THE USE OF BLOGS AS A PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY TO DEVELOP DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH WRITING

KAREN ROCÍO BAUTISTA RODRÍGUEZ

LIDA SERLEY GÓMEZ MELO

ADVISOR'S NAME: MARÍA EUGENIA LÒPEZ HURTADO

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RAE

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

TITLE: THE USE OF BLOGS AS A PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY TO IMPROVE DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH WRITING

AUTHORS: BAUTISTA RODRÍGUEZ KAREN ROCÍO; GÓMEZ MELO LIDA SERLEY

KEY WORDS: blog, writing, descriptive paragraphs

2. DESCRIPTION:

This is a thesis where the authors focused on the development of student's descriptive paragraph writing by using Blogs as a learning tool. The study was developed over four months with students of ninth grade in a public high school. They developed a sequence of activities in the classroom as well as in the blog. The findings indicate that the students feel motivation when working with this virtual tool, and the descriptive paragraph writing improved since they recognized and applied its structure.

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4. **CONTENT:**

MAIN OBJECTIVE: To develop student's English descriptive paragraph writing

RESEARCH DESIGN: It is presented the model used to carry out the research: Kemmis and McTaggart action research. Teachers also outline the participants and settings. The final part of the Research Design is the establishment of the Instruments Procedure, where the researchers detail the instruments used to collect data throughout the project.

THE DATA ANALYSIS: consists of the categories used to organize data, according to the Grounded Theory bases, from Strauss and Corbin.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS: It is shown the findings of this study, the conclusions that were infer from those findings, and additional suggestions for future studies.

5. **PEDAGOGICAL DESIGN:**

POPULATION: 60 students, 32 girls and 28 boys, from fourth cycle in a public school

SOCIOECONOMIC STRATUM: 1 to 3

TYPE OF RESEARCH: Action Research

INSTRUMENTS: Interviews, reflections, blog. Those instruments were applied in three different moments, at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the project.

Virtual and classroom work were designed, in order to guide students in the practice of descriptive paragraph writing, in the blog named WRITINGANDENJOYINGENGLISH' *www.writingandenjoyingenglish.blogspot.com*.

Researchers followed a didactic model during twelve weeks, which treated each descriptive paragraph component separately. Each component was individually explained and exemplified, and then explored, by the students, through group work. At the same time, the virtual exercises on the blog were applied to reinforce the concepts worked on in the classroom; by posting their comments on the blog, students had the opportunity to share the classroom work with their peers.

The didactic model was designed with the objective to write descriptive paragraphs about real situations, in the classroom as well as in the blog. For that purpose, different activities were planned for each week. This involved a

process of observing, recognizing, practicing, posting, correcting, and rewriting.

After applying the instruments, the information was analyzed through the combination of the interviews, reflections, and blog. By using Grounded Theory (GT), by Strauss & Corbin 1990 (cited in Jhonson & Christensen, 2010), as a way to measure the data elicited from the instruments, emerged certain categories and subcategories related with the students' behavior in the activities.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Through the use of the blog, students wrote a complete descriptive paragraph including coherence component. Some grammatical errors are still evident but they improved to some extend in this kind of texts. Also, students were more interested and aware of their writing, evidenced by the students' reflections, both in virtual and classroom activities, on their interests and weaknesses about writing, the former of which increased and the latter of which diminished. Despite of the student's progress in writing descriptive paragraphs, it is necessary to assign more time in class to the use of blogs in order to reach one hundred percent effectiveness of the project.

DATE: March 26th 2014.

ABSTRACT

This investigation focuses on the development of student's descriptive paragraph writing by using Blogs as a learning tool. The study was developed over four months with students of ninth graders in a public high school. They developed a sequence of activities in the classroom as well as in the blog. The findings indicate that the students feel motivation when working with this virtual tool, and the descriptive paragraph writing improved since they recognized and applied its structure.

Key Words: blog, technology, writing, descriptive paragraphs, collaborative work.

INTRODUCTION

As students write, they learn to express and communicate their ideas, interests and dreams. However, in Colombia, writing is still the pitfall of the cultural and intellectual advancement of our students, possibly because people are not conscious of the importance of the development of that skill or because the strategies used to motivate people to write are not catered to the individual needs of each person. To more effectively develop writing in Colombia, our challenge as teachers is, by using familiar tools such as current technology, to involve students in activities where they feel that learning is a natural part of their environment.

By exposing a group of high school students to activities concerning the composition of descriptive paragraphs in a blog, this project intends to show how writing skills could be improved to ultimately foster their performance in school and in life, in general. More specifically, the collected data lead to an answer to the scientific question: ***How could students develop descriptive paragraph writing?***

When students share and learn beyond their classrooms through a foreign language, they have the opportunity to show their potential as citizens who can contribute to the development of themselves and their community.

Therefore, when they use a blog, they do not only find new ways to grow from their external surroundings but they also develop their own internal paths, finding answers on the use of a language to discover new things and enlarge or reorganize their existing network of knowledge. According to Fellner (2006), blogs provide students and teachers with a novel form of learning, since blogs are now common and have become a relevant and credible forum for people to express their opinions and share information throughout the world.

There are many other reasons to get learners interested in writing both inside or outside the classroom. Writing is useful outside the classroom, for instance, because students will be able to think and write during spontaneous conversations and have the possibility to reflect about language aspects, word order, verb tenses, and punctuation, etc... Unfortunately, it is common to find students that are not enthusiastic about writing -- this may be due to a lack of confidence or lack of a topic to write about. Therefore, teachers should adopt different strategies beginning at low level courses that imbue confidence and imagination in the students.

The challenge of this project is to use a technological tool that fosters descriptive paragraph writing. The researchers have chosen the blog as that technological tool because it is a new tool for the students who otherwise only practice English in the classroom.

This project intends to measure the usefulness of a blog for foreign writing instruction, specifically how it can help develop descriptive paragraph composition. For that purpose, the researchers designed a timetable with classroom and virtual activities related to the recognition and composition of descriptive paragraphs. Those activities were undertaken during twelve weeks where fourth level (ninth grade) students worked in groups for one hour a week. They had a time limit to do their practice on the blog, which was reviewed every week in order to give them feed back to correct their work. With those exercises, teachers attempted to find some kind of improvement in the unity and coherence of writing as well as the student's attitudes towards the blog.

The methods and techniques the researchers used to collect organize and analyze the data, in order to best present and discuss the results, were guided by *qualitative* perspectives that make the analysis stronger before, during and after the project. Action research based on Kemmis & McTaggart (2000), was employed, which suggests that the researcher follow a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and revising, and then starting the cycle over again. It is a reflective process that allows for inquiry and discussion of various components of the research, where research is defined as a collaborative activity among colleagues searching for solutions to everyday, real problems experienced in schools, or looking for ways to improve instruction and increase student achievement (Ferrance, 2000).

When analyzing data, the results of the application of different data collection instruments were organized by multiple categories of analysis, which, through Strauss and Corbin, led to clear interpretations of the project's effectiveness.

The entire project consists of three distinct phases, Research Design, Data Analysis and Findings, and Conclusions and Implications. In the Research Design phase, it was presented the model used to carry out the research: Kemmis and McTaggart action research. Teachers also outline the participants and settings necessary to meet the goal of the project, which is to measure the effectiveness of the blog in developing descriptive writing. The final part of the Research Design phase is the establishment of the Instruments Procedure, where the researchers detail the instruments used to collect data throughout the project.

The Data Analysis phase consists of the categories used to organize data, according to the Grounded Theory bases, from Strauss and Corbin 1990 (cited in Jhonson & Christensen, 2010)

In the last phase, Conclusions and Implications, are shown the findings of this study, the conclusions that were infer from those findings, and additional suggestions for future studies.

Through this mode of developing the project, the researchers found that there are many challenges, both personally and socially imposed, that demand commitment and conviction about the job. But, when the teacher sees that his

or her students contribute to society through the application of a given subject taught in school, the teacher will feel satisfied and ultimately have the desire to continue to improve their practice. This project has given the opportunity to be closer to the real-life situations of school. Additionally, it has allowed the recearchers to see better how the English language can be used as an avenue for teachers to deal with student problems.

The most important contribution in carrying out this project is to determine which teaching practices can improve students' entrance into society. Successful teaching should make students see academic study, not as an obligation, but as a way to be successful in life. Foreign languages contribute to both group and individual interests; the researchers want students to recognize them as such. To impress this idea upon them, technology is highly useful, given the evidence that motivation for English writing could be improved by using media resources.

1. BACKGROUND

Firstly, the researchers must mention that the research presented in the PFPD program was developed in the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in April 2012, using a 'Blog to Guide Students to Use Adjectives Beginner Appropriately When Writing Descriptions in English,' by Omar Yesid Lizarazo Jara. This research was developed with sixth grade students. The objective was to implement an innovation to the practice of second-language instruction inside and outside the classroom, focusing on giving students a guide to descriptive writing. The design included activities to be worked on in the classroom and in a blog. The results were positive because the learners were able to improve the level of writing, in particular with relation to descriptive texts using adjectives.

Secondly, in this investigation, it is used the study 'Writing Using Blogs: A Way to Engage in Meaningful Communication Colombian Adolescents,' presented in July 2011, by Gloria Rojas, at Universidad Nacional de Colombia in a PFPD program. This project was developed with ninth grade students and focused on communication in English using blogs. Activities were developed in the classroom and in the blog that let students´ interact with peers and with researchers. The results showed that students

communicated through writing on the blog and therefore, communication improved.

Another work concerning this project is ‘Blogging: A way to foster EFL writing,’ developed during 2006, by *Luz Mary Quintero.* This project was carried out by a group of first year university students from an “English Program” at a public university in Bogotá. It analyzed the role that feedback played in the process of writing. That study was implemented through the interaction of two groups of students, one from Colombia and the other from Canada, who interacted regularly by means of using blogs. The findings suggested that EFL writing was greatly developed when students felt part of a community in which they can interact, and share similar interests and language learning goals. These interactions were mediated by technology. It was also found that, by writing in blogs, students not only developed their writing, but more importantly, they had the possibility to portray and show themselves through the written pieces they posted. Finally, the feedback was found to be beneficial in EFL writing as a crucial ingredient to give student-writers tools to support the writing process.

Directing the type of writing developed in this project was a study called ‘Adolescents’ Awareness of Environmental Care: Experiences when Writing Short Descriptive Texts in English,’ carried out by Lorena Jaramillo Urrutia, and Ana Stella Medina Gutiérrez in 2010. It is an action search and innovation study aimed at motivating students to care and preserve the

environment through the writing of short descriptive texts in English. The findings showed that the procedure used in class promotes interdisciplinary work around environmental topics, as well as the development of writing skills.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The need to develop English paragraph writing skill in students of two public schools, due to the low results in their academic development reflected on previous writing activities. It was based on the analysis of the results of an e-forum carried out in 2012, where an evaluation chart was designed to categorize the type of errors students made. Researchers prepared an activity related to a handmade portfolio where the students had to read information about cultural aspects of their regions, and then they wrote it in portfolios. The results showed that students used to translate from Spanish to English without understanding this information after the translation process. Moreover, it was observed that they present difficulties by using some grammatical structures (verbal tense, simple structures), as well as the unfamiliarity with the concept and use of unity and coherence in their writings.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

RESEARCH QUESTION

¿How could students develop descriptive paragraph writing?

OBJECT OF THE STUDY

English writing learning process

FIELD OF STUDY

The development of English writing learning process in students of fourth cycle.

MAIN OBJECTIVE

To develop student's English descriptive paragraph writing.

RESEARCH TASKS:

1. Characterization of students weaknesses about writing.
2. Design of pedagogical strategies, in order to review the students performance in English descriptive paragraph writing process.
3. Evaluate the proposal of blog implementation in the development of English descriptive paragraph writing

This study is significant because it allows measuring the level of contribution of blogs as a pedagogical resource in English language teaching by the design and implementation of a pedagogical strategy based on the use of a blog, to contribute in English descriptive paragraph writing process.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, it is presented the theoretical constructs that supported the development of this study to reach the goal of improving descriptive paragraph writing in English through the use of a blog. Before doing so, the researchers must first define a blog and explicitly state its particular advantages for motivating classroom practices and second, they must define productive writing and prove why schools need to foster its improvement.

4.1 Blogs and their teaching use

Throughout history, people have seen new inventions as a contribution to human development. Various tools have emerged that enrich different fields of knowledge. One of them is teaching and the development of a language learning process. One such invention is called Web 2.0, which allows people to easily access and work on blogs, wikis, and other types of web pages. These tools have aided the development of language instruction.

Blogs were used for the first time in 1994, in the United States, but became more popular by the late 90s (Rojas, 2011 p. 10). Since then, many people around the world have begun to use blogs in order to publish and access information.

Blogs are similar to, or even defined as a personal online diary, in which authors continually update information. Based on Alvaro Ramirez, associated professor of the Bergen University in Norway (El Espectador, 2009), cited in Rojas, (2011 p. 12), topics related to intimate relationships, sex, and technology are the most popular in blogs. Given the relative taboo of these topics, it can be infer that blogs grant people great freedom of expression in which there is no limitation of space nor censure.

> *Blogging has emerged among a variety of web-based instructional possibilities as a leader, in part because it allows students the ability to interact in a more public venue, sharing their thoughts, ideas, interpretations, hopes, and fears with anyone willing to spend time looking on the internet (Martindale & Wiley, 2005). Blogging has also become a media-darling, enjoying a prominent place among media outlets during the last presidential election (Martindale & Wiley, 2005; Sausner, 2005). Many within the academy, however, are less eager to embrace blogging as an instructional support mechanism, and demand an accounting of just what blogging adds to the classroom experience. The current study was designed to describe the elements or characteristics of blogging that might make it an effective tool for supporting college level instruction. (Miller)*

The use of blogs as a technological tool is very common in education, economics, politics, ecology, and other fields. When used in education, blogs present many advantages for teachers. For instance, they allow students to write without wasting or needing paper. Also, they give the opportunity to

create a space for autonomous learning, where the teacher can establish a continual communication with students.

With blogs, teachers can make their own schedules, since they can publish, revise, and evaluate the students' work whenever is most convenient. They can also publish different resources in writing, reading or listening skills. And perhaps most importantly, teachers can change their traditional teaching methods, since blogs open up the possibility of using other technological resources such as web sites, videos, songs, and images. To setup a blog, there exists helpful websites such as *www.blogger.com*, *http://es.wordpress.com*, *www.ezblogworld.com/*,*www.bahraichblogs.com/*, and *www.getablog.net/portal3.php*.

When teaching through a blog or another technological tool, there are steps one can follow to reach the desired goal, which, in this case, is the fostering of writing skills. Dudney and Hockly (2007), cited by Rojas (2011 p. 14) say that we should go through the following steps when setting up a blog for students: 1. Setting up a sample blog: before beginning to work in blogs with the students, teachers have to create their own blog in order to be familiarized with the content language and other nuisances that the technology contains. 2. Setting up students' blogs: in this step, the students will begin to create their blogs in the computer room and use the sample blog as a guide. Another important aspect of working with a blog is to encourage both individual and small group work. 3. Posting to and visiting blogs:

encourage the students to share their own blogs while visiting, writing and posting comments in other blogs. 4. Follow-up: the students and teachers should continue posting information in their blogs.

Blogs can be setup specifically for classroom use. as Johnson (2004) describes, a main class blog can be routed to individual blogs in order to give students access to their own personal blogs and to group blogs. Using a blog allows for easy creation of new entries; data is entered in an easier way than any other tool of its kind (Fellner 2005). It also gives the possibility to invite other authors, and permission can be easily granted to them.

Curran (2011) provides additional reasons to integrate blogs into the curriculum. A blog could make education demand-oriented and participant-centered, which is excellent for self-driven learners who need individual feedback. This open approach to information allows the user to be curious and imaginative. Blogs can encourage pupils to be active throughout the period of learning and allows easy access to information.

4.2 Writing and Blogs

Technology is changing the way we think about and approach writing. For example, Cushing (2002 p. 231) argues that “the traditional distinction between speech and writing is becoming increasingly blurred as a result of the pervasiveness of electronic mail in business, schools and other settings.” More to that point, Carter and Nunan *(2001 p. 32)* argue that the use of

technology in English L2 writing courses may be the foremost change in curriculums today. For instance, composition students regularly use word processing, which has revolutionized the writing process. Further, computer-networked classrooms allow students to communicate both locally and globally. In local communication, students can work cooperatively with their peers. In global communication, students can connect with other people around the world.

To establish a connection between *writing* and *blogs*, we followed Luz Mary Quintero (2008, p. 16), cited by Rojas (2011 p. 15), who says that with "the avenue of the internet and other technologies that can support writing, it is possible for students to have peers in a remote part of the world, in a different school in the same city or just peers from other levels, or even from the same class at the same institution. New Technologies have extended writing environments by linking student- writers to other people with whom they can interact through writing. Writing then becomes the vehicle for communication rather than the final purpose". And, Pennington (2008) argues that students motivation in L2 writing increases because they are in contact with a real audience who provides input, encouragement, and suggestions for new resources with which to develop their ideas.

a blog is a good tool to improve writing because, firstly, it lets the students and teachers interact. Secondly, students can read and write about information related to their interests, and life styles. Fellner (2006 p. 17)

sustains that the use of blogs fits with students´ interests and varying English levels. Additionally, through a blog, teachers can control all students´ activities in an easy way so they can save time and propose different activities that help students learn.

4.3 Writing in School

In trying to define good writing, various definitions have been offered: according to Klein (1985, quoted by Tan 2009), “writing is the ability to put pen and paper to express ideas through symbols”. In this way, representations on the paper will have meaning and content that could be communicated to other people by the writer. According to Zamel (1982), however, meaning is expressed through writing during the process of writing itself. Writers do not necessarily start off the process knowing what they want to say. Rather, meaning forms during the process of writing. For Harper (2006), cited by Amado (2010 p. 155), writing is an “art, an action, and an activity as a mode of engagement with the world, as the producers of artifacts in the form of books, plays, poems, television and films, website among others.” So, as the writer creates meaning while writing, he or she also builds art to be shown to the world. In this way, writing is hugely important for learning. Every day, people want to communicate their feelings, findings, research, and knowledge, and writing seems to be a successful way to achieve it. According to Cushing (2002 p. 10), “writing, which was once

considered the domain of the elite and well-educated, has become an essential tool for people of all walks of life in today´s global community."

It is also necessary to understand how the skill of writing is developed, because, as Archibald (1994) mentions, the term 'writing' refers both to an act and the result of that act. This immediately sets up two possible perspectives on acquiring writing: learning as the process of composing and learning as the form and organization of the product. In this way, the strengthening of the writing process at school has many benefits. As Peterson (2008, p. 61) adds, "the act of writing helps students make sense of the rolling, backtracking highway of thoughts running through their heads. The written words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs give these thoughts some shape and form." For Peterson (2008), students writing in any subject area come to know more about themselves through the process of writing. Through writing, students learn to expand their sense of who they are and learn about all that life has to offer.

Discussing the human capacity to write, White (cited in Nunan 1984 p. 36) argues that "writing is not a natural activity. All physically and mentally normal people have to be taught how to write." So, as language teachers, one of our main purposes is to teach students how to write. Some important points we have to bear in mind when writing is that the text must be cohesive and coherent. Thus, it is necessary to take into account the following aspects, considered by Nunan (1984 p. 37), which contribute to a good writing

process: content format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter formation. In addition, Peterson (2008) explains that more formal contexts of writing require additional basic writing conventions (tone, spelling, grammar and punctuation). This means that reinforcing appropriate writing conventions is necessary in science classes as well, and not only in language arts classes. It is important that students understand that effective communication is important in every aspect of life, including with their friends, family, and school.

In an information-based society, writing skills represent the development of communication in economic and academic fields; as Perrin and Jakobs (2006, p 2) add, “Through writing, we build up social networks, develop projects, inform colleagues and customers, and generate the basis for decisions. We send e-mail messages with text attachments, publish those texts, and store them in knowledge databases. The quality of the products of all these processes is often decisive for social resonance and professional success”. Expanding this point to other fields, Cushing (2002 p. 12) argues that effective writing is used in reporting current events for newspapers or web pages, composing academic essays, business reports, letters or e-mails. Ultimately, the ability to write effectively allows individuals from different cultures and backgrounds to communicate.

Peterson (2008) affirms that many students spend countless hours blogging, e-mailing and text messaging. Compared to the past generation, students

now have much more opportunity in their daily lives to write. And, they appear to enjoy this socially-oriented writing. That said, the teachers need to guide students so that they recognize that the informality of electronic communication is not appropriate in all contexts.

Students spend much of the time in classrooms writing, and some of them make writing a habit if they see it as important for their learning goals. As Harmer (2007, p 111) points out, the first reason to get students into a writing practice is that writing provides more time for thinking than spontaneous conversation. This gives them a greater opportunity for language processing, which the author refers to as “thinking about the language”. And even more so, writing ability must be developed in schools because it contributes to other areas of the knowledge. Related to this, Cushing (2002 p. 5) argues that “It is clear that writing is an important part of the curriculum in schools from the earliest grades onward, and that most children in countries that have a formal education system will learn to write, at least at a basic level, in that setting.” In this sense, Kroll (1990 p. 77) says that many teachers are currently involved in writing across different curriculums and are accustomed to stressing the role of writing in developing critical thinking.

For Santiesteban (2012), writing is one of the generalized skills in the teaching-learning process. The ability is useful because it allows evaluating students’ use of language and their knowledge about it. For Perrin and Jakobs, however, writing can be a painful process due to the difficulty of

choosing the correct words and the correct linguistic patterns. Thus, the question of how text production can be conceptualized, taught and learned is not a trivial matter.

Teachers of different areas encourage children to write beginning in their first years of school because it is a good experience for students and can help them in the future. But, it is necessary to bear in mind that this is not an easy process and demands a great effort from teachers and parents. Feedback on student writing is used to support the development of the skill and nurture their confidence as writers. Teacher feedback often takes the form of written comments on their final graded compositions (Stagg, 2010), remarking on, for instance, syntax, semantics, punctuation, and capitalization.

In this respect, Harmer (2007) distinguishes between two kinds of writing purposes, writing for learning and writing for writing. In the first case, writing is used as an aide-mémoire, or practice tool, to help students practice and work with language. On the other hand, writing for writing is important because, according to the author (p, 99) “students should become better at writing, whatever kind of writing that might be.”

Writing is an important goal for all those people that are learners, especially, in this case, for English language learners. Speakers of different languages have several writing challenges. Writers have the opportunity to help new

learners of writing by sharing stories about exercises, books, and learning techniques that, in turn, help to improve the English writing skills.

Teachers have to consider many aspects before starting a writing activity, taking into account scholarly and individual perspectives to introduce them to get that objective. One of the important aspects to consider before teaching writing is to agree the genre of text to be written; as Harmer (2007 p, 112) emphasizes: “genre analysis will help students see how typical texts within a genre are constructed, and this knowledge will help them construct appropriate text of their own.”

The act of writing helps students’ to interact with their surroundings. Its success depends on the process followed by the writer according to their needs. Harmer also says that writing typically involves *planning, drafting, reviewing and editing* but instead of this, “we may plan, draft, re-plan, draft, edit, re-edit, re-plan, etc before we produce our final version”. Simple awareness, however, of the steps in the writing process, is not sufficient to get students into a voluntary habit of writing. To accomplish this goal, teachers must firmly keep in mind the close relationship that exists between reading and writing. Stotsky (1983), cited by Eisterhold, surveyed first language correlational studies and found the following: “There are correlations between reading achievement and writing ability. Better writers tend to be better readers”. This suggests that reading and writing are related and both skills must be taken into account to complete an objective.

Regardless, in this project, the researches intend to work solely on descriptive paragraphs. They define descriptive paragraphs as a group of sentences that are closely related in thought and which serve one common purpose. To improve their descriptive paragraphs, it is important for writers to receive steady and appropriate feedback in such a way that the corrections are constructive and do not confuse the students. Goldstein & Kohls (2002) points out that research has shown that students often find teacher commentaries confusing. Similarly, Crawford (1992) wrote that students said that they may use teacher feedback without understanding the reasons behind it. And finally, Arndt, cited by Ferris (2006), says that students sometimes think they have understood the feedback when, in fact, they do not.

4.4 Descriptive Paragraphs.

Discussing descriptive paragraphs, Hollovel (2009 p. 112) emphasizes that the nature of the description is in the sensory details. The purpose of a paragraph is to express one point, idea, or opinion, by selecting the appropriate elements from the relevant setting in which the thing to be expressed is located. An experienced writer will select these most effective element based on sensory memories of a specific experience, using things like people or place. Haines (2007 p.121), specifying that point, adds that the writer often uses spatial order to create a clear visual image of a person,

place, object, or scene: the location or arrangement in space from top to bottom, bottom to top, right to left, left to right, near to far, far to near, inside to outside, or outside to inside.

Description also may include or suggest chronological order because a person, place, or object usually appears in a situation, or an incident usually suggests a scene. Descriptive transition words signal that the details follow a logical order based on one or more of the following elements: the arrangement in space of a person, place, object, or scene. These provide the starting point from which the writer chooses to begin the description and the time frame that is relevant to the description.

According to Hollowell, it can be distinguished three types of descriptive paragraph. The first is the narrative description, or storytelling. It tells stories, real or fiction, in such a way that the reader can relate to it personally. This can be achieved through the writer's understanding of personal experience for which the reader feels empathy. The second is the subjective description, or persuasive paragraph, where the writer has an opinion or attitude about the situation or subject being written about. The use of descriptors helps to convey the writer's attitude to the reader. Finally, the objective description is a description factual in nature, written in such a way that allows the reader to experience the description from different perspectives.

According to Hollowell (2009, p 100) , it is important to describe, when people writes descriptive paragraphs, particular smells, tastes, textures, wherever possible. That is, it is important to appeal to the senses. For example, the sentence, "the silk garment felt smooth and fluid over my skin, and it had the sound of a gentle breeze," makes great use of sensory description. It helps to use similes and metaphors and to insert descriptive adjectives to modify your nouns. For example, rather than only saying "blue ocean," describe the actual colors you see in the ocean, using more specific words such as “aquamarine” or “indigo” to describe the shade. Personification, attributing human characteristics to inanimate objects, is another useful descriptive tool. The paragraph must also be long enough to give an adequate description. One should describe the scene or object in as many ways as you can, while still making sure to keep the paragraph coherent.

Beare (2011 p.18) argues that there are four sentence types used to construct a paragraph:

Topic sentence: This sentence contains your idea, point, or opinion. It should use a strong verb and make a bold statement.

Supporting sentences: These provide explanations and support for the topic sentence (main idea) of your paragraph. Supporting sentences provide the evidence for your topic sentence. Supporting sentences that include facts,

statistics and logical reasoning are much more convincing than simple statements of opinion.

Concluding sentence: This sentence restates the main idea (found in your topic sentence) and reinforces the point or opinion. Concluding sentences repeat the main idea of your paragraph in different words.

Transitional sentence: This sentence prepares the reader for the following paragraph. Transitional sentences should help readers logically understand the connection between your current main idea, point or opinion and the main idea of your next paragraph.

5 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

According to General Education Act, Act 115 of 1994, as teachers, we are looking for the development of *skills*, with the intent that citizens have a capacity for reflective critical analysis to strengthen the scientific, technological and social endeavors mediated by the use of language. This law also proposes, as an act of innovation, the incorporation of the use of new technologies for language learning, a strategy that has been called: “Ases para una nueva Nación bilingüe y competitiva”.

To achieve these educational purposes, the Ministry of National Education, together with the National Program of Bilingualism, proposed that, in Colombia, the minimum education necessary to learn a foreign language is three hours a week, with a total of 1440 hours from basic to intermediate levels. In other words, for students to achieve the required competence in English, they must study for three hours a week from basic primary education, A1 (first to third year of primary school), through the A2 level (fourth grade to seventh grade) and until basic secondary up to B1 (eighth to eleventh of secondary) (MEN, 2007). These are the Basic Standards for foreign languages (MINISTERIO DE EDUCATION NATIONAL - MEN. 2006) that were issued as a part of the national bilingual program from (NBP) 2004 - 2019. The standards are based on the common European framework of

references for languages (CEFR) council of Europe (2001). In that framework, with concern to writing skills, linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic abilities are emphasized.

Additionally, there exists a project in Bogotá called “Plan DICE (Plan de Inclusion a la Cultura Escrita)”, which attempts to engage students in writing. With respect to technology, the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS), published by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), states that the main objectives are using technology as a guide to improve higher-order thinking skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity, in order to prepare students for their future in a competitive global job market. Also, it tries to design student-centered and project-based online learning environments to guide systemic change in our schools. In other words, it attempts to create digital places of learning and inspire digital age professional models for working, collaborating, and decision-making.

6 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study intends to develop students' English descriptive paragraph writing in a public school, through the use of a blog, for ninth grade (fourth cycle) students. These students have particular writing difficulties, evidenced in previous virtual and in-class writing exercises. This project is focused on encouraging and developing students' descriptive paragraph writing through collaborative work in virtual and classroom activities.

6.1 TYPE OF STUDY

This research can be classified as an 'action research' project. Related to Cohen & Manion and cited in Nunan (1990, ,p 64), action research is used as a means of remedying problems diagnosed in specific situations, or improving in some way a given set of circumstances. The specific purpose of this study was to contribute to the development of descriptive paragraph writing in students.

More specifically, the Kemmis & McTaggart (2000) action research scheme lets the researcher follow a cyclical process where the first stage is to plan, and then act, observe, and reflect in two cycles to obtain the results; at the

end of the first cycle it is necessary to do a revision of plan, in order to start the cycle again.

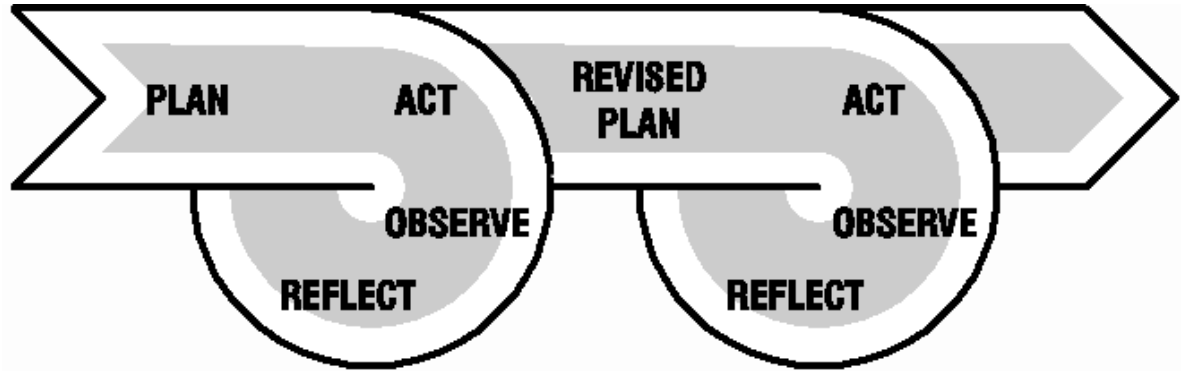

Figure 1. Kemmis & McTaggart Action Research scheme

During the first stage of the project implementation, *planning*, blog and classroom activities were enacted in three different moments. The researchers bore in mind the principles of planning according to Kemmis and McTaggart, which include specific, manageable, acceptable, realistic, and timely planning. During the second stage, *acting*, we followed Kemmis et. al in *applying the plan.* In the third stage, *observation*, we observed and recorded the effects of certain classroom actions, following the aforementioned author. Lastly, in *reflection*, we went through analysis, synthesis, interpretation, explanation, and conclusion (Kemmis & McTaggart (2000)).

After enacting the four stages for a first cycle, the teachers reflected on what did and did not work, made changes based on the reflection, and did the *revision of plan*, which consisted of repeating the cycle again, but with the relevant revisions.

The collected data from the two cycles were then organized by analytical categories which, following *Grounded Theory (*Glaser and Strauss 1967), allowed for a more detailed analysis. Grounded theory lays out a method of creating a new theory from observed data: the analyst jointly collects codes and analyses his or her data to help build a theory and guide what further data is necessary to make the theory stronger.

6.2 PARTICIPANTS AND SETTINGS

The study took place in a public school in Bogotà. According to its PEI (Proyecto Educativo Institucional), this institution has an emphasis in technological areas. Their population average socio-economic stratum was between 1 and 2, and they have three and two hours of English classes per week respectively. The population was made up of 60 students: 32 girls and 28 boys, from the 901 and 902 groups.

Before starting the project, it was necessary to take into account the fact that the population consisted of students under the age of eighteen. According to

the law, students' under 18 must have written information from their parents to use any information, recording, artifact, related to them, both in the project itself and in the publishing of the research. For that reason, students' parents signed a consent form where they knew the objective of the project and of their children's participation in it. (See Annex 1.)

The students' attitudes toward the project were positive, given that they carried out every proposed activity. In general, they were a well-behaved group, although some students had disciplinary problems, especially in the performing their assigned duties. However, those problems were solved within their own work groups, because, since the groups had to reach the goals cooperatively, all the students learned to work together.

The students worked in groups of four, with one leader to integrate the ideas of all the groups to reach the objective of each activity. This form of organization helped them develop their ability to work with others and their sense of responsibility.

6.3 INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURE

The data obtained in the implementation of the project were collected during twelve weeks of the first semester of 2013, in three different stages. Three instruments were applied in order to get the information for solving the research question: interviews, students' reflections, and the blog. These instruments are described below:

1. Interviews

The interview, as a mode of data collection, involves a face to face situation (Mayer and Ouellet, 1991: 308; Taylor and Bogdan, 1996 (cited by Lòpez 2011) in which there is a reciprocal exchange between interviewer and interviewee. Three interviews were applied in different moments of the research: the initial, middle and final stages. The conversations from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed.

In the first interview (See Annex 2.), the researchers attempted to understand the students' position about descriptive paragraph writing process and the use of blogs *before* the first phase of the project was carried out. That is, the students' about writing and blogs pre-implementation of the writing activities. After carrying out the first phase of the project, the second interview was enacted (See Annex 3.). The main objective of the second interview was to see what students learned about descriptive paragraph writing, blogs, and if the writing process was improved to some extent. The third interview (See Annex 4.) was applied for the purpose of collecting the students' final impressions of the blog as a meaningful tool to improve descriptive paragraph writing.

2. Reflections

The reflections were applied in three distinct moments in time, like the interviews, to know the students' point of view about the inclusion of a blog in

their writing process during different stages of the project. The reflections focused on collecting data about students' feelings about motivation when using a blog, the relevance of writing in the blog context, and the importance of publishing their writings. It was applied in the initial, middle and final part of the project (See annexes 5, 6,and 7).

3. Blog

This instrument was employed during the entirety project. Through it, the researchers attempted to learn about the students' progress when they wrote descriptive paragraphs and to encourage them to pursue collaborative work. Moreover, the researchers intended to use the blog to strengthen students' communication.

The following abbreviation will be used to describe the interviews and the stages at which they were implemented: interviews (II= Initial Interview, MI= Middle Interview, FI= Final Interview), reflections (IR= Initial Reflection, MR= Middle Reflection, FR= Final Reflection), and the blog (IA= Initial Activity, MA= Middle Activity, FA= Final Activity),

In the first stage, the researchers explained to the students about the general aspects of the project, namely the different the virtual and classroom activities. Additionally, students were taught about the two first components of the descriptive paragraphs that, according to Childs (1999), are introduction

and body. The researchers then applied the three data instruments for the first time, to get the students' initial perceptions, on February 1st, 2013.

At the end of the second stage, teachers applied the instruments for the middle stage, to see what changes the students underwent after further instruction. Those instruments were applied from February 11th to March 4th, 2013.

In the final stage, the students were given feedback and encouraged to continue writing about a specific topic, which, in the case, was the place where they lived. The instruments were then applied one last time from March 11th to April 22nd, 2013.

7 **PEDAGOGICAL DESIGN**

Virtual and classroom work was designed, in order to guide students in the practice of descriptive paragraph writing, in the blog 'WRITINGANDENJOYINGENGLISH' *www.writingandenjoyingenglish.blogspot.com.* During classroom time, teachers followed a didactic model, named LET'S WRITE, which treated each descriptive paragraph component separately. Each component was individually explained and exemplified, and then explored, by the students, through group work. At the same time, the virtual exercises on the blog were applied to reinforce the concepts worked on in the classroom; by posting their comments on the blog, students had the opportunity to share the classroom work with their peers.

The didactic model LET'S WRITE was designed with the objective to write descriptive paragraphs about real situations, in the classroom as well as in the blog. For that purpose, different activities were planned for each week. This involved a process of observing, recognizing, practicing, posting, correcting, and rewriting. Students worked in groups, because they felt more confident from helping each other. The instructions of for each activity were first given to the students through the blog and then through the classroom. In class, teachers taught the students ever step of descriptive paragraph writing and the way they can write them on the blog.

The schedule of LET'S WRITE presented twelve activities and consisted of classroom and virtual practice exercises, resources and evaluation items. The resources were tales, posters, photocopies, a dictionary, a recorder, paper, a blog, flashcards, images, a power point presentation, books, photographs, video, video beam, and texts.

The criterion used to evaluate the students were interaction with peers and the blog, punctual development of virtual work, posting on the blog, active participation of the students in both classroom and virtual work, construction of the introduction of a descriptive paragraph on the blog, and acquisition and application of concepts. All of those were categories were used as a way to see how the students worked as a group and how they acquired and applied the various writing concepts. Additionally, extra activities were developed to elicit further productions of descriptive paragraphs. It is worth highlighting the fact that those activities were divided in stages in order to collect the data necessary for this study.

During the first stage, teachers first used the story 'The Giving Tree' in class, and they published a video on the blog (see annex 8). The story was first read during class. Then, it was discussed and analyzed, and the students worked on worksheets about the vocabulary and the comprehension of the topic. After classroom exercises, students had their first entrance to the blog. After first exploring the blog, the student used it to write their opinions about the story, as well as descriptions of its characters. This blog activity was done

independently. The objective of the exercise was to give students an initial trail on the blog (see annex 9).

After the first trail with the blog, during the classroom lesson plan, the teachers explained to the students about different aspects of descriptive paragraphs: introduction, body, and conclusion. Then, in the virtual work, students wrote the introduction and body of a paragraph about the place where they live or study (see annexes 10 and 11).

On the second stage, the students were presented with the last component of the descriptive paragraph, the conclusion. Although, in the prior stage, this component was mentioned in classroom and virtual activities, with the purpose of getting new information about students' writing after the instruction process. In the blog, students wrote the conclusion of their paragraphs. After that, teachers reviewed their writings and gave them feedback. Using the corrected paragraphs, the students integrated the three paragraph components in the classroom, and the subsequent final paragraphs were posted (see annex 12 and 13). At that point, we applied the middle instruments (Interview and Reflection) to know the effect of the project on the student's writing.

Finally, in the third stage, the student groups read and commented about their peers' paragraphs. Afterwards, each student chose a topic of his or her own interest and wrote a complete paragraph including all the aforementioned

components. These paragraphs were then posted on the blog. Then, the teachers did the last interview and reflections, so as to gauge the final effects of the project.

8 DATA ANALISYS AND FINDINGS

This study intends to show, by exposing a group of high school students to the development of activities concerning the composition of descriptive paragraphs in a blog, how blogs can help develop the descriptive paragraph writing skill and how this helps improve students' performance in school and life. Thus, the data that the researchers collected was meant to answer the project question: *¿How could students develop descriptive paragraph writing?* After applying and analyzing the instruments, the following possible answers, organized as separate categories, emerged: *Developing Writing skill, Blog's role, Students' interaction, Motivating writing, Exploring descriptive paragraphs.*

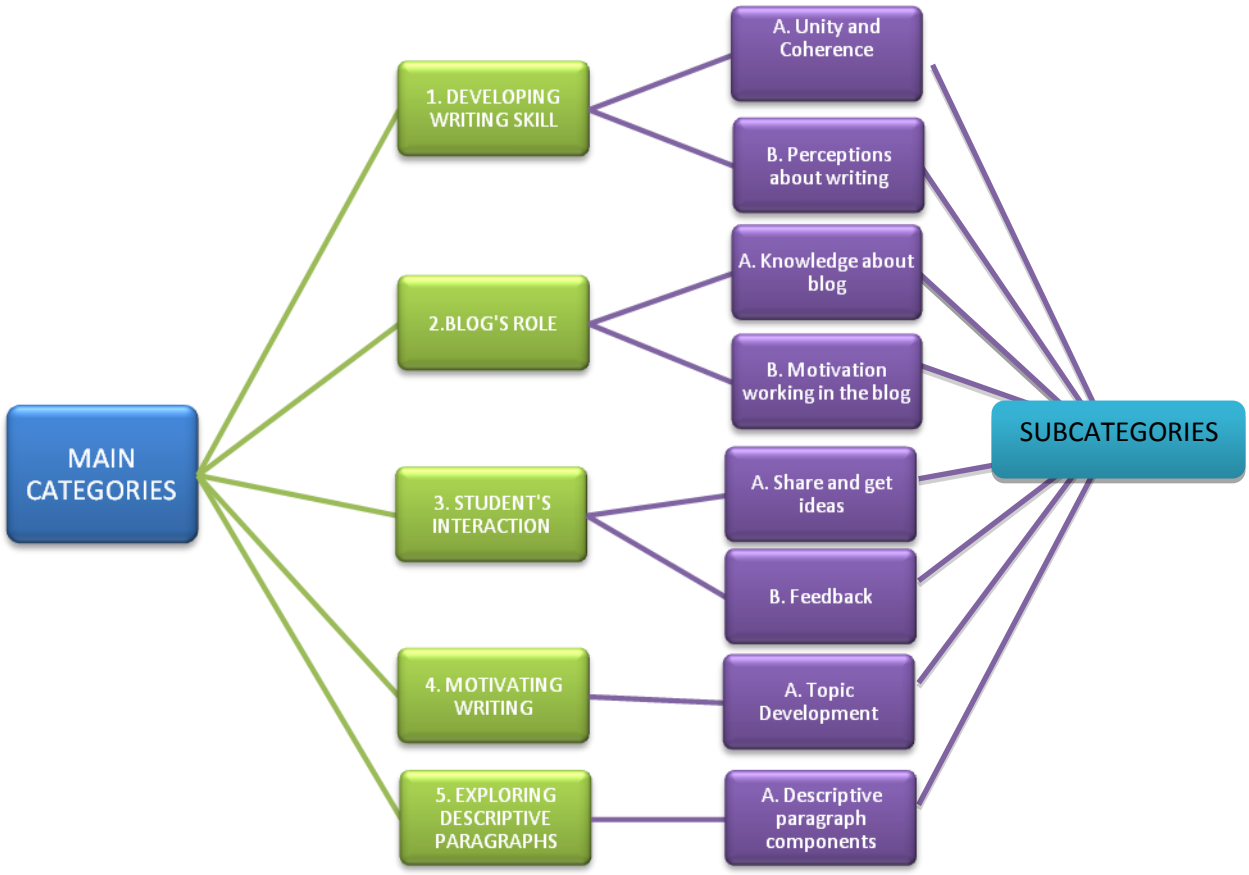

Figure 2. Categories and subcategories that emerged from Data Analysis

The information was analyzed through the combination of the three instruments interviews, reflections, and blog. By using Grounded Theory (GT), by Strauss & Corbin 1990 (cited in Jhonson & Christensen,2010), as a way to measure the data elicited from the instruments, certain categories and subcategories related with the students' behavior in the activities emerged.

Following the coding of GT, we made four readings of the instruments for each stage of data analysis. This is referred to as *open, axial,* and *selective*

coding. This allowed for analysis, categorization and comprehension of the phenomena studied.

During the Open coding stage, the researchers examined the data in a first reading where the answers to the interviews, reflections, and initial activities on the blog were grouped by a counting system, taking into account the common answers or ideas that they gave. The Axial coding, by looking for things students mentioned many times according to the study question stage, let the researchers deeply analyze the students' answers and writings. Then, the responses helped to analyzed the phenomena, which were grouped into categories. These categories, according to Corbin and Strauss 1990, p. 7 (cited in Jhonson & Christensen, 2010) are the second element of GT. It is defined as higher in level and more abstract than the concepts they represent. They are generated through the same analytical process of making comparisons to highlight similarities and differences that are used to produce lower level concepts. Finally, the Selective coding was applied in a fourth reading of that categorized data, which allowed the researchers to reflect on specific points of analysis related to the writing skill or the use of the blog for educational purposes.

When each instrument was analyzed after all three stages, it was proceeded to a more comprehensive and reliable analysis where a validation of the results of the application and analysis of the three instruments was necessary. For that goal, the triangulation process was used, which,

according to Gutiérrez (2008. p 3), is necessary in order to have at least two different views for a given phenomenon. More perspectives allow for a more reliable understanding of the analysis. Therefore, when triangulating, it is a requirement to collect data at different points in time (Duong cited in Burns 2010. p, 97). In this case, the data was collected at the beginning, middle, and end of the study. Likewise, developing the analysis with open, axial and selective coding let us reaffirm the concepts. Five categories, each with their respective subcategories, emerged as a guide to answer the research question (See Fig 2). We explain the categories and subcategories below:

8.1 DEVELOPING WRITING SKILL

As one of the objectives of the project, students needed to develop the foundations of descriptive paragraph writing. Thus, they had to realize how important writing is as a way of communication. To that end, Peterson (2008) claims that students write in any subject area and, in the process, explore their worlds and come to know more about themselves. Through discovering writing, students learn to expand their sense of who they are. It is more than learning just to learn, but learning to apply it in one's daily life. Two aspects were analyzed in this category, which led to knowing how students in the study perceived descriptive paragraph writing before and after their participation in it. This 'developing writing skill' category emerged from the following answers that students gave to certain questions such as:

What aspects of writing do you consider will be improved through working on the blog?, Now that you have written, Do you consider , it is important to have good writing?, and the activities developed on the blog such as : "Write the introduction of your paragraph in two sentences where you show the most interesting or important aspect of the place where you live.

(II, January 28, MR March 14, and MA March 20,

2013)

According to students' answers, the researchers found that Developing Writing Skill was seen as an important aspect in the students' performance, because writing contributes to effective communication. And, it complements their school development. In connection to this category, there emerged two subcategories: 1A, *Unity and Coherence and 1B, Perceptions about writing.*

8.1.1 A. *UNITY AND COHERENCE*

This category formed when the researchers did a writing activity on the blog in which a complete descriptive paragraph with all its components was constructed from a selection of shorter sentences. There are the following samples taken from the student interventions on the blog:

SAMPLE 1

S3: *First, the park is very interesting people, will see. The culture is long as it is a monument to the yew is very significant for the people addition, the village has very wonderful gardens with beautiful roses and other flowers, but do not belong to the*

village of origin is striking me culture statues, such as wonderful and interesting ways. Studying in the village school has taught me a lot about the yew. Finally people are very special new tourists also arrive which demonstrate happiness and interest and enjoy the typical food of the people such as arepas, corn wrapped, Etc.

(MA, March 20, 2013)

SAMPLE 2

S12:*Bogota city architecturally one of the most visited in the world, is a city that is home to approximately 7,363,782 residents this divide by 20 localities, is the capital of the Republic of Colombia.*

Archaeological sites in Bogota found very beautiful, also find variety of shopping centers in the q highlight: the millennium tintal square Hayuelos, titan, etc. ..

We have two fun parks such as saltpeter magic and adventure world, as it is an aquatic cici aquapark

has tourist sites and a variety of resident and univercidades Schools.

(MA,Mach 12, 2013)

In the above samples, one can see the sequence of the authors' ideas, but grammatical mistakes lead to a loss of unity and coherence. There is a general comprehension of the activity, such as the construction of the paragraph body, but grammatical mistakes restrict coherence and hence the comprehension of the text. Bearing in mind the above, Child (1999, p 12) says that unity is the concept in which each sentence in a paragraph

contributes to one single main idea. Coherence, another concept, is where each sentence in a paragraph must be tied to the one before and after it like links in a chain by using special words called transitions such as, ‘first,’ ‘in addition,’ ‘finally,’ etc. In sample 2, one sees unity between sentences, but less so coherence, due to the lack of connectors and abundance of grammatical errors.

8.1.2 B. *PERCEPTIONS ABOUT WRITING*

Through students’ answers to different questions, this subcategory shows the students’ point of view during the instrument implementation process. The evidence was found in the MR, as is shown in the following extracts:

> ***SAMPLE 1***
>
> ***MR:*** *Ahora que ha escrito, considera que es importante tener una buena escritura? Si, No, Por qué?*
>
> ***S1:*** *Si porque en un futuro nos puede ayudar a relacionarnos con los demás y conseguir oportunidades laborales.*
>
> ***S2:*** *Si, por supuesto, porque es algo fundamental para el desarrollo de las actividades escolares.*
>
> ***S3:*** *Si para que se entienda la que se quiere expresar.*
>
> *(Student’s reflections, March 14, 2013)*
>
> ***SAMPLE 2***
>
> ***FI:*** *Luego de haber participado en este proyecto, considera que tiene las bases para escribir otro tipo de textos? Si, no, por qué?*

> ***S6:*** *Si porque ya se como escribir y redactar un párrafo decriptivo sabiendo lo que se debe hacer para construirlo*
>
> ***S7:*** *Si porque gracias a todas las actividades realizadas podemos escribir otro tipo de texto.*
>
> *(Transcription of an interview, April 24, 2013)*

All the participants of this study considered writing to be a useful skill for general learning. It was evidenced that, for the students, it is important to write well because it is beneficial for their future academic performance. Related to this, Fraca (2003) says that students express themselves through texts that build not only their knowledge and experiences but also their emotions. Furthermore, in sample 2, students consider that the activities developed to write descriptive paragraphs have contributed substantially to the production of other texts.

8.2 BLOG'S ROLE

This category is made up of two subcategories: *2A, Knowledge about the blog, and 2B, Motivation for working on the blog*. The information was collected through every instrument: the interviews, reflections, and the blog. The role of the blog is an important aspect of this study since it is the tool that guides the project and ultimately, the research aim of the project. Despite the existence of many technological tools, the blog was chosen because it is a useful and practical tool where you can keep a chronological order of interventions and it is easy to use. Moreover, as Fellner (2006) says, "the

blogs provide both students and teachers with an authentic task, as blogs are now common and have become a relevant and credible forum for people to express their opinions and share information throughout the world".

Bearing in mind these points, the 'blog's role' category was identified and reinforced from the students' answers to the questions asked in interviews and reflections. Some of these questions and answers were:

> ***SAMPLE 1***
>
> *¿Se siente motivado a trabajar en el blog?,*
>
> ***S4:*** *Si porque a través de este podemos construir un buen párrafo pero también leerlo y entenderlo*
>
> (IR,January 28, 2013)
>
> ***SAMPLE 2***
>
> *Considera que la escritura de parrafos descriptivos por medio del blog influyó en el mejoramiento de la escritura de los mismos?*
>
> ***S5:*** *si por supuesto, estas actividades contribuyen al mejoramiento de nuestra escritura*
>
> (FR, April 24, 2013)
>
> ***SAMPLE 3***
>
> *Una vez desarrolladas las actividades del blog, cree que es una herramienta útil para ser utilizada en actividades de escritura? Sí, No, por qué?*
>
> ***S10:*** *Si porque nos ayuda mucho a la escritura y al desarrollo de actividades*
>
> (FI, April 24, 2013)

As is seen in the examples, the students' motivation for working on the blog is to improve their learning and communication processes. It should be noted that, according to students' responses, descriptive paragraph writing improved through the activities carried out on the blog, because they were able to get used to the descriptive paragraph's structure and learn from their errors. And, lastly, students consider the blog as a useful tool for their academic performance, especially in foreign language, because they interact with each other and share knowledge. In an investigation by Rojas (2011) about writing in blogs, where she cited Martindale & Wiley (2005), it is evidenced that blogging has emerged as a leader among a variety of web-based instructional possibilities, because, among other reasons, it allows students the ability to interact in a more public venue, where they can share their thoughts, ideas, interpretations, hopes, and fears with others. In this way, students' perceptions accord with the findings of the aforementioned authors.

In this category, given the findings of the data analysis, the following subcategories emerged: *2A Knowledge about the blog, and 2B, Motivation working on the blog*. We will now examine each subcategory in detail.

8.2.1 A. KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE BLOG

Knowledge about the blog refers to students' ideas about what a blog is before and after working on it, measured by the interview, reflection, and blog

instruments. This evidence is extracted from a few students' answers elicited, from the aforementioned instruments. The question and answer samples are:

> ***SAMPLE 1***
>
> *¿Qué sabe acerca de los blogs?*
>
> ***S8:*** *Que sirve para comunicarnos con los demás, y es fácil de usar.*
>
> *Ahora que ha trabajado en un blog, que concepto tiene de este?*
>
> ***S11:*** *Que es un medio de comunicación virtual que nos ofrece muchas facilidades para entrar, escribir y comprender con otras personas, nuestars ideas y opiniones*
>
> (Student's interviews, January 28, and March 4, 2013)

The above sample illustrates students' common perceptions regarding the concept of a blog; they consider it to be a mode of communication, an outlet to state one's opinion, as well as an educational and virtual tool. Given this view of blogs, Curran (2011) points out that a blog could make education demand-oriented and participant-centered, which is excellent for self-driven learners who need individual feedback. This open approach to information allows the user to be curious and imaginative. As we can see, blogs are seen as a functional tool for students, especially when they learn out of the classrooms, in a collaborative or individual way.

8.2.2 B. MOTIVATING WORKING ON THE BLOG

This subcategory emerged from some students' reflections about the use of the blog, where they answered similarly about their enjoyment of it. The questions and answers that guided the classification of this subcategory are the following:

> ***SAMPLE 1***
>
> *Luego de haber realizado trabajos en el blog, se siente motivado a seguir utilizándolo? Sí, no, por qué?*
>
> ***S4:*** *Si porque cando trabajamos en el blog, compartimos nuestros conocimientos de una forma mas didáctica y nos refuerza el conocimiento para el estudio*
>
> ***S13:*** *Si porque nos brinda información didáctica, imágenes, videos, etc*
>
> *(MR, March 4, 2013)*
>
> ***SAMPLE 2***
>
> *le gustó trabajar en el blog? Sí, No, por qué?*
>
> ***S10:*** *Si porque trabajamos en grupo de una forma didáctica y muy buena que mejoró nuestra redacción de párrafos*
>
> ***S3:*** *Si por que era una pagina que nunca había utilizado.*
>
> *(FR, April 24, 2013)*
>
> ***SAMPLE 3***
>
> *¿Después de trabajar en un blog, considera que este es una herramienta que contribuye con el desarrollo de sus tareas escolares? Sí, no, por qué?*

> ***S7:*** *Si porque en el blog nos ponen varias actividades que nos pueden ayudar en la solución de tareas y trabajos.*
>
> ***S11:*** *Si porque allí podemos aprender muchas cosas,hacer consultas y compartir conocimiento.*
>
> (MR, March 4, 2013)

Students demonstrated motivation to continue using the blog as a learning tool, since they considered it fun and useful. Moreover, the use of the blog increased collaborative work and students' development of skills through which they can further strengthen their learning. As Fellner (2006 p. 17) argues, blogs provide students with real opportunities to improve not only writing in English, but also reading, because students read and responded to their classmates' blogs. For both teachers and students, blogs are a perfect learning tool when used for educational purposes.

8.3 STUDENT'S INTERACTION

This category branches off into two subcategories: *3A Share and get ideas, and 3B Feedback.* They emerged from the analysis of students' highly active participation in the blog. This active participation in turn translated into more cooperative behavior in the classroom as well. The following passages come from their work on the blog:

SAMPLE 1

S9 Intervention: *First, is the capital of Colombia and is located in the center of the country and has a population of nearly seven million people of different cultures, religions and ethnicities. In addition has many tourist sites which can be visited as Monserrate, the planetarium,the tower Colpatria National Park, the Simon Bolivar Park, the park Salitre Magico, among many others.Finally, there are good opportunities study, whereby there are many people from different parts of country.*

S2 Answer: *hello kevin I like what you published because these very informed in addition bogota also takes many places to visit Responder*

SAMPLE 2

S14 Intervention: *the town of turmeque is historical and you have many ancestral cultures*

S7 Answer: *I like it very interesting yme Turmequé by their ancestral cultures.*

(MA, March 11, 2013; and FA, March 20, 2013)

Students consider the blog as a practical tool for learning, since it is a user-friendly tool that leaves open many avenues for one to gain new information and improve various skills. It also stresses the value of collaborative work for the improvement of writing, since exercises were discussed and developed in groups. As one can see in the above samples 1 and 2, the blog was an effective motivator for the students, namely because of the peer feedback process.

The goal of learning together is to reinforce not only academic knowledge, but other aspects of what makes people social beings as well. In this sense,

Perez (2010, p 322) says that, in teamwork, people learn to find commonality in their discourse with others in order to move towards the new idea that, because it is shared and negotiated, differs substantially from the product of a single individual. The next subcategory will illuminate how the students worked together in this study.

8.3.1 A. SHARE AND GET IDEAS

This subcategory is the result of analyzing the interviews and reflections on the students' work on the blog, where they expressed what they thought were the most enriching and productive aspects of working on the blog as a learning tool. The main point here is that students showed interest by working together as a team and that they expect to continue doing it. They expressed what they thought about sharing and getting ideas when working together in responses like the following:

> ***SAMPLE1***
>
> *¿Cree importante que otras personas conozcan sus escritos? ¿Por qué?*
>
> ***S3:*** *Claro,importantisimo porque si shacen los grandes escritores y podemos compartir nuestras opiniones con los demás*
>
> ***S1:*** *Si me interesa que otras personas conozcan mis escritos porque ellos me pueden corregir*
>
> (IR, S3, S1, January 28, 2013)

Students listed collaboration and interaction as most important when sharing their writing, keeping in mind the necessity of communication.

> ***SAMPLE 2***
>
> ***S2:*** *hello kevin I like what you published because these informed in addition bogota also takes many places to visit.*
>
> ***S6:*** *I like you restaurant is a good alternative.*
>
> (IA and FA, March 17,2013)

In sample 2, the students express their positive opinions and ideas about each other's posts on the blog. This was evidence of how interested they were in the activities. Fraca (2003) shows that students' motivation is based on being able to earn something, especially confidence, for the work they do. Therefore, students need greater positive feedback on their work to feel satisfaction for having done something correctly.

8.3.2 B. FEEDBACK

Feedback on student writing is used to support their writing development and nurture their confidence as writers. Teacher feedback often takes the form of written comments on their final graded compositions (Stagg, 2010). For instance, teachers often correct grammar, syntax, semantic, punctuation, and capitalization. However, in this subcategory, feedback does not only come from the teachers, but from their peers as well. For this study, students gave

their opinions about their partners work by writing comments on the blog.

From that exercise, we have the following extracts:

> ***SAMPLE 1***
>
> ***S13:*** *sandra I like your comment because you talk about all those things that people do to make us happy and many times we do not how much and what we do is take advantage.*
>
> ***S13:*** *I like the story, because shows the friendship and generosity of a tree, only for the child be happy, without interested.*
>
> (IA, February 12, and March 6, 2013)

Students received comments other than purely grammatical corrections about their work on the blog, which gave them more reasons to keep writing.

8.4 MOTIVATING WRITING

This is a category where the students' specific interests are taken into account to motivate them to write. This part of the study includes a subcategory named *Topic development,* where the students choose what topics they will write about based on their own preferences. For Boekaerts (1999), knowledge about what beliefs motivate your students' will allow you to plan activities that encourage favorable beliefs and discourage unfavorable ones. "*Students are very successful in hiding their thoughts and feelings, leading to misconceptions about their values, self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations"*.

Through the students' reflections, the enjoyment that they had from writing about topics of their own choice is seen clearly. The next sample shows the associated questions and answers:

> *A través de los párrafos descriptivos en el blog, logró desarrollar sus ideas sobre el tema de su preferencia?*
>
> ***SAMPLE 1***
>
> ***S8:*** *Si porque gracias a este pude desarrollar mis ideas sobre el tema que quise*
>
> ***S11:*** *Si porque hablamos de un tema interesante como es el lugar donde vivimos*
>
> (FR, April 14, 2013)
>
> **SAMPLE 2**
>
> **S: 14** *My house*
>
> *1.My house is very big and ancient, is part of the historical context.*
>
> *2.I like by its large gardens and available spaces the I share whit my family..*
>
> (II, February 23, 2013)

Students agreed that participation in the project allowed them to work on issues related to their daily lives and interests as well as improved use of LE. In this way, the texts show learning based on experience.

8.5 EXPLORING DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH

Most students reported positive feelings about descriptive paragraph writing. As they were working on the study, all of them said that they noted improvement on their comprehension of the topic. Besides improving writing, students also felt increased interest and enthusiasm, all of which are goals for language instruction.

When working on the texts, students experimented with a different kind of writing where they used familiar environments, likes and activities to create their own texts. The idea was, following Hollovel (2009 p. 112), to convey meaning to the reader through sensory details. These sensory details allowed them to feel familiar with the writing exercises.

Hollovel (2009 p. 112) states that the purpose of a paragraph is to express one point, idea or opinion. A good writer will be able to use a few well-chosen words to help the reader have a level of familiarity with that text that enables full comprehension of the main point of the paragraph. The students' ideas were written in a simple way, using only the words that they knew, as you can see in the following examples:

SAMPLE 1

S1: *THE SCHOOL RESTAURANT The school restaurant is an economic help for our family they offer us a balanced feeding . First,the school restaurant provide as good nutrition,in addition, this is a financial aid.finally we share with friends.*

> *first, the school restaurant provide as good nutrition,because the foud is delicious.In addition, this is a financial aid ,because we play monthly.Finally we share with friends, because there no us we feel alone well that there many partners around. conclusion the school restaurant is a great support and collaboration already that there we feel well.*
>
> (FI, April 26, 2013)

As in the above example, when writing a descriptive paragraph, the writers have to create an image of what they are going to say. In this case, they chose to write about the places where they live or the places they are close to, because they were familiar with the place. For Haines (2007 p.121), in a descriptive paragraph, the writer uses sensory details such as sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, and textures to create vivid images in the reader's mind. The sensory details can be reached only if the person has had permanent contact with the place or object being described, as is the case in the example.

This category of exploring descriptive paragraph leads to a subcategory named *Descriptive paragraphs components*, where students' paragraph writing is seen in detail while they write.

8.5.1 A. DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS COMPONENTS

This subcategory emerged from the application and analysis of the three instruments of this study. The components of descriptive paragraphs are, according to Child (1999, pg. 12), “Unity and Coherence,” which were explained above in section 1A.

The process of comprehension of the two components started with an open question about the topic: ¿Qué conoce sobre los componentes de un párrafo de tipo descriptivo? At the beginning of the study, students had similar responses, as in the following example:

> ***SAMPLE 1***
>
> ***S6:*** *conozco parrafos pero no le he puesto atencion a la estructura*
>
> ***S12:*** *mas o menos pero no tengo muy claro lo de los componentes*
>
> (II,January 28, 2013)

Students displayed limited knowledge about the components of a descriptive paragraph, unity and coherence. After being explained to, however, about the descriptive paragraph writing process, they produced paragraphs in which they attempted to use unity and coherence. This example shows some of the results:

SAMPLE 1

S1:*town*

1.the town of turmeque has culture

2.it is famous for the tejo

(IA, February11, 2013)

SAMPLE 2

S5: -first, the park is a beutiful monuments.

-in adittion, the park of turmeque has old trees

- finally, in the park we play futbol

(MA, March 1, 2013)

SAMPLE 3

S3: Bogota:

It is very big and nice. It offers a wide variety of tourist attractions such as museums, theaters and amusement parks. This city has several tourist attractions have several sites of cultural tourism and its people. Bogota a city in central Colombia, is the country's capital, Bogotá offers residents and visitors everything that a modern city can give even an intellectual and cultural life diverse and vibrant. offers various tourist landscapes, gastronomy and culture. It is also important to visit each street that Cndelaria culture coloniales.finally heritage buildings, the city of Bogota is very cultural and historical monument bigs fun and diversity of tourist activities. Bogota is an interesting city full of life and a great place to spend a pleasant stay perfect time with the family. (FA, April 15, 2013)

The introductory exercise shows coherence -- unity, however is not present, due to lack of punctuation. Specifically, it is lacking the period. Instead of

using a period, they number the sentences. In the second exercise, there are three arguments to the topic. There also exist grammatical errors, such as the omission of words, but, despite this, the ideas were clear. The last example provides evidence for the complete comprehension of the exercise, where the participants finally wrote a complete paragraph with all its components. Grammatical errors are still evident, but the use of the paragraphs components has improved to some extent.

CONCLUSIONS

It is important to start by noting that the objective of improving descriptive paragraph writing was met in a great percent of the students. But, it is necessary to assign more time in class to the use of blogs in order to reach one hundred percent effectiveness of the project. Also, some students displayed *some* improvement, but could still use more practice with descriptive paragraph writing. Finally, teachers themselves must involve new strategies in their pedagogical practices and become trained in the use of new technological tools such as blogs.

The research tasks of getting students more interested and aware of their writing met were also met, evidenced by the students' reflections, both in virtual and classroom activities, on their interests and weaknesses about writing, the former of which increased and the latter of which diminished.

This study shows the analysis of the results of blog implementation in the development of English descriptive paragraph writing, where each category shows the different ways in which students discovered and reinforced their writing through the use of the blog.

Through the first category: DEVELOPING WRITING SKILL, we saw that students found writing important for communication, especially when they

needed to be clearly understood in a group setting. Students understood the structure as well as the function of the descriptive paragraphs in transmitting ideas to others.

On the other hand, the BLOG'S ROLE category was essential as it guided the process of developing paragraph writing, the blog being both a motivational and instructional tool. In this way, the category MOTIVATING WRITING showed the students' satisfaction when they wrote descriptive paragraphs about their own interests and setting on the blog. The STUDENT'S INTERACTION category proved that the students were highly engaged during the entire study, as they worked and complemented their ideas as a group, where they continually helped each other to improve their writing.

The last category was EXPLORING DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH, which developed students' comprehension about the topic, so that they knew the structure of descriptive paragraphs and were able to use this knowledge to achieve the purpose of the project, improving descriptive paragraph writing.

Based on the implementation of the research process, we draw additional conclusions: students often have difficulties in the writing process due to a lack of a solid base in writing skills and a lack of motivation to write, both of which must be fostered early in life. However, in this study, it is concluded that, if a good writing habit is nurtured, by using explanation, exemplification, motivation, and staying in tune with students' needs, they will willfully want to

write and thus, improve their writing process. It was for this goal that, in the development of this study, we asked the students about the topics they would like to write about. Their answers were related to music, sports, hobbies and the setting where they lived. Therefore, these were the topics they wrote about.

Further, the researchers conclude that the use of blogs was one of the most interesting and useful technological tools that students could engage with when writing. This tool can be used outside of English classes as well. However, it is important to mention that the use of technology and blogs is not common in the classroom. For that reason, students are not familiar with these kinds of tools and training activities must be used to properly introduce the technology to students.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study let the researchers reflect on possible pedagogical practices to encourage students to write descriptive paragraphs through activities worked on in the blog and in the classroom. These can be used by teachers who are open to useful and practical tools, like the blog, in their classes. The blog can also be used to improve other skills, since its focus on interaction and teamwork is applicable to many different disciplines.

LIMITATIONS

Insofar as achieving the project goal of improving writing skills, we were limited by the amount of time we had for each activity, as students could have benefited from more practice with the virtual setting. Another limitation was that not all students had access to Internet outside of school, which is important in order to complement the work done in the classroom.

FURTHER RESEARCH STUDIES

Further investigations should search for additional ways to use blogs for different types of skills. Perhaps, if blogs could become more common as a didactic tool in schools, the students' performance and future competitiveness would increase, since blogs develop individual and group skills that are tantamount to success in current society.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1. CONSENT FORM

Enero 22 de 2013

Estimados padres de familia.

Actualmente estoy realizando maestría en “Didáctica de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras con énfasis en Inglés, en la Universidad Libre. Dicha maestría requiere el desarrollo de proyectos en inglés, los cuales pretendo desarrollar con estudiantes del curso ___. Dichos proyectos, intentan fomentar el enriquecimiento de procesos de aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera (Inglés) y al mismo tiempo desarrollar habilidades de escritura y habla mediante el uso de las nuevas tecnologías y el intercambio cultura.

El objetivo de este proyecto es implementar el desarrollo de las habilidades para el aprendizaje del idioma inglés, el desarrollo de la identidad, y expresión de la individualidad mediante estrategias de trabajo colaborativo en el aula de clase, aula de sistemas y en el hogar.

Por lo anterior, solicito su consentimiento para que su hijo (a) participe en las actividades planteadas estrategias al igual que la publicación de registros fotográficos, videos, grabaciones, escritos. De mi parte les garantizo el uso de claves y contraseñas y que el uso de la información publicada será con fines estrictamente educativos.

Agradezco de antemano su valiosa colaboración para llevar a buen término este proyecto.

Atentamente,

KAREN ROCÍO BAUTISTA

Docente de Humanidades

LIDA SERLEY GOMEZ MELO

Docente Humanidades

Yo, _____ acudiente del estudiante_____

Del curso ____ de, por medio de la presente autorizo a mi hijo (a) para participar en proyecto de inglés. Conozco los objetivos y dinámicas de este proyecto y permito se utilicen las entrevistas y registros con los fines pedagógicos expresados.

Atentamente:

_____

C.C.No.

Firma del estudiante aceptando su participación en el proyecto:

_____

T.I. No.

ANNEX 2. INITIAL INTERVIEW

1. ¿Qué conoce sobre los componentes de un párrafo de tipo descriptivo?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. ¿Qué sabe acerca de los blogs?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. ¿Qué aspectos de su escritura considera se pueden mejorar a través del trabajo en el blog?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. ¿Por qué encuentra importante mejorar su desempeño en la escritura de párrafos descriptivos?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

ANNEX 3. MIDDLE INTERVIEW

1. ¿Le es claro cómo escribir la introducción, el cuerpo y la conclusión de un párrafo descriptivo?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Ahora que ha trabajado en un blog, ¿Qué concepto tiene de éste?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Considera que su proceso escritor ha mejorado a través del uso del blog? Si__ No__ ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. ¿Cree que después de trabajar en el proyecto, posee bases para escribir un párrafo descriptivo en lengua extranjera inglés? Si__ No__ ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

ANNEX 4. FINAL INTERVIEW

1. ¿Cree que el blog contribuyó a mejorar la Escritura de párrafos descriptivos? Si__ No__ ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Una vez desarrollado las actividades del blog, ¿Cree que es una herramienta útil para ser utilizada en actividades de escritura? Si___ No___ ¿por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Luego de haber participado en este proyecto, ¿Considera que tiene las bases para escribir otro tipo de textos? Si__ No__ ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. ¿El desarrollo de este ejercicio contribuyó con el mejoramiento de las habilidades de escritura de párrafos descriptivos? Si__ No__ ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____

ANNEX 5. INITIAL REFLECTION

1. ¿Considera importante trabajar en un blog en el desarrollo de sus actividades escolares? Si__ No__ ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. ¿Se siente motivado trabajar en un blog? ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. ¿Cree importante mejorar su escritura? ¿por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. ¿Cree importante que otras personas conozcan sus escritos? ¿por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

ANNEX 6. MIDDLE REFLECTION

1. ¿Después de trabajar en un blog, considera que este es una herramienta que contribuye con el desarrollo de sus tareas escolares?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Luego de haber realizado trabajos en el blog, ¿Se siente motivado a seguir utilizándolo? Si__ No__ ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Ahora que ha escrito, ¿considera que es importante tener una buena escritura?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. ¿Le gustaría dar a conocer sus escritos? Si__ No__ ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

ANNEX 7.FINAL REFLECTION

1. Le gustó trabajar en el blog Si__ No__ ¿Por qué?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. ¿Considera que la escritura de párrafos descriptivos por medio del blog, influyó en el mejoramiento de la escritura de los mismos?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. A través de los párrafos descriptivos en el blog, ¿Logró desarrollar sus ideas sobre el tema de su preferencia?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

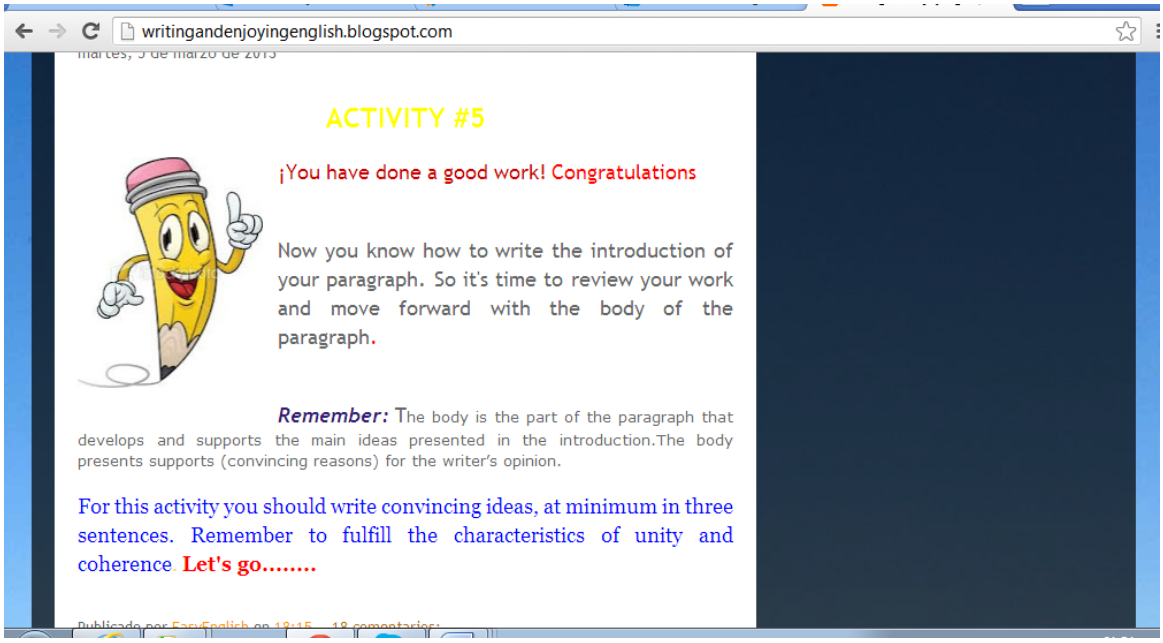
4. ¿Considera suficiente el trabajo presencial y virtual que se hizo por medio de este proyecto para mejorar la escritura de párrafos descriptivos?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

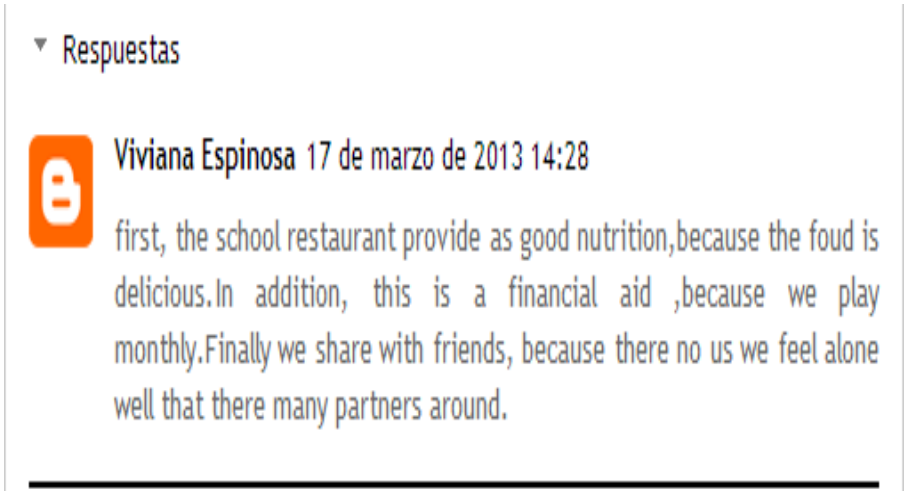
ANNEX 8. INITIAL ACTIVITY ON THE BLOG

ANNEX 9. STUDEN'T WRITING PRODUCTION ON THE BLOG – FIRST STAGE

ANNEX 10. MIDDLE ACTIVITY ON THE BLOG

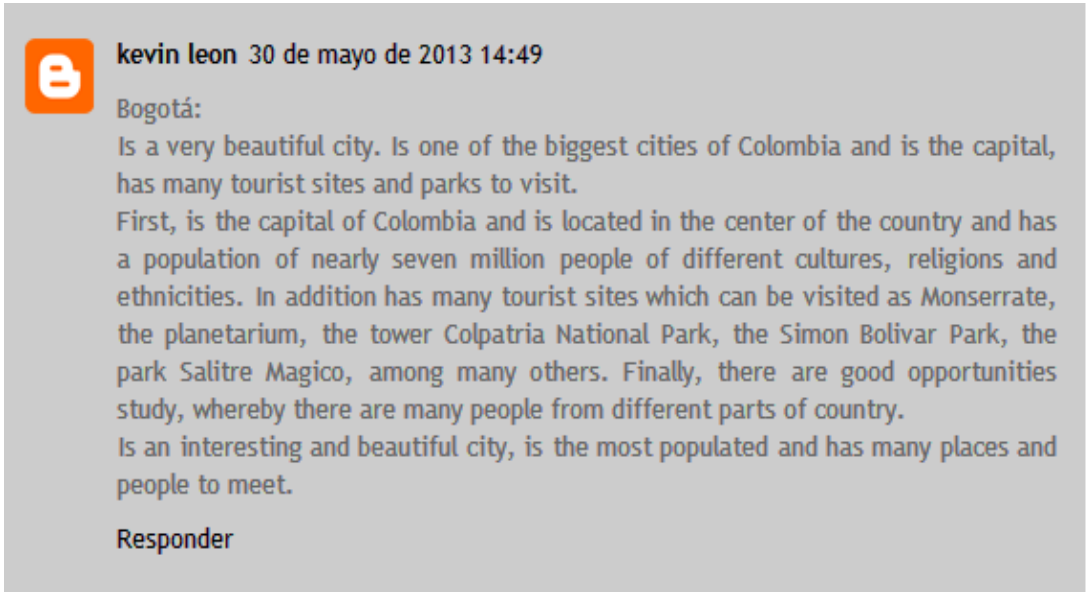


ANNEX 11. STUDEN'T WRITING PRODUCTION ON THE BLOG – SECOND STAGE



ANNEX 12. FINAL ACTIVITY ON THE BLOG

ANNEX 13. STUDEN'T WRITING PRODUCTION ON THE BLOG – THIRD STAGE



kevin leon 30 de mayo de 2013 14:49

Bogotá:
Is a very beautiful city. Is one of the biggest cities of Colombia and is the capital, has many tourist sites and parks to visit.
First, is the capital of Colombia and is located in the center of the country and has a population of nearly seven million people of different cultures, religions and ethnicities. In addition has many tourist sites which can be visited as Monserrate, the planetarium, the tower Colpatria National Park, the Simon Bolivar Park, the park Salitre Magico, among many others. Finally, there are good opportunities study, whereby there are many people from different parts of country.
Is an interesting and beautiful city, is the most populated and has many places and people to meet.

Responder