Writing through children´s common experiences

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Abstract

This research paper reports the impact that the collective creation of stories had on third grade students' written production in English at Ferrini School, a private institution in Robledo neighborhood, Medellín, Colombia.

In order to increase students written production, I proposed a set of actions that moved from writing aloud and shared and guided writing to independent writing. I also used observations that were recorded in my journal, an interview to the CT and students, and students' production to appraise their perceptions about how the activities proposed had impacted their written productions. The analysis of the information revealed that the creation of collective stories had a positive effect on students as they progressed in the conventional use of the language, and wrote more structured stories. Their desire to use English in different moments of the class increased as well as their engagement in collaborative learning activities.

Key Words: Conventional use of English, collaborative learning, written production, Language Experience Approach, textual knowledge

Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellin, Colombia.

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Preface

This paper contains the report of my practicum research project conducted as a student-teacher at Ferrini School, a private institution in Medellín, Colombia. The objective of this research was exploring the impact that collective creation of stories had on students' written production in English. To accomplish this objective, students were immersed in a gradual writing process that started as collective creations and ended with individual creations by using some elements of Language Experience Approach LEA, strategy to promote writing as a tool to convey meaning.

This paper presents a description of this school context, the analysis of students performance in the English classes that triggered the design and implementation of this research; the theoretical framework that supports this research, the action plan set to accomplish the objectives established, the data collection instruments used and its respective analysis, the findings and conclusions obtained in regards to the impact of the Language Experience Approach on students' writing production; and finally, my own reflection about this whole process**.**

Context Description

As a requirement to finish my studies in foreign language teaching at the University of Antioquia, it was necessary to undertake an action research project in an educational context. That is why I decided to conduct my practicum project at Ferrini School, as it is an institution that has given me many educational experiences during the nine years I have been working there.

Ferrini School, founded in 1965, is a private institution located in Robledo neighborhood, in the west of Medellin city. It started having a religious orientation and over time these guidelines changed to a secular, pluralist, and inclusive education offered to lower and middle socio-economic class.

In its commitment to educating competent students, the school presents different purposes, the main one is "focused on offering an intercultural and high quality educative proposal oriented to the development of integral dimensions and student's competence" which is stipulated in the Institutional Educational Project (P.E.I, 2012, p. 10.) Its philosophy and mission are based on the education of moral, responsible, and understanding students, who can contribute to the transformation and development of a fair society. Finally, the school vision is to be leaders in the execution of innovative projects that promote the learning of different languages, sports, arts and sciences.

In order to accomplish the proposals and objectives established in the P.E.I: the school offers two different programs. The regular program where all the subjects are taught in Spanish with three hours of English per week, and the bilingual program where students take almost all the subjects in English. The two programs have a teacher who is responsible for organizing the syllabus and planning of all the lessons and activities for a specific subject throughout the school year.

The students of the two programs use the premises of the school, which is divided into three sections: one for preschoolers, one for elementary school and one for high school. The facilities include: classrooms for first, second, third and fourth graders, the cafeteria, the coordinator´s office, the teacher´s lounge, the music classroom, the bathrooms for boys and girls, three little playgrounds and two sports fields, two computer rooms, an educational support classroom where students who have cognitive difficulties receive guidance and support in different subjects, the psychologist office and the auditorium.

My group is 3rd A, it is part of the bilingual program and it is located on the third floor; it is composed by 28 students, fifteen boys, and thirteen girls. They are around eight and nine years old. Most of them like to participate in all activities that the teacher proposes in the English class like singing songs, playing games, making competitions, reading stories, etc. This means, they always have a positive attitude during the English classes.

According to the PEI, these classes should be prepared under the communicative approach because for the school "This approach is the one that best reflects the goals and prospects towards which the model of foreign language teaching is directed. That is why the application of this approach in the classroom is carried out thorough the development of student's skills to perform in real communicative situations, emphasizing on oral communication" (P.E.I p. 34). However, the teacher who was responsible for planning the English lessons for third grade focused on grammatical work, where students wrote sentences by using grammatical structures in an isolated way and read them aloud to correct pronunciation mistakes. So although the approach advocated by the school was the communicative one, the lessons ended up focusing on form and not on meaning.

Initially, I conducted the activities proposed by the teacher in charge of planning English. However, analyzing this situation and with the help of my cooperating teacher and my practicum advisor, I took the risk of talking with the academic coordinator about this situation and she gave me the support to continue working on the classes according to the communicative approach and following the topics established in the syllabus.

I started to plan the activities for the class by using a different focus with the help of my cooperating teacher who is a co-worker and stays with me in my English classes. He acts as a critical teacher who gives me some suggestions and recommendations to conduct my classes and also my practicum project.

In the interview that he answered at the beginning of my practicum (February, 2016), concerning the planning of his classes, he stated that he is careful in following a class structure that consists of introduction, production and evaluation. He also stated that he takes into account student learning goals and their interest for learning English. As a result, I discovered that we share some common principles related to lesson planning, so he can help me to plan my English class under the school approach, maintaining a learning environment that allows my students to develop different abilities. Sharing the same vision was an asset during this process as we formed a positive team during my practicum.

Under the advice of my cooperating teacher and my practicum advisor, I started to explore different types of activities that my students have not been exposed to. I developed different kinds of activities in the English class by using videos, songs, and games with a clear purpose for me and my students: the use of the foreign language with different purposes. Consequently, I began reading stories and constructing short texts where the students had the

opportunity to discover different ways of learning English with the clear purpose of making meaning, not only practicing a specific grammar structure or vocabulary item.

Having identified and analyzed the demands of the institution in terms of legal documents, the parameter for planning an English class, the characteristics of students, and the cooperating teacher perception, I discovered a motivation to start developing my practicum research project.

Statement of the Problem

Since the beginning of this year, I was worried about the way I was conducting the English classes combining the ideas that teacher responsible for this subject proposed with the principles and methodology proposed in the syllabus, because there was a mismatch between them. I realized that the objectives stated in the P.E.I (2012), and the syllabus for the school during the whole year were in some way different to the reality that students had in the English class. For example, in the bilingual program the methodology is the communicative approach, so the English class should be based on real communicative situations. However, the objectives in the syllabus such as "the students will be able to recognize and use simple tenses to make short sentences, make brief descriptions using personality, appearance adjectives, and to understand and use the language about people around the community." (P.E.I p. 37), and the activities for English classes proposed by the teacher in charge did not focus on communication and students were not immersed in different communicative contexts. Besides, the English classes were focused on learning new vocabulary, and grammar structures, practicing oral production, and production of written isolated sentences from pictures applying the grammatical structures students have learnt; as can be seen in the following examples:
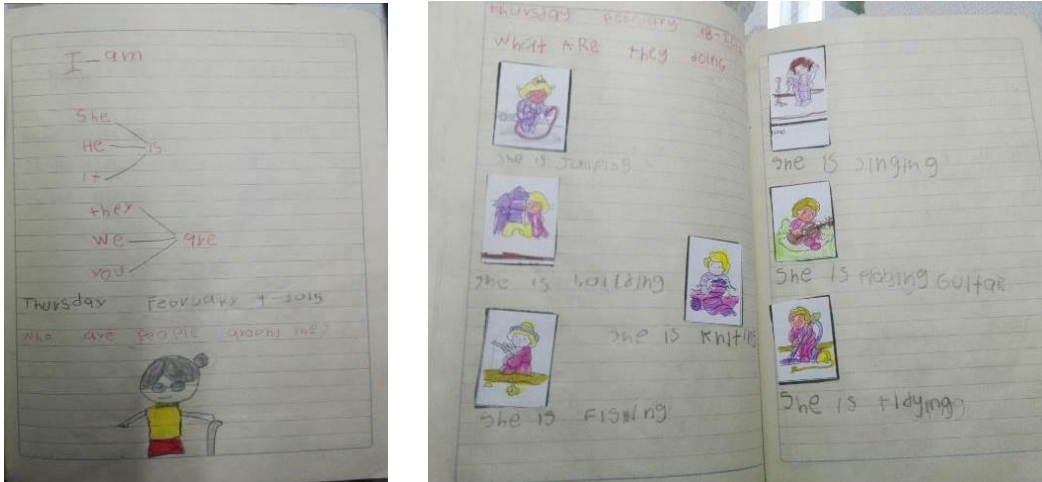
Considering these differences between the English syllabus, and what this teacher proposed, I began to think about ways to improve the writing production of my students, so I realized that I had never proposed to them activities where they had the possibility to construct meaningful short texts using writing for communicative purposes and not in a fragmented way as we had been doing.

Given all of the above, I took the risk to explore a little more on students' written abilities, and I conducted one activity based on a school event (sport day) where all the students were involved. In this class, we started to discuss about what they did on this activity, in order to create a collective story where the students expressed their ideas and I worked as a scribe. I offered my guidance so they would not lose the plot of the story and to help them feel more comfortable participating.

With this activity, I provided the students the possibility to use language with a purpose, and challenged them to start writing collective texts, using what they already knew and what they were learning. This activity was amazing for the students; they were very surprised about the result obtained. That is why I wrote on my journal "I discovered in this class the importance of working from students' experiences and letting them switch codes in order to increase

confidence in themselves to participate in class. In addition, it was the chance to enable them to understand what they are saying because it is something familiar to them." (Journal Entry, April 12, 2016). As a consequence, this activity inspired me to know the path to follow in my practicum project and continue exploring students' written production based on their common experiences.

For all of these reasons, I decided to look at and to study the use of Language Experience Approach (LEA) as Dixon and Nessel (1983) stated that "LEA is useful to create a cooperative and supportive learning environment by actively listening and responding to ideas in a nonjudgmental way, and fostering an environment where mistakes can be made without an accompanying sense of failure" (Wurr, 2002, conclusion, para. 27). According to this, LEA is a valuable tool to enhance students' written production, based on the use of some common experiences in order to create a variety of meaningful and cooperative stories in which they become entrusted and active writers and readers of their own productions. With those ideas in mind I decided to explore the following research question.

Research Question

How can the creation of collective stories foster the development of written production in third grade students at Ferrini School?

General Objective

To explore the impact that collective creation of stories can have on third grade students' written production in English.

Specific Objectives

To promote the use of students´ experiences lived at school and at home as a source for creating meaningful texts.

To create a positive class atmosphere that allows students to express freely their opinions about their experiences.

To encourage students' independent writing through a gradual process of writing development.

Theoretical Framework

The task of teachers to engage students into a literacy development process is increasingly complex, because they need to use different strategies and material to get students interested in this process as they begin to manage the abilities required to construct meaning from the text. As students might feel insecure when they are going to write or read, teachers must face the challenge of increasing the confidence in themselves to do so. These challenges would imply that teachers need to teach them how to read and write and at the same time, increase their confidence and desire to write, make it pleasurable, enjoyable and useful for them.

During the time I had been conducting the English classes with third grade students, I was worried about how to awaken in my students the desire of writing complete texts with communicative purposes. So I took this challenge as an inspiration to do this research project with the aim to make writing an important part of student´s life by using it as a way to express feelings or personal ideas in the invention and construction of their own stories. I began to look for strategies to connect writing with the experiences of students. Bearing in mind all of these ideas, the purpose of this literature review is to explore some of the concepts that were essential for me to achieve the main goal of this research. For instance, I present the concepts of literacy, Balanced Writing Program, Language Experience Approach, and the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model.

The process of reading and writing throughout childhood at school has been also known as children's literacy development. However, the concept of literacy goes beyond learning how to read or write, it allows people to share their understandings and maintain connections with others. According to Hudelson (2001) reading and writing are language processes in which individuals construct meaning. (p. 130).

This conception involves thinking about literacy not only as the act of combining letters and symbols to form words, but also as a process in which a person constructs and creates meanings influenced by the personal experiences, language background as well as the purpose for writing or reading. It also presents literacy as a social process because children give a sense of importance to everything around them since they find all the activities that are carried around them important to maintain relationships with others and thus construct meaning from interaction with others and from what they experience in the surrounding environment.

As the author states, the environment is a powerful tool to provide students experiences to interact among them. It is exactly what my students did in this process as they wrote from the experiences they had in important events at their school. Through the interaction between the teacher and peers, students could gradually take responsibility following some steps such as focused instruction, guided instruction, collaborative learning and independent learning. These steps gradually helped students to take responsibility of their writing process. This concept is called the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (GRR) where the students participate in a gradual process of writing in which they begin to do it in a collective way and progressively they end up writing on their own; As Clark (2014) stated "student must take responsibility for and be capable of proficiency in the targeted skill or knowledge." (p. 29).

I wanted students to gradually assume the responsibility and confidence to do their own writings. This view is also supported by Graves and Fitzgerald (2003) "effective instruction often follows a progression in which teachers gradually do less of the work and students gradually assume increased responsibility for their learning" (p. 2) (Cited by Fisher and Frey (2013). In this case, responsibility was gradually granted through the use of a writing program proposed by Salmon, that she denominated Balanced Writing Program that consists of the following phases:

Writing aloud: In this phase the teacher writes on the board what the students say and she/he takes the opportunity to show them the conventions of written language like punctuation and spelling.

Shared writing: The teacher and students share the message that is being created. Shared writing favors students' learning process in many ways: it reinforces and supports the reading process, brings all class participation, demonstrates how the conventions of language work, allows children to write their own messages, and develops self-confidence.

Guided writing happens when the teacher sits with the student and discusses the topic that the student wants to write about. Guided Writing aims at guiding students in using strategies that allow them to write independently.

Independent writing allows children to create their own writings. It is a technique that allows them to value what they have written. It is an opportunity for children to consider themselves as writers.

The process previously described helps students to increase their self-confidence, as it gives them choices concerning what they want to write about and to personalize their own productions understanding writing as a way to communicate with others. To achieve this purpose, teachers can implement different strategies such as the Language Experience Approach

for different purposes: to encourage students to gradually undertake independent writing, to help them make connections not only between their common experiences and what they write, but also to use their creations to strengthen the reading process and use their productions for communicative purposes. "The Language Experience Approach (LEA) draws upon and takes advantage of this important relation between experience and education by means of student´s narratives as the basis for reading instruction" (Wurr, 2002, theoretical support, para. 21). That means that school life provides the students with real experiences that can be used as a source and inspiration for the construction of collective stories in which they use the language for communicative purposes. It also means that these stories can benefit students in many ways: they can be used as reading texts to promote reading comprehension; they can also help the students to develop their communication abilities in the foreign language by listening, retelling what is happening in the stories, following a progression of events, and developing understandings of characters, personalities and actions in their own stories.

In keeping with these, I focused my attention on the five stages of Language Experience Approach proposed by McCloskey & Davidson (1989) and Dixon and Nessel (1983) (as cited in Wanis, n.d., p.221). Those are:

Share and discuss an experience. In this stage the teacher and the students talk about the experiences together in class; these experiences could be a school trip, a science experiment, a game or competition or a role play.

Dictation. The students dictate their experiences to the teacher in English as far as possible. They can use their mother tongue when necessary and the teacher can provide the English vocabulary or expressions needed.

Revision and Editing. The teacher and the pupils read the story to make any corrections, changes and improvement. Next, the teacher makes a final copy on the board, chart, or overhead for the students to copy.

Extension. The teacher plans a range of follow-up activities to reinforce and extend what the students have learned.

Assessment. The teacher assesses student´s comprehension; teachers can also ask the students to talk about their own progress and their peer's progress.

Those processes and stages are very useful in an English class to awaken students' desire to write without the fear of making mistakes, to feel proud of what they construct. As Hudelson (2001) states the purpose of literacy development is not only that children learn how to read and write, but also that "Children choose to read and write, and they want to engage in these activities. Children would enjoy reading and writing and view reading and writing both as pleasurable and useful for them" (p. 130) In the end, they become aware and responsible of the advances in their writing process in terms of the use of language, beginning from a collective construction and ending with an individual construction in which they use English independently to express their ideas about different experiences at the school or at home. English becomes a tool to express themselves and understand the world around them.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Action Plan</h3>

Based on the theories above mentioned I designed this action plan with the purpose to reach the goals set for this research project. I also wanted to explore the writen production as a progressive process through the implementation of the Language Experience Approach stages.

The proposal was to carry out the activities using both languages English and Spanish with the aim of increasing gradually the use of English. The chart in Appendix A summarizes the actions planned for the development of this project.

With the intention to know about the impact of my action plan, and my performance as a teacher, I decided to collect information from three different sources: Journals, Students written production, student´s interview and formal interview to the CT. (See Appendix B).

Development of Actions

After analyzing in the literature the benefits of implementing Language Experience Approach to improve the students writing abilities, I designed some activities in the action plan in order to achieve the goals set for this research project.

Most of the strategies implemented were related to the invention of stories based on the school events as common experiences where all the students had the opportunity to participate. At the end of the school year each student obtained a book with all the stories created collectively and individually.

The actions were presented as a sequence where students started doing collective writing productions and finished writing texts on their own. I divided the actions into six different moments which were focused on students' experiences at school and at home such as vacations, Antioquia´s Independence Day, invention of a pet and Halloween day (See Appendix C, D, E, F, G and H). These stories took seven class sessions.

The first action took place in July 2016, after students' vacation time. It was the creation of a story based on the activities they did on their vacation which is an experience that almost all the students enjoy. The creation of this story was focused on the implementation of writing

aloud, starting with a list of activities that students were going to use in the story and a list of different titles proposed by them; they voted and chose the best title for this story. Then, students dictated me all their ideas to start the story. With my guidance students continued giving me their ideas through the end of the story. Finally, some of them read the story and made some changes. After this, students wrote the story on a paper sheet and made the drawing to illustrate it. This activity took two hours of English class. (See Appendix C: vacation story).

The second moment was based on the celebration of Antioquia's Independence Day**.** In the school, we celebrate the "Antioqueñidad day" every August, where students from every grade bring food according to a region of Antioquia; then every teacher with her/his group passes through different stands that are decorated according to the region and students taste this food. There is a space to sing "trovas"[1] and a parade where each grade must show something representative of Antioquia as "silleteros"[2], myths and legends, stick horses, and the Castañeda family. Based on this experience, students created a story implementing writing aloud, they voted for the best title proposed by them and they dictated me all their ideas. In this story they took into account connectors to link ideas (we worked on this during the English classes) and the different moments of a story like: the beginning, the middle and the end. Then, students read this story and corrected some mistakes in terms of conventional use of the language and then they answered some questions about this story proposed by the teacher to extend students reading comprehension (See Appendix D: story about the culture of Antioquia). This second moment took two hours of the English class.

The third moment was devoted to working in groups of five students in the creation of a strange animal combining the characteristics of three different animals they liked the most and

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[1]Trovas: typical paisa song that is sung in verses humorously
[2] Silleteros: it is a person from the territory of St. Elena that carries a "silleta" with flowers on his back.

the construction of a story using this animal. As they had already worked in groups in some

classroom activities with my help in the assignment of responsibilities, this time, they did this

story being responsible themselves for the assignment of roles and responsibilities within the

small group. The first thing they did was to agree on the three animals that they like, then they

had to decide who would draw the head, front legs and body and hind legs and tail. After that,

they drew these three parts in three different sheets. Then they began to discuss ideas for

building the story, and on a separate sheet they wrote this story, using the vocabulary worked in

class and taking into account the parameters to write a story. At the end of the activity, they put

together the three parts of the animals and, in front of their peers, they read the story and

explained which animals they used to build the new one. The rest of the students had the

opportunity to assess the story of their peers and the work of their classmates within each group

(See Appendix E: story about the pet). This moment took four hours of the English classes.

        In the fourth moment, students created the end of a story invented from a school event

chosen by them, in this case they chose the sport day. As in the first moment, we constructed the

beginning and the middle of the story together, proposing and voting for a title they were going

to use in the story, this was "the athletic day". After finishing the first two parts of the story, they

read it aloud, and then they chose a friend to create the end of this story according to the

beginning and the middle parts of the story and then made drawings to illustrate it. After this,

every pair read the story in front of the group and the students assessed them in terms of

coherence with the other parts. In this activity we spent two hours of the English class. (See

Appendix F: School Event the end of the story).

        The fifth moment was also based on a school event, namely the Halloween day. The

students were asked to invent a story based on the experience they lived on this day. For doing

this, we spoke about what they did on that day first. After this, they had to choose one friend to work together selecting the title for the story, providing ideas to write the complete story, making drawings and reading the complete story at the end. As we always did, they assessed the stories of their peers, and then each pair said how they felt doing this work in pairs. This activity took three hours of the English class. (See Appendix G: Halloween day story)

The last moment was an individual creation in which students had to choose their favorite topic to invent the story. Students wrote about Christmas, the English class, horror situations, and superheroes among others. They had the opportunity to ask questions about the spelling of some unknown words and tenses. They also used the textual structure to construct the story. This creation took three hours of the English class. (See Appendix H: A free Story).

Those were all the actions implemented during the second semester in the English classes applying the Language Experience Approach with the aim of helping students not only to write in different ways, but also to awaken their desire to participate freely in the creation of those stories.

Findings and Interpretations

Through the development of this practicum project, I collected information from four different sources which helped me to analyze the degree of accomplishment of the objectives set and to answer the research question proposed in this project.

The most valuable resource was the journal entries that I wrote during all my practicum; this journal contained all the events that took place during the classes, as well as my reflection on my own process as a teacher-researcher, and what happened with the students and their progress. The second one was the students written production to assess how they were using the language

to express their ideas in terms of the conventional use of language; the third one was the interviews conducted to all my students in the middle and at the end of the process to know the impact that the activities implemented had on their writing process, and to identify their perceptions about writing in English. And the last one was the interviews applied to my cooperating teacher in the middle and at the end of the process with the intention of knowing his perception about gradual process of the students during their writing process in the English class.

After collecting the data from these instruments, I analyzed them inductively, based on some steps proposed by Burns (2010) "The first one is coding the data that means refine the data into more specific patterns or categories, the second one is comparing the data that means compare the categories or patterns across the different sets of data, the third one is building meanings and interpretations that means think deeply about what the data are saying by reflecting beyond the immediate surface details and the last one is think about how you can present your research and what you have found to tell others" (p. 104-105). I started the analysis with the journal entries, I continued exploring the students writing production, and finally the interviews applied to students and the CT. After doing this, I coded those similar patterns into nine possible categories. I narrowed these categories according to the relationship they had and considering how they influenced the students writing process. Finally, the result of reading and analyzing the categories that were present into the data were grouped in five relevant aspects that are related to my research objectives and provided me with insights to answer my research question: conventional use of English, textual knowledge, students' desire to use English and collaborative learning.

Conventional use of English

After analyzing some of the students writing production, I found that the students at the end of the process were able to construct written texts with higher quality, using simple structures they were learning, writing with more complexity, and fluency, and some of them using code switching to express their ideas. This was evidenced during the following process.

At the beginning in the construction of collective stories (See Appendix C) they did not use any word in Spanish because, "all students cooperated and worked always pursuing the goal of not using much Spanish and putting into practice all the knowledge they have acquired in English so far." (Journal Entry, August 16, 2016). However, they presented some difficulties with adding the "s" in the third person singular, and in some sentences they made some spelling mistakes because they did not pay attention to the story on the board when they were copying it. In this story, they changed some words that were in Spanish into English for example: "later" and "the other day", and they needed a lot of help from the teacher in the construction of the story because they started using their imagination to create a story, but then they ended up doing a personal recount.

Despite these difficulties, they were motivated with the idea of writing more stories. For instance, in one class they said: "Cuándo vamos a escribir otra story?." and in one of the interviews they expressed "nos gusta escribir en inglés porque podemos mejorar las cosas que estamos haciendo mal como la escritura de palabras y la pronunciación" (September 2016) [we like to write in English because we can improve things we are doing wrong like writing words and pronunciation*] and this is something that was happening every time they wrote a story. For instance, in the other collaborative stories, I needed to guide the students clarifying the steps of the story and the use of punctuation to separate ideas and finish paragraphs although they already

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* Researcher Translation

had it a little bit clear. They continued using some connectors like: later, next, at the end, and

finally, as they did it in the first one with the difference that they added some new connectors in

this story. (See Appendix D)

In those stories, they also used Spanish to express some words like: "les dolia" and

"vomitar" that they did not know how to say in English. As they were the only two words in

Spanish, students expressed "teacher, mira las poquitas palabras que usamos en español, solo

dos" [Teacher, look at the few words we used in Spanish, only two*], and they felt so proud of

the story they created, and their confidence to write increased. In this activity they used the text

to extend their comprehension by three basic questions about their story. I tried to explain them

the meaning of the questions but they immediately said "teacher no nos tienes que explicar, ya

sabemos qué hay que hacer" [Teacher, you do not have to explain to us, we already know what

to do*], as I mentioned "Students did not need help to solve them [the questions] because they

understood clearly their story because they created it." (Journal Entry, August 16, 2016).

The next step was the creation of stories in groups of five or six students (See Appendix

E). I did this activity in big groups with the aim to check the students' writing abilities using

English without the help of the teacher.

All the groups demonstrated that they had clear the structure of a story, so they notably

improved in this aspect. The use of English in each group depended on the level of English of its

members: the first group did not use Spanish words while the other ones wrote around 20 words

in Spanish, most of them were unknown words in English for them. For example, in group

number two they wrote "once upon a time one lion, one dog and one elephant and was walking

in the forest and is chocaron and cayeron in un hole that había liquid toxic" the phrase is not

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* Researcher Translation

totally in English, but it is easy to understand its meaning. They took advantage of their mother

tongue and used code switching to write it so, students explored the English language making

approximations writing their texts.

As I was gradually reducing the work in groups, students created the story about

Halloween in pairs (See appendixes F and G). In those stories, some sentences were written with

correct grammatical structure, and by using many and different words written in a correct way.

Students wrote sentences like: "two boys went to a haunted house", "next entered to the haunted

house", "the ghosts are false", "the two boys got scared and closed the door", as I mentioned in

one of my journals "I saw that students are moving toward writing in a conventional way

because they are constructing more structured sentences" (Journal Entry, September 6, 2016).

The students who had a low level of English tried to use the vocabulary learnt in the

previous stories, they were able to write the text conserving the structure of a story (the

beginning, the middle and the end). They used Spanish to write some words or sentences, they

wrote sentences with a correct grammatical structure, and most of the words were written as they

are pronounced. These were some examples about what I said before: "once supoatimen on

crismas uan girl and yor name is sara", "ella lov the crismas and celeste deseim". (See Appendix

I) As the CT affirmed in the interview (November, 2016) " the individual construction of the

stories was influenced a lot by the level of English of each student, for those who showed a

higher level were able to write very complete stories, however those who had a lower level

proved to have more difficulty writing them".

In their effort to avoid the use of Spanish in the writing of the stories in English, students

had some difficulties in using grammar accurately, like the conjugation of verbs according to the

pronoun, for example: "she go", "you is". But I consider that those mistakes were normal in

students with whom grammatical aspects were rarely emphasized. As my purpose was mainly to provide them with opportunities to use the language to express their ideas, the emphasis was more on fluency than accuracy.

Taking into account all of this process, I consider that I achieved the objectives of this research project as students were able to use the English language to write meaningful texts in groups or individually by using simple sentences with correct grammar structures and also using the vocabulary they learnt during the process.

Textual Knowledge

At the end of the process students were not only able to use the language more conventionally, but they were also more conscious about the structure of the texts they created, having in mind the stories should have a beginning, a middle and the end. It was not easy because at the beginning of the creation of these stories, this was not evident, as I sated in my journal: "I feel a concern when the students are creating their stories because they start using their imagination, but sometimes they stop using it, and start to do a personal recount about what was happening in the experience and I found it difficult for them to be aware that it is a story not a personal recount". (Journal Entry, August 16, 2016) But through the reading of the texts they created, and the peer assessment done every time a story was created, I was able to make the students aware of this and at the end, they acquired the ability to say to what extent they used their imagination in the stories and if the texts were similar to a story or a personal recount (see Appendix G). In this regard, the cooperating teacher stated: "students have learnt to write stories because when they read them, in the majority of stories it was possible to identify the steps to create a story, I mean, the beginning, the middle and the end", I agreed with my CT as I said "with this activity I could evidence that they are clear about the type of text we are working on"

(Journal Entry, August 23, 2016), "I realized they are already starting to use a clear structure to write, because in the stories I could perceive the beginning, the middle and the end" (Journal Entry, August 23, 2016).

Students' Desire to use English

Other important impact that LEA had in the writing process of the students was to awaken in them the desire to use English voluntarily to express their ideas in English in different moments of the classes. As the cooperating teacher said in the interview "the students always express a desire to participate in English in the classes and to write the different stories according to their experiences, using gestures and comments of pleasure toward the construction of these stories" (Interview to the CT, September, 2016). This desire did not disappear with time, instead, it was strengthened as the activities became more challenging. Students never gave up, this was demonstrated through their participation; that is why I said "at this time there were more students participating, students who had not taken the risk to participate so much started doing it. They participated using more Spanish than English, but the rest of the students put these words in English because they were always very concerned to use as fewer words in Spanish as possible." (Journal Entry, August 16, 2016). For example, in the story created in July 12, 2016 one student said "se fue" [she went*], and other students said "go to", and another one said "Coraline go to the beach". Not only their own conviction to use English but also try to convince others to do so. "They could have easily done the activities using Spanish and for their own conviction, they performed the activities in English, and when some students tried to answer in Spanish there was always someone who told them they should do it in English." (Journal Entry, September 6, 2016). It was not necessary for me to remind them to do the activities in English. For example,

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* Researcher Translation

when there were some activities in groups, and I passed around monitoring their work, most of

the groups were running the activity mostly in English while they were enjoying it. I could

witness what Hudelson stated as one of the goals of literacy development "Children choose to

read and write, and they want to engage in these activities. Children would enjoy reading and

writing and view reading and writing both as pleasurable and useful for them" (p. 130). As some

of the students said in the interview "a mi me gusta mucho escribir las historias porque son sobre

dias especiales y podemos imaginar, inventar, podemos decir las ideas en el grupo y aprendemos

a trabajar en grupo" [I like a lot writing the stories because they are about special days and we

can imagine and invent, we can say the ideas in the group, and we learn to work in groups*], " a

mi lo que más me gusta de las clases de inglés es escribir las historias porque aprendemos a

escribir más palabras nuevas en inglés para meterlas en las historias que escribimos" [what I like

the most of the English class is writing the stories because we learn to write new words in

English for using them in the stories we write*]. The previous quotations demonstrated the desire

that the students had to put into practice the knowledge they were acquiring during English

classes.

Collaborative Learning

Students have always shown a very positive attitude towards the English classes, as it was

affirmed by the cooperating teacher in one of the interviews "students constantly show their

interest in participating in each of the activities proposed by the teacher from the beginning of

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* Researcher Translation

the year until the end, they never refuse to do them or make negative comments or have a

negative attitude toward the class". (Interview to the CT, October, 2016). This aspect facilitated

that the classes were carried out in a harmonious way with very positive results for them. I used

different grouping arrangements like individual work, in large or small groups, and it is here

where I found that students markedly improved the way of carrying out activities in groups.

When they started to perform the group and individual work, some difficulties were

presented. In my journal I reflected about this aspect: "at the beginning of the activities doing the

stories with the entire group was very good because the teacher helped them to regulate a little

the participation of students, and that ideas were in an organized way, but writing of stories in

small groups was a little bit complicated because it was difficult to get into an agreement, and all

students in the group did not hear each other, but with the help of the teacher to choose some

roles it became easier" (Journal Entry, September 16, 2016). During the students' interview, they

also affirmed "a mi lo que no me gusta de trabajar en grupo es que a veces no nos podemos

poner de acuerdo y hay confusiones y conflictos" [what I do not like about working in groups is

that sometimes we cannot agree on the group and confusions and conflicts are presented[*]]. In the

end, during the construction of stories in groups, they managed to work in large or small groups

in a quieter and organized way. Students started to implement different strategies to improve in

their collaborative learning "the strategies they implemented to improve this part were: giving

few turns to each partner of the group for giving their ideas, in other groups there was someone

who granted the floor to each friend, but in general they were taking a very autonomous role in

this teamwork" (Journal Entry, September 16, 2016). Regarding this, students said in the

interview in September, 2016 "aprendemos a trabajar en grupos pequeños" [we learn about how

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[*] Researcher Translation

to work in small groups*], "aprendemos a respetar la opinón de los otros" [we learn to respect

the opinion of others*], "nos podemos poner de acuerdo en las cosas que decimos" [we can agree

on the things we say*] they started to have a real collaborative learning and taking the

responsibility to get the activities forward into the groups. "They are taking more responsibility

for doing some things that the teacher did before" (Journal Entry, September 16, 2016). As

Graves and Fitzgerald (2003) stated "effective instruction often follows a progression in which

teachers gradually do less of the work and students gradually assume increased responsibility for

their learning" (p. 2) (Cited by Fisher and Frey (2013). It was evident that at the beginning of the

school year students did the activities depending on the teacher, and at the end, they were

conscious of their responsibility to do their work by themselves. So the responsibility was

moving from teacher to students.

To conclude, all of these aspects affected positively the performance of students as well

as their perception of the writing process and the English classes in general. Besides, they felt the

confidence to use English in a meaningful way through the creation of different stories based on

their experiences.

Conclusion

After exploring the impact of creating collective stories based on LEA, I think that I

achieved the objectives proposed in this practicum project as it had positive effects in different

aspects of my students writing process, and language learning in general.

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* Researcher Translation

Using their own experiences lived at different times in school and at home, they were able to move from writing simple sentences to writing short stories looking for different strategies to express their ideas in English, such as using code switching to convey meaning, or inventing their own words to create meaningful texts. Although at the end, the writing process was influenced by the level of English that each student had to write the individual stories, and despite some grammar and spelling mistakes, the majority of students were able to write stories using their imagination and their experiences, and they also became aware of the structure of this kind of texts. This was favored by a positive classroom environment in which students worked collaboratively and felt the confidence to participate in Spanish and in English to express their ideas.

LEA is a very useful tool to help students to lose their fear of using English when they participate in class, and in the writing of consistent texts with communicative purposes. However, it is necessary that this approach be applied in a continuous way, devoting considerable time to it so that significant advances can be seen in the writing process of the students. It also implies a consistent and coherent work on form and structure as we develop students' writing abilities.

Reflection

This practicum project provided me with many lessons not only as a teacher (in spite of my years of experience) but also as a researcher.

At the beginning of this practicum, I was very worried about the behavior of my students the previous year and their level of English because I did not have very good references of them in those aspects, and I was worried about not knowing how to handle them in those aspects. However, this practicum helped me to discover that the students are what the teachers teach them, in my case, my students learned to behave and they advanced in leaps and bounds in English. As a teacher, this project led me to open my mind to experience and explore different ways of teaching English using different strategies and approaches that I did not know, and it had a positive impact on me and my students.

With this project, I learnt that it is important not to stay with the knowledge I already have, since each year I experience different situations that need to be solved in different ways; so it is relevant to reflect on my praxis as a teacher in the light of all these theories that support my procedures as a teacher. Research is also important to analyze the results of the new strategies implemented. So, teaching and research go hand in hand and they are mutually enriched.

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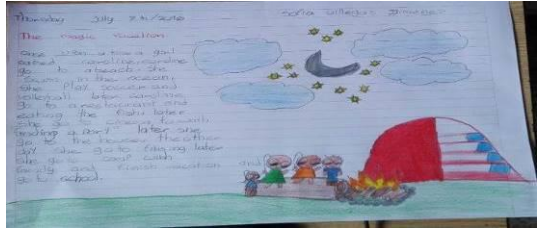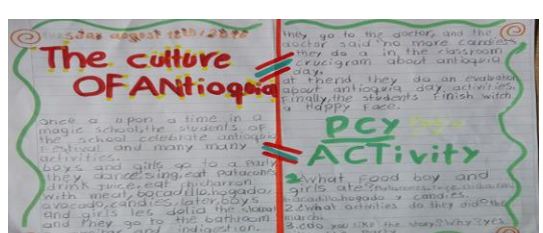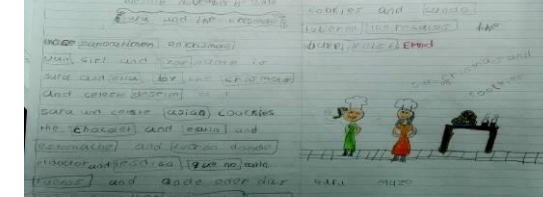
Appendixes

Appendix A: Action plan

WHAT?	WHEN?	HOW?
Story about vacation: students talk about activities they did during their vacation	JULY 7 TH	**Writing aloud:** students express their ideas about it and the teacher writes them on the board and repeats them aloud. The teacher guides the students by asking questions.
Story about "Antioqueñidad" day (school event about Antioquia's Independence Day)	AUGUST 16TH	**Writing aloud:** students express their ideas about this event and the teacher writes them on the board and reads them aloud. The teacher guides the students by asking questions.
Story about a pet invented by the group of students	SEPTEMBER 27 TH	**Shared writing:** the teacher and the students share the story. Some students write on the board while the teacher guides some aspects of conventional use of the language.
Create the end of a story about cultural and institutional celebration (school event).	OCTOBER 18TH	**Writing aloud and Guided writing:** students will write the end of the story in pairs with the guidance of the teacher
Story about Halloween day (school event)	NOVEMBER 2ND	**Independent writing:** the students will be able to create a story in pairs.

Story about the English class	NOVEMBER 8TH	**Independent writing:** students will be able to write a story on their own about their feelings during English classes individually.

Appendix B: Data collection instruments

WHAT?	WHEN?	WHAT FOR?
Journals	Every Class	To take into account the students´ perceptions about their written productions. To have evidence of the way they respond to the gradual development of written production.
Students´ written production	After every stage of the process	To evidence the students´ process in terms of the conventional use of the English language.
Students' interview	Initially, in the middle of the process and at the end.	To identify the opinion of students regarding their own process, the use of languages and their conceptions of their written productions.
Formal Interview (CT)	Initially, in the middle of the process and at the end.	To know his perception about the gradual progress of students' written production and their performance.

Appendix C: vacation story	Appendix D: "Antioqueñidad day" story
Apendix E: Strange animal story	
Appendix F: The end of a story	Appendix G: Halloween story
Appendix H: A free story	Appendix I: A free story