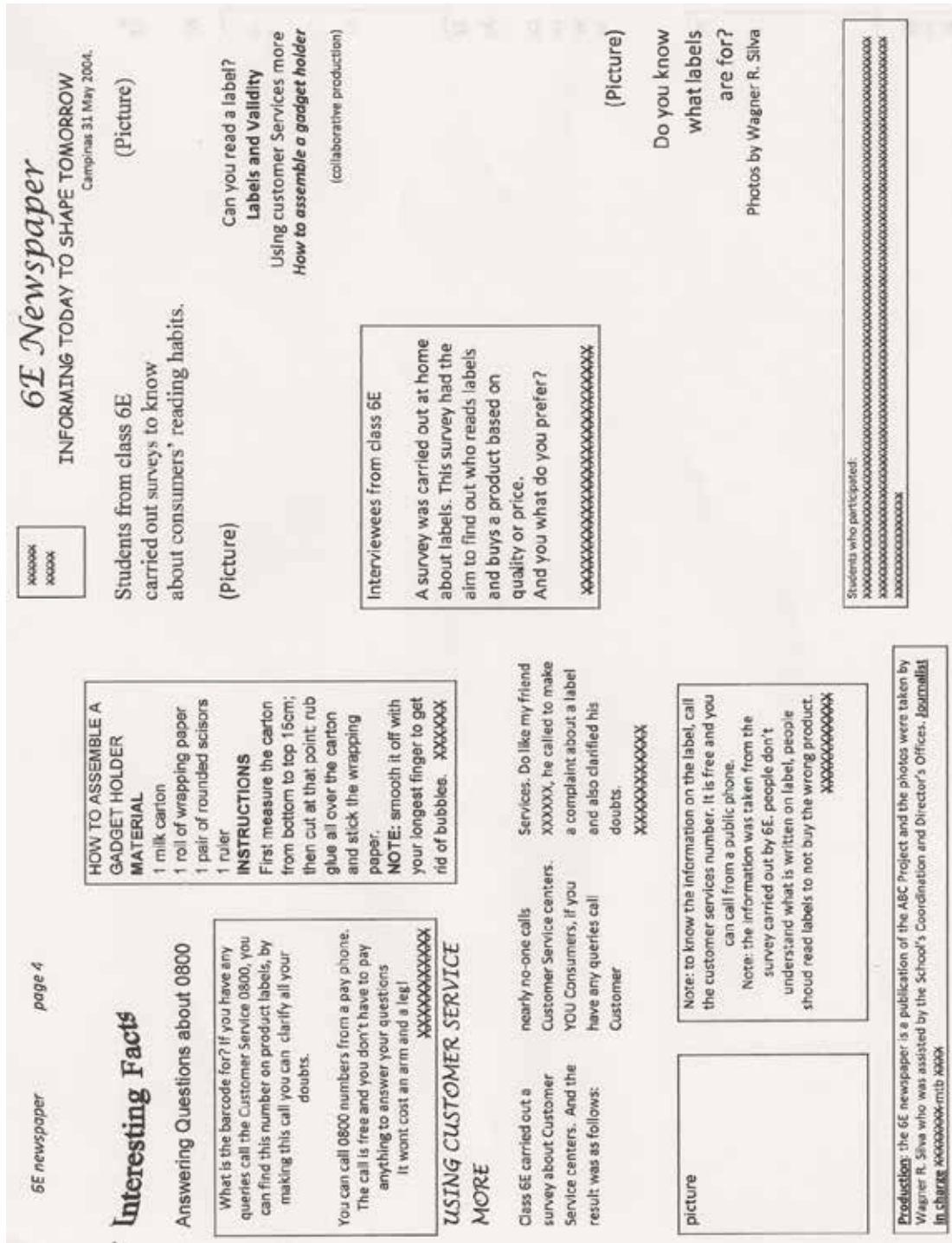


Figure 1. Translation. The school paper produced through collaborative writing whilst rebuilding events of the mediation work carried out by the teacher. The figure shows one-sided-A4 sheet of paper, pages one and four. The sheet of paper was folded in half





Figure 2. Original version. The school paper produced through collaborative writing whilst rebuilding events of the mediation work carried out by the teacher. The figure shows one-sided-A4 sheet of paper, pages one and four. The sheet of paper was folded in half

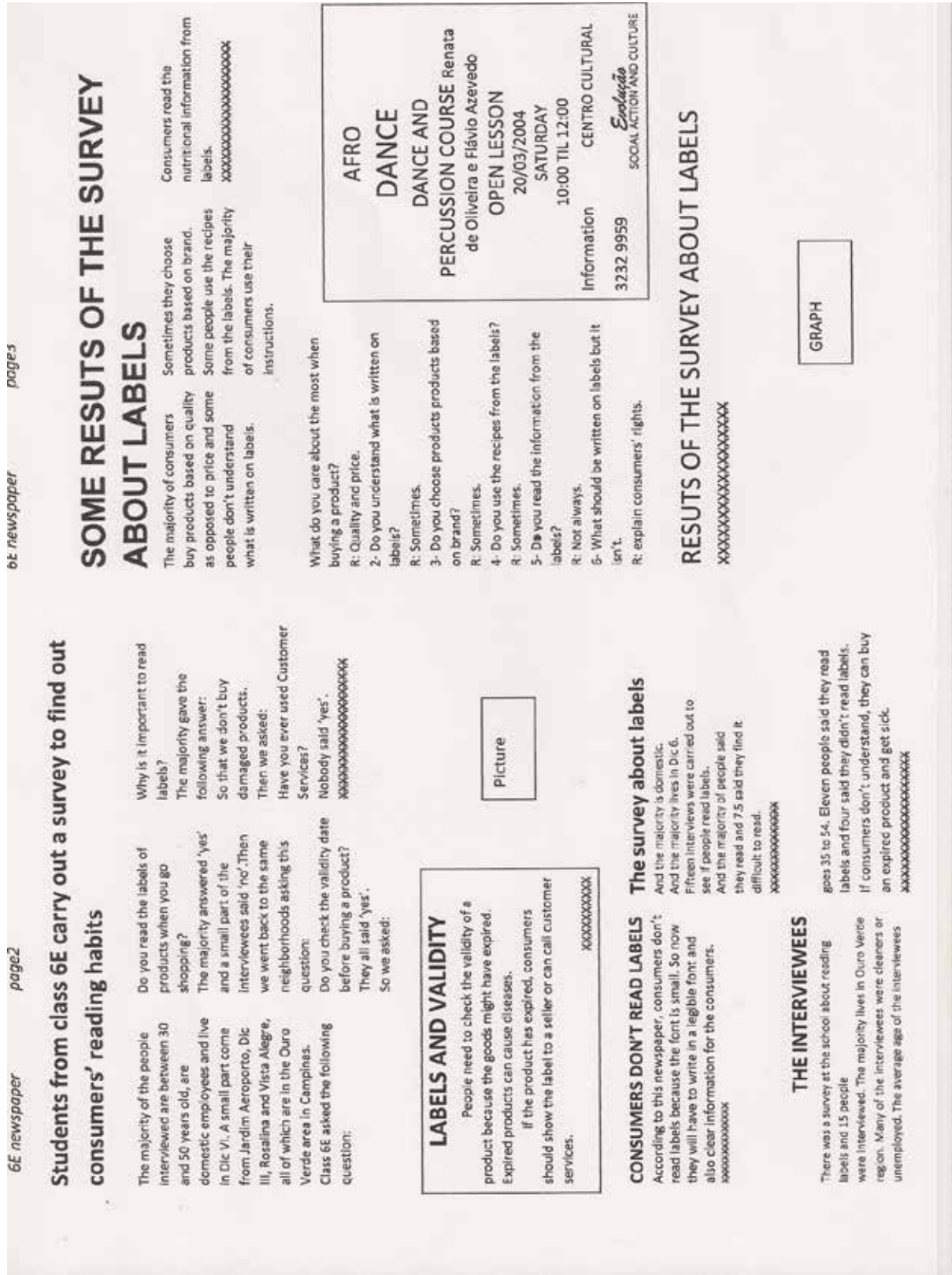


Figure 3. Translation. The school paper produced through collaborative writing whilst rebuilding events of the mediation work carried out by the teacher. The figure shows one-sided-A4 sheet of paper, pages two and three. The sheet of paper was folded in half

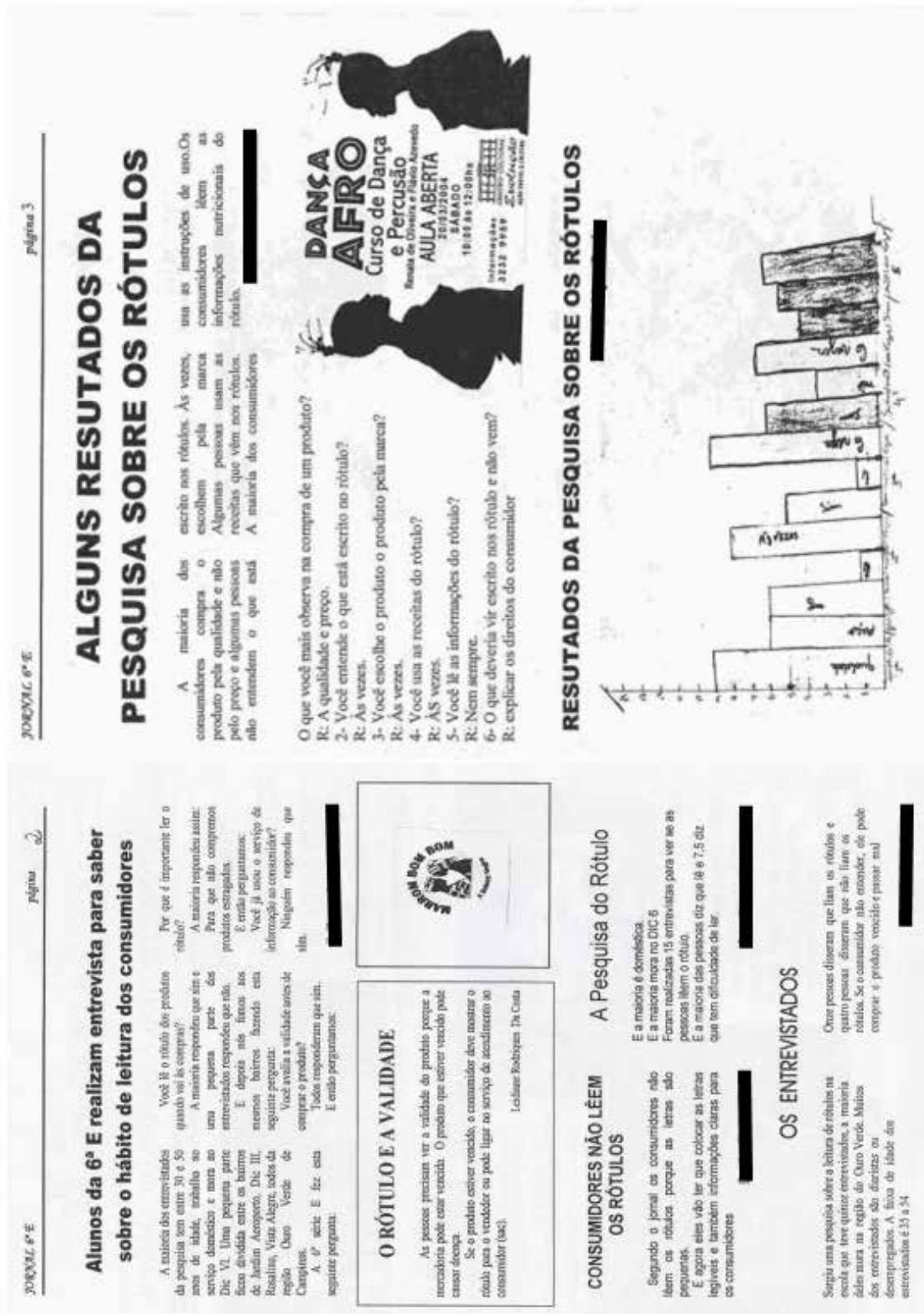


Figure 4. Original version. The school paper produced through collaborative writing whilst rebuilding events of the mediation work carried out by the teacher. The figure shows one-sided-A4 sheet of paper, pages two and three. The sheet of paper was folded in half

Interpersonal function guides the analysis when interpreting the support and the elements that form the text structure as contributors to the characterization of the *represented participants* as well as the *interactive*

*participants*, according to the concepts used by [16. p.119]. The elements that form the structure of the school paper itself are the represented participants, whereas the producers and readers are the interactive participants. Defining the



producers as represented participants in sub-genres is a peculiarity of school papers. Attained through the mode system and language modality, according to initial proposal in [15], this function expresses the relationship between the producer of the text and the interlocutor, as well as the participants' attitude towards the issue addressed. Some forms of using visual language to express this function are through color tones, background image, image angle and graphics.

The shift from handwriting to printed text legitimates the knowledge the authors of the texts have in the school paper. The legitimation of this knowledge is reinforced by the choice and use of photographs. The writers are represented as participating students as the scenes captured show them working diligently, in all but the first photograph. Their diligence is also clear in the first photograph where the students are orderly presented to the readers as producers of knowledge, which is corroborated by the partial overlap of the main headline (*Students from the 6E group carry out surveys to find out about consumers' reading habits*). In *Figures 3 and 4* on page three, the graphs represent school production due to the clear use of pencil, which also represents the lack of knowledge of the producer with respect to the graphics resources available on the computer. The advertisements showing Afro-Brazilian culture in *Figures 3 and 4* on pages two and three not only illustrate and fill empty space but also represent the identity of the teacher, who is of African descendency and actively participates in social movements for racial awareness.

Considering the representation of the producers of the genre, I will essentially mention two readers represented in the school paper. Readers who are interested in the information divulged because, like the students, they could come across relevant information about the use of labels and the assembling of a 'gadget holder'. These readers would probably be those responsible for interviewing the students during the survey about labels, which gave birth to the school paper, and the students from other groups, who could be their relatives or friends. The other type of readers would be the teachers and scholars, who were, for various reasons, optimistic or not to see the performance of the producers of the school paper<sup>ii</sup>.

The text function of language guides the preliminary analysis of genre when we say that the elements that integrate the structure are vertically organized. The way sub-genres are distributed on a page is chosen based on the space that has to be occupied and the readability of the texts to be presented on the page. The texts in *Figures 3 and 4* on page three illustrate this last criterion. The title itself (*SOME RESULTS OF THE SURVEY ABOUT LABELS*), highlighted by the use of a large font, is a sign of interdependence between the texts, which is thoroughly analyzed in the next section by focusing on the mediation of the teacher to enable a minimum of coherence in the school paper.

Achieved through the theme system, text function is responsible for text coherence, which is produced by the organization of linguistic structure in the materiality of a text.

With the information distributed horizontally, the structure found at the beginning of a sentence is called *theme* and it works as the starting point of a message, whereas the comment made about the theme is called *rheme* [15, p. 38]. By adapting these categories to analyze the organization of images vertically laid, [16, p. 193] came up with the terms *top information* and *bottom information*. The information found at the top has an 'emotive appeal', something idealistic, which means 'what could be'. The information at the bottom however is more realistic and practical, showing 'what actually is'. A kind of motto written by the teacher underneath the name of the paper analyzed here (*INFORMING TODAY TO SHAPE TOMORROW*) illustrates very clearly the position commonly occupied by idealistic information.

By referring to genres common to non-school environments, registered in the linguistic materiality of the genre analyzed here, it is revealed that different types of writing go beyond the school domain. This results in what I call network, according to [25, p. 12], by characterizing it as simultaneously *real*, *collaborative* and *discursive*. The links of this network are justified by the literacy practices experienced by the participants in other instances, such as activities in the area of journalism developed by the teacher and in the field of research developed by me. These activities greatly influenced the final production of the school paper and the creation of content to be published in the news texts, respectively.

To continue explaining the aforementioned network, in the next section I will show how some aspects that characterize a text and its genre, while aiming at different texts, guided the mediating work carried out by the teacher when the school paper was being produced through collaborative writing. This resulted in the formation of students and teacher as both readers and writers. The teacher's work establishes new literacy practices at school, influencing the way of doing things and introducing students to a new writing ritual. This was influenced by some types of writing which are characteristic of non-school environments.

#### 4. Situations of Collaborative Writing

The final product of a themed unit involving instructional exercises, the school paper studied here is made up of three different text genres, according to the literacy practices that are distinctive to the social backgrounds accessible to the people taking part in the collaborative writing. A preliminary analysis mentioned institutional bulletins, newsletters and daily newspapers as genres that inspired the school paper. With respect to the production of sub-genres, the models used by the participants were other types of writing, typical of school and non-school environments. An interaction between teacher and students is shown below after they read the news story "Brazilians do not understand the information contained in food packaging", reproduced by me, from

*Jornal Nacional's*<sup>7</sup> electronic page to be a model for the students<sup>8</sup> text. It shows the written version that was going to be read during the news broadcast. The fragment below shows the interaction at the end of a reading<sup>9</sup> lesson:

*.../586-D: This material was produced based on a survey, which we carried out previously. You are going to write a text similar to this, OK?*

*587- JR: Yes, madam. Can we glue it?*

*588- D: You can glue it on your notebook, and it is your homework, bring it on Friday ... let's tidy up the classroom .../.../*

In statement 586 the teacher asks the students to write the news texts. As opposed to the planned strategy, which was supposed to study the aspects that characterizes genre in the news, the teacher restricted her work to clarify the parts of the text that the students did not understand. The only aspect addressed here is the thematic content, from which the teacher relates the news to the text to be produced as the news shows the results of a survey about consumers reading labels. In the selected piece of news some results of the study even answer questions from the questionnaire used by the students to generate information to be divulged in their paper, as highlighted by the teacher in another moment during the reading lesson.

The teacher's instructions result in texts written by students, which for scientific purposes, are difficult to be classified in terms of genre. Considering the spelling and grammar inadequacies found in these texts they can easily be used to practice 'correction', a type of exercise typical when teaching mother tongue, like the one carried out by the pedagogical coordinator in the draft reproduced in *Example 1*. In *Example 2*, I reproduced a sample of a text that is difficult to be classified and rewritten to adapt it for the school paper. Find below the text with interventions carried out by the teacher, and its transcription alongside:

The text produced is basically formed of two parts: the first is made of questions and answers, which the teacher calls 'interview' in the note she uses to request the student to rewrite the text and will be analyzed later; the second part is made of disconnected phrases that attempt to summarize the information presented in the first part. These parts respectively point at the survey and the phrases cooperatively produced during an activity used to quantify and interpret the interviewees' opinions for each question

<sup>7</sup> *Jornal Nacional* is the most watched Brazilian news programme presented in the evening from Monday to Saturday by *Rede Globo de Televisão* (Brazil's largest TV Company).

<sup>8</sup> The news "Brazilians do not understand the information contained in food packaging" is in the annex.

<sup>9</sup> Transcription conventions:

The teacher is identified as letter D and students are identified as combinations of letters, such as JR;

CAPITAL LETTERS emphasis on the speech;  
 /.../ passage omitted;  
 (( )) analyst's comments;  
 ( ) the speech is reconstituted by the analyst;  
 ... pause.

from the survey. With the exception of the draft reproduced in *Example 1*, all the others were directly affected by the last activity carried out by the teacher, resulting in an exhaustive repetition of very similar texts made of disconnected phrases. It is undeniable that the teacher tries to control all actions in the classroom, leading the reader to conclude that, in certain instances of the exemplified dialogue, negotiation is very restricted.



xxxxx 6<sup>th</sup> grade, group 'E' 13/05/04

P: What is the most important thing when you are buying a product?

R: - Quality.

Price.

Do you understand what is written on the label?

The majority sometimes understand what is written.

Do you choose a product based on the brand?

The majority choose (sometimes) a product based on brand?

P: Do you use the recipes from the label?

R: - sometimes.

Do you read the informations on the label?

- Consumers (don't always) read the nutritional information on the label

What do you think should be Written on labels but is not?

- Explain consumers' rights

Quality, Price (sometimes)

The majority sometimes understand what is written on the label.

The majority sometimes buy a product based on brand

Not always consumers nutritional informations on the label}

The information above within the curly brackets can be in the introduction.

**Example 2.**

The activity where students had to interpret the results of the survey and produce phrases, as well as the previous activity where they had to read the televised news, are both carried out by the teacher as support or a framework to help

the students to produce the newspaper. The teacher's speech reproduced below highlights the inaccuracy of the instruction given to the students of how they should use the phrases in the production of a text. The variation of noun expressions, such as *text, clause, phrase, paragraph*, used by the teacher when referring to the phrases cooperatively produced, shows the inaccuracies. The speeches with the noun expressions are in *italics* as follows:

248 – D: *Those who didn't understand, pay attention so that you can understand now, CO is producing his text on his own, I won't write the next one on the board, you will produce it on your own ... we are, CO, analyzing graph, we found out that our graph will be like this, our graph is like this, can I rub this off guys?* ((the teacher draws a graph on the board))

260 – D: *Is it difficult to answer? So rub it off and answer... ((the teacher says to CO)) You have to think, why was CO finding it difficult to write his clause here? He couldn't read the question, check the question before answering based on your graph... what is my graph saying, is it saying yes? Is it saying no? Is it saying sometimes? Ah, it is saying sometimes, so sometimes consumers choose a product based on the brand, I've already answered question six... speak GB...*

267 – D: *Mess around during your break time, have you written your phrase, AS? ... You keep messing around, there is work to be done...*

283 – D: *You can give several, several types of answers with the same meaning, in other words... write the phrase in your notebook, see CO! Let's go, after CO, comes DP...*

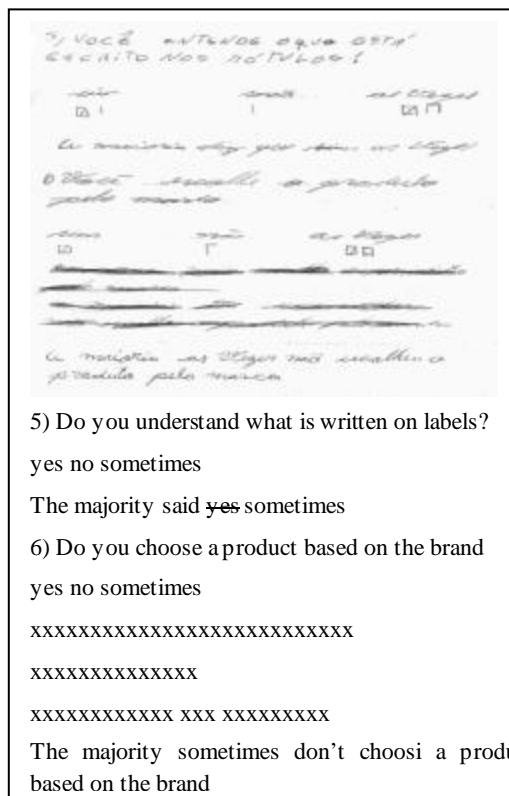
350 - D: *How would we do this paragraph? Now, it will become complicated, how can I explain to consumers, to readers, that we are going to write a small text later to show our research to the school.*

352 – D: *Our research will be a text, we will write a text, how can I explain to the reader, without them seeing the graph, the answer to question seven?*

558 – D: *Write the text based on the question, you produce... when we can't write a paragraph it's because we didn't understand in the first place, read the question and try to answer it based on the responses we got from people...*

In the examples above the teacher presents the student's writing on the board or in his notebook as a text for the paper (*statements 248; 352; 558*), or as clauses, phrases or paragraphs that will form the text to be produced later for the paper (*statements 260; 267; 283; 350; 558*). I must highlight the use of graphs by the teacher to help to understand the answers from each question (*statements 248; 260; 252*). These graphs show the answers to each question from the survey calculated separately. On the other hand, the graph on page three in the school paper, *Figures 3 and 4*, shows the results of the survey as a whole piece, based on the summary of the results, which was presented as a questionnaire, in the text before the graph. I must highlight that the work with graphs developed by the maths teacher also supported the use of mathematics language through multimodality for the school paper.

The unfamiliarity of the students with writing also makes it difficult to adapt the student's text to the school paper. This lack of familiarization becomes clear when students calculate the answers and write a phrase, summarizing the result of each question from the survey on the board. Some phrases written on the board are very confusing, as there are unfinished linguistic structures or inadequate inverted syntax structures. The notes below found in a student's notebook show two phrases he created and calculations he made (*Example 3*). See in *Example 2* the notes with the results of questions five and six.

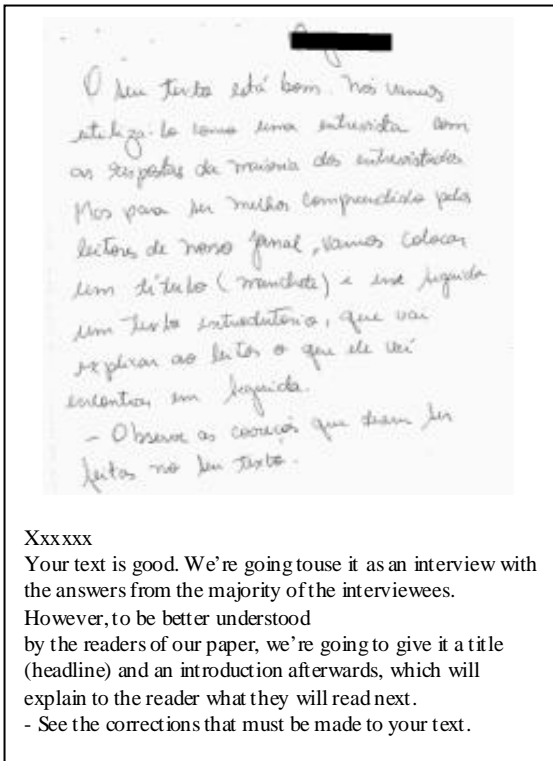


**Example 3.**

The phrase presented as a summary for question five (*The majority said yes sometimes*) shows an example of unfinished linguistic structure, as, in this case, it would be necessary to explain which *majority* we are talking about why *sometimes* is said. Such linguistic inadequacies become more serious when, following the teacher's instruction, students put these types of phrases together to make a news text, as seen in the second part of the text reproduced in *Example 2*. The attempt to erase, shown before the phrase summarizing the answers for question six, signals different versions of the phrase written on the board by a student who was being helped by his classmates and teacher. The instruction to rewrite this phrase on the board during the activity is highlighted in statement 260, previously shown here, where the teacher says (*So rub it off and answer... ((she says to CO)) You have to think, why was CO finding it difficult to write his phrase here?*)

In order to adapt the students' text to the paper, some aspects that characterize genre and text are applied by the

teacher through the use of notes as mediating tools to request that the text is rewritten. The thematic content and the structure are text and genre aspects, respectively, and they are used more often in the notes analyzed here. Function and support, on the other hand, are aspects of text genre, and used more indirectly. The linguistic patterns that refer to registers of tenor and mode are not focused on in the notes. The changes suggested through the notes transform the sub-genres and, consequently, the school paper. Reproduced in *Example 4*, previously shown in *Example 2*, is the note requesting the text, which was difficult to be classified, to be rewritten. The note requesting the text to be rewritten and its transcription are as follows:



Xxxxxx  
 Your text is good. We're going to use it as an interview with the answers from the majority of the interviewees.  
 However, to be better understood by the readers of our paper, we're going to give it a title (headline) and an introduction afterwards, which will explain to the reader what they will read next.  
 - See the corrections that must be made to your text.

**Example 4.**

In the note above, the four aspects – thematic content, function, support and structure – are directly used to classify the student's text as an interview. Function guides the teacher's intervention when the purpose of the text produced in the school paper is made clear (*We are going to use it as an interview with answers from the majority of the interviewees*). Structure is applied when it is suggested the text is to be organized in three parts (*interview / title (headline) / introduction*). Thematic content is used when the purpose of each part of the structure is explicit (*with the answers from the majority of the interviewees / which will explain to the reader what they will read next*). Support is used to reason that the title needs to be added as part of the structure of the news text (*However, to be better understood by the readers of our paper...*).


The suggested changes at pragmatic-discursive level imply some alterations in the materiality of the text, given that, as mentioned before, the genre aspects are semiotized through language functions in the linguistic system. Some of these alterations are suggested in the instruction presented at the end of the note (*See the corrections that must be made to your text*). An example is the suggestion to substitute the summarizing phrases by the actual record of the choices made by most interviewees. These suggestions are seen in particular corrections made to the student's text, as shown in *Example 2*. Only the aforementioned instruction was taken into consideration by the text's author, which is justified by the fact the student is familiar with this type of intervention commonly used during mother tongue lessons.

The use of the teacher's note was understood as a new literacy experience by the students, in the same way it was for the teacher, who would initially resist in writing it. Originally, the note was thought of as a mediating tool that would help the students during the process of rewriting a text. However, the note did not give a positive result in this respect as the teacher had to explain the written instructions to each individual student. On the other hand, the note helped the teacher during the oral instruction requested by the students, as it corroborated with the memories students had of the text.

With respect to this approach towards the note, I refer to *Figures 3 and 4* on page 3 of the school paper to show that even during the editing of the paper, the instructions written on the teacher's note enhanced the work of the teacher herself. In the center of the page is the final version of the interview for which the note was written, *Example 4*. As proposed on the note, another student produced and gave a title to the text that was used as the introduction to the interview. Both the interview and the graph that precedes it were produced by the same person, although they were not simultaneously conceived. The creation of the graph and the vertical distribution of the texts supported the interview, giving the page of the school paper coherence. Given the interdependence between the introduction, the interview and the graph, the page they are on is a very distinctive example of multimodal collaborative writing.

To finalize the reconstruction of the ritual involving collaborative writing in order to produce the school paper, I refer to the draft reproduced in *Example 1* at the beginning of this chapter, to show an example of text intervention typical of traditional literacy practices of mother tongue teaching. In *Example 5*, shown below, I have reproduced the version handed in by the student to the teacher. It is longer than the draft corrected by the coordinator that was not returned to the student. In this version two pieces of information are kept as thematic content and shall be used in the school paper: the importance of reading the validity date of a product and the procedure to follow when a product with an expired date is bought. The first text version and its transcription are as follows:





13/05/04  
 Nome: Xxxxx X. Xx Ssssss n. 16  
 People needs to check the validity of products because it might be valid.  
 - Huen a peoples buy a product they have to check if it is exired and ef it is valid the product show the product to the seller that gave you the product if he doesn't give another product you call Costumer Service that they say that the product has expired and the expiring date of the product.


Example 5.

The procedure regarding appropriate use of labels, semiotized through modalizing verbal forms (*needs, might, have to*) and pronominal forms (*you / you*), is particular to this text. The other texts studied here resume the phrases that summarize the answers to the questions from the survey. These linguistic uses, as well as the adverbial forms (*Huen a people buy a product / ef it is validate the product / if he doesn't give another product*), classify the student's text as injunctive, using the genre 'instructions for use' that was widely dealt with in the classroom, especially when linguistics was being analyzed. The genre 'instructions for use' is also used by the teacher on the note reproduced below in Example 6, which she wrote to request the text to be rewritten. As opposed to the suggestion made by the coordinator to 'directly intervene' with the student's text, I must highlight that by considering structural aspects and thematic content, the teacher focused on four levels of language: text, semantics, pragmatics and discourse. The note requesting the text to be rewritten is as follows:

#### Example 6.

By using the initial format of the student's text, structure features guided the intervention of the teacher when it was suggested that the text should be reorganized in topics similar to 'instructions for use' (*In this next phase, you can divide your paragraphs into topics, like we did in the exercise on punctuation.*), used in a linguistic analysis, where the regular use of punctuation in the aforementioned

genre<sup>10</sup> was addressed. Suggesting the addition of a title to the text is also something promoted by structure features (*You can also give a title to the text*). Linked to these features, thematic content is applied by suggesting the information should be explicit in the three proposed topics, similar to the initial idea in the student's text (*In the first topic you can emphasize both the date when the product was made and its expiring date. / In the second topic, consumers should do when they come across a product with expired date and in the third one mention Customer Service.*).



Xxxxx  
 Your text is very good. In this next phase, you can divide your paragraphs into topics, like we did in the exercise on punctuation. You can also give a title to your text. If you need help just let me know.  
 In the first topic you can emphasize both the date the product was made and its expiry date.  
 In the second topic, what consumers should do when they come across a product with expired date and in the third one mention Customer Service.

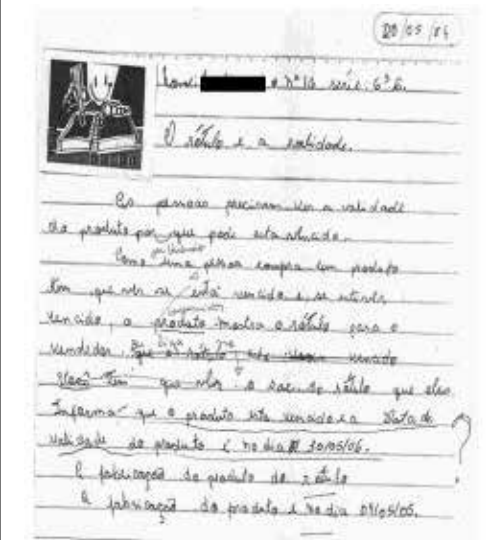
Teacher Xxxxx

Example 6.

As well as applying some text and genre features, the teacher's notes analyzed here have something in common: a very similar introduction praising the students' texts (*Your text is good. / Your text is very good.*). Teachers praise students in order to motivate them and prevent them from not performing the proposed task, which, in this case, some students saw merely as an activity where they 'had to rewrite the text', which meant they simply had to neatly copy the text in a new sheet of paper. Their first attempt in rewriting the text does not show many changes in relation to the previous version. This can be seen in the second version of the text for

<sup>10</sup>I mention [26] with respect to the approach on linguistic analysis from regular linguistic uses in genres, which I call grammatical patterns.

which the above note was written. The rewritten text and its transcription follow:



20/05/04

Name: Xxxx: no. 16<sup>th</sup> grade, group 'E'

Labels and validity

People need to check the validity date on products because it might have expired.

How or When a person buys a product they have to check if it has expired, if it has expired, the product consumer shows the label to the seller or ~~call~~ ~~the~~ ~~label~~ ~~has~~ ~~expired~~ ~~you~~ ~~have~~ ~~to~~ ~~check~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ Customer Service on the label that they inform that the product has expired and the validity date on the product is 30.05/06.

The production of the product of the label

The production of the product and on 04/09/05.

**Example 7.**

As well as changes and lexical suppression, some suggestions made on the teacher's note, such as to add a title (*labels and validity.*), and repeated orally and individually, were taken into consideration by the student. The suggestion to display the information under topics, like instructions, was not followed when the text was rewritten. With respect to thematic content, Customer Service was added. The validity dates, and when the product was made were added, which created a new problem in the text as it does not make sense to simply copy these dates on the school paper without even mentioning the name of the labeled product. It is possible that these dates were added because of a misunderstanding caused by inaccurate instructions on the note (*In the first topic you can emphasize the date the product was made and its expiry date.*)

In the rewritten version, some interventions were made to the text itself, and as they proved to be more familiar to the students, these interventions were taken into consideration in the final version seen in *Figures 3 and 4*, on page 2 of the

school paper. In the second re-draft, interventions were carried out directly on the computer. This time, the students made fairly substantial alterations as they were motivated to work on a machine to which their access was normally restricted, and because the computer provides resources to correct spelling and grammar. These resources were used by students when the computer showed inadequacies through red and green lines, respectively. According to the analysis I carried out in [20; 21; 22], computers play an important role as a mediating tool in writing exercises, increasing students awareness whilst writing.

## 5. Conclusions

Just like the text written by Clarice Lispector, presented in the epigraph of this article, the text the students cooperatively wrote with the teacher's support, was not free from being classified as a particular genre in this study. In the same way Clarice said she experienced writing, the students were not prisoners of the school paper either, to the contrary, they wrote a hybrid genre with characteristics placed according to the type of text and mediating tools (*technological apparatus*) applied during the production. By using the student's initial text and oral and written mediation, it was possible to conclude the production of the school paper, even though the aim of the teacher's notes was not initially achieved.

As a researcher, the notion of text genre allowed me to visualize the concept of writing as a creative process formed by culturally standardized forms. Some are already known by the students and others are introduced by teachers during the production process in the classroom. In this respect, the terminology 'school paper' entails a hybrid genre, formed by different uses of both verbal and visual language specific of non-school and school environments familiar to their authors. By applying multimodal language, students' knowledge could be communicated, which contributed to their characterization as students learning to read and write.

In the established ritual of writing at schools, writing can also be a process that triggers brokerage by the participants of new, culturally standardized forms of writing, which will influence other processes later established and possibly in non-school environments. As I am in favor of work guided by the concept of writing as an uninterrupted production process, even considering modifications that the reader may wish to carry out to my work, I should highlight that the text genres identified here are the consequence of my interpretation of the many activities studied, enabling readers, who are aware of this work to distinguish new connections themselves.

This research contributed to show that students were not responsible for school failure. The failure was justified by the traditional approach to the teaching of the Portuguese language, common in a number of Brazilian schools. Such approach is based on a prescriptive perspective of language teaching, which is still based on standard grammar, and it

ignores school work using authentic texts that are part of daily life. Such failure is also attributed to the stigmas surrounding the students, who were thought to be incapable of learning the content set in the curriculum, which the teachers attributed to the students' life stories, characterized by social exclusion.

The use of the action research was essential in developing this scientific investigation, which was enriched by the combining of different research data created during the intervention carried out in the primary and junior high school. Perhaps characterizing this research as a case study might imply the investigation was in some way limited as it does not allow the results to be generalized, which is expected from scientific work created within the positivist paradigm of research. However, I must highlight that this investigation counteracts this paradigm, therefore the relevance of the presented research is especially attributed to the contribution given to the participants and collaborators that are part of the school community focused on in this study. The results produced could also be used as a reference to other training contexts assessed by the reader to be similar to that analyzed here.

In future research, I intend to continue investigating tension and conflict that arises in situations involving the teaching of mother tongue (Portuguese), in which both researcher and teacher carry out interventions that aim to innovate the pedagogical work in place. I am especially interested in situations where the attempt to innovate is based on teaching techniques using authentic text genres, with a critical perspective regarding literacy, counteracting traditional school literacy methods, which are a characteristic of traditional Brazilian mother tongue (Portuguese) teaching.

Finally, by highlighting some characteristics of the students that were once hidden, I finish this study with a favorable comment from the teacher who participated in it. The comment, made during a planning session, was about the performance of the students in becoming readers and writers throughout the exercise:

(...) 'Look, I feel that they felt as if they knew everything, even more so when someone questions something, they are EXPERTS in labels, I see it like this, this is something nobody can take away from them, this knowledge cannot be taken away from them by anybody' (...)

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## Appendix

### Text 1

Brazilians do not understand the information contained in food packaging

25/11/2003

A survey published today concludes that the majority of consumers find it difficult to understand the information found on food packaging labels. Amongst other products, such information is now obligatory on fruit and vegetable packaging as well.

An inspector warns a truck driver: the grapes he is transporting did not have any identification saying where they come from. Neither did they have a date on the packaging as required by Brazil's National Health Surveillance Agency.

The supply center does not have the power to retain the cargo. However the businessman that bought the fruit will be informed of the irregularity and all the food shall have labels by March of the next year.

'The label is saying to the consumer: look consumer, this product left such and such farm, from such an area, and this is its origin. Therefore you can safely eat it', explains Euclides Amorim, the advisor for Ceagesp (*Companhia de Entrepostos e Armazéns Gerais de São Paulo*—São Paulo General Warehousing and Centers Company).

Natural food is the last type to become part of the label era, which still has problems, but there has never been so much information on the package of everything that is being sold. Consumers are still coming to terms with the importance of labels.

'I have problems with high cholesterol, so I have to know what ingredients I am eating', says an elderly lady.

In a survey carried out in São Paulo by the Brazilian Educational Institute for Food Consumption, 61% of the people interviewed said that they read labels. However only 29% compare and decide what they are going to buy based on what is on the label.

'I would say that there is an issue which is not about lack of information, but because there is a gap between the information that is on the label and what the consumers understand from it', explains Patrícia Fukuma, from the Brazilian Institute for Education and Food.

It is always possible to improve the text, the writing. What consumers do not want is to stay in the dark, without information on labels.

(<http://jornalnacional.globo.com/site.jsp>)

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<sup>i</sup>According to [24. p. 84], I understand ergonomics as "a set of knowledge about human beings in the work environment and action practices that intimately relates how work is understood and its transformation".

<sup>ii</sup>The print-run was significantly reduced as the students and teachers from 6<sup>th</sup> grade, group E, only received one copy. As opposed to the copy received by teachers and students, the one sent to the Local Educational Office responsible for the school was in colour. As can be noted, this different type of treatment highlights the relationship of power amongst those who play a role at schools.