Blogging: A way to foster EFL writing

Luz Mary Quintero

Teacher of English Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas and Universidad La Gran Colombia, Colombia.
E-mail:luzmaq03@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article reports on the results of an action-research project carried out with a group of first year university students from an "English Program" at a public university in Bogotá. The project aimed to gain insights into EFL writing and to analyze the role that feedback played in the process of writing. The experience 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. Students were provided with three different spaces: a personal blog in which they wrote about topics of personal interest, a group blog that allowed students to work and write cooperatively, and a debate blog that required the use of argumentative writing. The findings of this research suggest that EFL writing is greatly developed when students feel part of a community to interact with and to share similar interests and language learning goals which are mediated, in this case, by technology. It was also found that by writing in blogs students not only developed their writing but more importantly, students have the possibility to portray and show their own selves through the written pieces they post. Finally, the feedback was found to be beneficial in EFL writing as it was a crucial ingredient that gave student-writers tools to scaffold in the writing process.

Key words: writing in EFL, blogs, feedback, community, process writing, scaffolding.

Resumen

Este artículo reporta los resultados de un proyecto de investigación-acción desarrollado con un grupo de estudiantes de primer año de licenciatura en Inglés en una Universidad Pública de Bogotá. El proyecto tenía como objetivo ganar conocimiento sobre la escritura en EFL y analizar el papel que juega la retroalimentación en este proceso. Esta experiencia se llevó a cabo a través de una interacción entre dos grupos de estudiantes uno de Colombia y el otro de Canadá. Se diseñaron tres espacios para los estudiantes: un blog personal, en el cual podían escribir sobre cosas de interés personal; un blog grupal el cual propició el trabajo y la escritura grupal; y, un blog de debates que requirió del uso de la escritura argumentativa. Los hallazgos de esta investigación proponen que la escritura en EFL puede desarrollarse significativamente cuando los estudiantes se sienten parte de una comunidad con la cual interactúan y comparten intereses y objetivos de aprendizaje de lengua similares mediados, en este caso, por la tecnología. De la misma forma, que a través de la escritura en blogs los estudiantes no sólo desarrollan su escritura en EFL sino que también tienen la oportunidad de proyectar su propia imagen a través de las piezas que componen y que acumulan en sus blogs. Finalmente, se encontró que la retroalimentación es un ingrediente fundamental en la escritura en EFL ya que le brinda a los estudiantes herramientas para avanzar en el proceso.

Palabras clave: escritura en EFL, blogs, retroalimentación, comunidad, proceso de escritura, scaffolding.

Introduction

Learning to write in either a first, second or foreign language is one of the most difficult tasks that a learner can encounter and one that few people can be said to fully master; however, not much attention has been devoted to it. In some English texts we find that there is always a part for writing that is usually related to a particular grammatical topic studied along the unit. Thus, the writing task is much more concerned with the form rather than with the abstract thinking capacity to construct meaning and put it into words. Richards (1990) affirms: "The process of moving from concepts, thoughts and ideas to written text is complex. A written text represents the product of a series of complicated mental operations" (p. 101). Evidently, writing is a difficult skill to develop since it requires not only syntactic and lexical knowledge, but also the capacity to generate and organize ideas and thoughts in a way that can be clearly and coherently communicated to a potential reader.

Writing is a very complex area that causes problems to the majority of students in both the native and the foreign language. It might be due to the fact that it implies using an abstract set of mental processes rather than only using the formal structures of the language itself. We have been educated under a system for which writing is not a major concern. Thus, we find that this activity is left to people who are supposed to be the experts, the *writers*. It is much more worrying when we think of language teachers who do not have this ability and as a consequence, they may not feel prepared and committed to help students with this crucial part of language.

Nowadays, most teachers and students acknowledge the importance of having good writing skills. For them, developing the ability to express themselves through written language has become a learning objective of its own right. Nevertheless, when we analyze what we as teachers actually do to help students with the challenging task of writing, we might find that sometimes, we do very little to contribute to the actual development of this crucial aspect of the language. Perhaps, if we ask ourselves, do students write as much as we want? Do they enjoy the kind of writing activities they carried out in the classroom? Or, do our comments and feedback contribute to the development of our students' writing? Unfortunately for some of us, the answers to these questions might be a simple "no".

Concerned with the issues mentioned above, this research study was developed in order to gain insights about the development of writing in EFL

and to explore to what extent feedback from the teacher and from peers shape students' writing. This study was carried out through a blog writing exchange between a group of Colombian and Canadian students. A blog is, according to the general online consensus, a website that can be updated regularly and organized chronologically according to date, and in reverse order from most recent entry backwards (Ward, 2004). A blogger usually writes free-flowing pieces that are interesting to him/her, his/her ideas about life and his/her own interpretations about world; in general, issues that might not be meaningful for everybody but that for any haphazard are intimately close to him/her. Blood, (2000) says in regards to blogs: "These fragments, pieced together over months, can provide an unexpectedly intimate view of what it is to be a particular individual in a particular place at a particular time." (P.5). Blogs have allowed people to have voice and self-expression in a world where every time there is less space for people to write or talk just for the sake of sharing things that are meaningful and interesting to them.

This research was carried out as part of work-research alliance between University of Dundee, in Scotland and Distrital University, in Bogotá. There were schools from five different countries enrolled: Colombia, Scotland, Chile, Canada and Spain; and two universities from Colombia. The object of this collaborative project was to give students the opportunity to use technology to communicate and create mutual cultural understanding through the interaction among people with different cultural backgrounds. Through this meaningful interaction, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) were used to create a different learning environment to foster virtual human relationships in order to create a community for learning. To be able to succeed with such goal, a virtual platform was set up by University of Dundee in Scotland whose name was "International creative storytelling forum". This platform included blogs, forums and videoconferences for communication and interaction, among students-students, students-teachers and teachers-teachers.

For the purpose of this study students were provided with three different blog spaces: a personal blog, a group blog and a blog for debate. For the personal blog, students were free to write about any thing they wanted, depending on their personal likes, style and interests. The personal selection of topics ranged from poems and stories to articles about art, photography and cultural movements. In the second one, the group blog, students worked in groups of two or three, they could write about the topics selected by all the

participants in the forum or any they collectively chose. Finally, the objective of the debate blog was to promote the use of argumentative writing through the discussions of topics that were democratically chosen by the students. Interaction between Colombian and Canadian students was initially mostly achieved by means of the personal blogs. Students usually visited each other's personal blog, read what the other had written and gave comments, asked questions and gave some feedback.

Theory underlying the research

Here, I present a discussion of the theoretical and research foundations that support the present research study, they are: some conceptions and approaches to writing, some considerations on feedback; and finally, some considerations on blogs and language learning.

Some Considerations on writing

Undoubtedly, one of the first terrifying impressions when writing is facing the blank piece of paper unfolded in front of us waiting to be filled with our thoughts and ideas. Even the most experienced writers might feel a kind of panic in front of that blank sheet of paper. As soon as one starts putting something on it, one gets confident to see how wonderfully one's invisible inner thoughts are put in such a visible way that anybody can have access to them; now they are not hidden any more, they are not only mine, but they are others' as well. It is a sublime moment when words come into our minds and we struggle to connect and put them together to give meaning to the thousand of ideas that are running into our heads.

It indicates that the act of writing is far beyond the fact of only putting well organized words and structures on a white piece of paper; it is rather the act of giving meaning and substance to our thoughts. Mitchell (1996) puts it as follows: "writing is a process of discovering and creating meaning" (p.39). Writing implies more than the selection of the right structures, words and general conventions of the language; it is a mental process of using and arranging formal structures in such a way that they can create actual meaning to what the writer has in his head and wants to express in written language. "Good writing is an extension of clear thinking, and writing competence is how the writer makes meaning in written language" (Mitchell,1996: 4).

White and Arndt (1996) also argue that: "writing is far from being a simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols: it is a thinking process in

its own right, it demands conscious intellectual effort which usually is sustained over a considerable period of time" (p.3). In the same trend of thought, Hedge (2005) asserts that effective writing demands a number of things: a high degree of organization in the development of information, ideas or arguments; high degree of accuracy in order to avoid ambiguity of meaning; the use of complex grammatical devices for focus and emphasis; and a careful choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures to create a style which is appropriate to the subject matter and to the potential reader.

Nevertheless, in some cases, we as teachers have students write simply as a way to practice formal structures that unfortunately, do not necessarily promote creation of meaning or the necessity of organized thinking. In most of the cases, it demands only a clear understanding of the structures, therefore students might be concerned only with the form rather than with the content. In regards to this, Richards (1990) states: "In foreign and second language programs, the teaching of second language writing has often been synonymous with teaching grammar or sentence structure" (p.102).

From Chomsky's (1975) conception: "the rules of sentence formation do not really belong to grammar but to some other subject in which the "order of thoughts" is studied" (p. 7). Language is not just a system of structures, but it is the tool that allows human beings to construct and interpret the world. The facilitation of language use within a socio-cultural environment is the predominant means by which people make sense or meaning (Wells, 2000). In a similar trend of thought Lee (2000, p. 192) highlights: "Language serves as a conceptual organizer, primary medium through which thinking occurs". Thus, language, either written or spoken, is above all an inherent part of knowledge construction.

Writing as process versus writing as product
In the sixties the audio-lingual method was still the dominant mode of language instruction. The view was that writing primarily served as a subservient to reinforce oral patterns of the language (Raimes, 1995). As a result, writing took the form of sentence drills to reinforce the accurate use of grammatical patterns and structures focused on the manipulation of sentences. Teachers' concern was only the final product in terms of how good students were at using vocabulary, structures and mechanics. A "good" text, then, was meant to be one whose formal structure was perfect. To reach such objective students were given texts as models to be followed and imitated (Kern, 2000).

The product model was mainly based on a behaviorist approach whose purpose was just to fill learners' heads with some information to be then reproduced without even being aware of the fact that they were just following a pattern. Krashen states that students can modify input internally and produce a different output, because they have their mental structures that interact with the information given. Mitchell (1996) states that: "there is no such thing as a natural norm for writing. Each writer has a unique approach and uses different strategies to produce a text."(p.31). Grammar and formal aspects of the language should be considered as essential ingredients for the creation of a text but not the only and most important feature. Towards the seventies, as a response to the continuous dissatisfaction from the teachers with that traditional linear approach the Process Approach to writing emerged.

This approach sprang together with the communicative approach in the late 60s and early 70s. The 1970s saw the development of more than sentence combination and controlled composition, which was the aim of audio-lingualism; teachers and researchers reacted against a form-oriented approach by developing an interest towards what learners actually did as they wrote (Raimes, 1995; Kern, 2000; Mitchell, 1996). Hence, writing was understood as a constant writing-revising- rewriting activity. However, I agree that there is not such a strict linear process, as some authors argue, it is rather a circular one in which the writer can go backwards and forwards in the process (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). It means that the writer is constantly generating ideas, organizing and reorganizing the text in order to have his ideas and thoughts clear. I completely agree with the idea that writers do not necessarily follow one step after the other (first prewriting, then writing and so on) as it is often stated, they recur to every stage as they feel they need it.

Baynham (1999) affirms: "Research into drafting and redrafting processes has shown that the writing process is cyclical or recursive, not linear" (p.148). This cyclical process is very different from writer to writer for the mental organization of each one is very different. In a research carried out by Zamel, one of the first persons interested in this approach, she found that planning and generating ideas did not necessarily precede writing but rather were ongoing processes, thus student's writing ESL compositions were involved in the constant interplay of thinking, and rewriting, (cited by Mitchell, 1996: 39). Similarly, Zamel's research points out that students were more influenced by what happened before the actual writing began, some students reported

having internal dialogues to determine how to proceed; others said that they read their compositions to an imaginary listener to assess its clarity. Finally, nearly all the students stated that outlines were rarely if ever used; however, they did plan their writing (Cited by Mitchell, 1996: 39). These findings suggest that teachers must be careful because sometimes, even though we claim to follow a process-approach, we try to force students to follow the same process, forgetting that writers vary in the way they arrive at a final product. In some cases, we want our students to use an outline, which is a good idea, but there are some who do not need that since as the findings show, they just have a very careful mental planning of their ideas; some writers revise over and over as they write.

Although the process approach is much more interested in the process of creation of meaning, it does not imply that formal aspects of the language are not seen as important. Baynham (1999) argues revision and reformulation can involve work at all levels of the text, from spelling and punctuation through grammar and lexical choice, to features of discourse organization. Similarly, Mitchell (1996) states: "Students can be taught to shift their focus from thinking of writing as a linguistic exercise in which quality is measured by the degree of accuracy, to thinking of writing as an activity in which linguistic information can help them shape their ideas." (p.48). Certainly the focus of this study was not on the accurate use of linguistic features, but of course, they were tools that clearly helped writers to shape and express their thoughts.

It is often seen that problems with grammar, punctuation, lexical choice and the like can have a very negative impact on content and general understanding of a text. When there is a considerable number of problems with the language use, it is very likely that readers will not be able to fully understand what the writer meant. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) argue that the ideal thing is to have an integrative approach where creation and organization of meaning are central to the act of writing, but one that is carried out through the correct choice of language structures in order to have a comprehensive final text (product). To conclude this section, I want to highlight what Raimes (1995) points out in regards to writing: "…what seems to be emerging is a recognition that the complexity of the writing process and the writing context means that when we teach writing we have to balance the form, the writer, the content, and the reader." (251)

What is the role of feedback in writing?

If we are to follow a process approach to writing, which implies constant revision and reorganization of thoughts and ideas in order to get a final ideal text; it is very important for teachers to be aware of the relevant role that they play in the whole process. Therefore, teachers' responsibility is not only to mark final paper's mistakes with red ink or give a final score, but to become mediators and coaches in order to help students succeed. "Because we comment on students' work in progress, the kind of comments we traditionally made are no longer sufficient and may even be counterproductive" (Reid, 1994). Additionally, White and Arndt (1996) affirm: "In a process approach, reading students' work involves responding to the text as a reader, rather than simply as a marker" (p.124). Instead of constraining learners because they do not produce correct writing, teachers should act as facilitators, organizing writing experiences that enable the learner to develop effective composing strategies (Richards, 1990, p. 111).

A response on student's writing is potentially one of the most influential texts in a writing class (Raimes, 1995). Nevertheless, one of the issues that have always intrigued teachers and people interested in researching on writing is precisely the kind of feedback that teachers should give to their students to actually contribute to the improvement and development of writing. Perhaps we as teachers are concerned about choosing the best approach, but very often leave aside the crucial role of feedback. Different ideas have aroused from teachers and researchers in the field on how to and where to focus when responding on students' texts.

Fathman and Whalley (1994), for instance, believe that teachers can comment on form, make generalized comments about content, e.g. "good description" or "bad details". Coffin (2003) considers that students need to be explicitly told where and how their "grammar" is incorrect; it is especially for students who are in the first stages of the writing development because they are not experts, then they might not know why certain thing is problematic. It means that they need a lot of guidance and support from the teacher. According to White & Arndt's (1996) point of view: "The teacher-reader must be supportive and helpful in the kinds of comments that he makes, accentuating the positive rather than focusing on the negative aspects of what the students have presented." (p.124). The teacher should not take the position of a judge, he must play the role of a collaborator, and act as an authentic reader when

reading students' written production. The notion of teachers-as-collaborators is particularly valid in that it encourages a focus on the writing process rather than only on the final product. Teachers who agree with this position must work collaboratively with students during the different phases of the writing process with the aim of contributing on students' writing development in EFL.

Another important issue concerning feedback is where to focus attention: whether on content or on form. People who claim to follow a process approach agree with the idea of focusing on content. However, the majority of them believe that both the content and form are relevant to the purpose. Fathman and Whalley (1994) report the compared results of correcting grammar, content, both grammar and content and neither, in an L2 composition class. According to the findings, correcting grammar brought about improvement of the grammar of rewritten drafts and at the same time led to a 44 per cent improvement on content expression of the writings. The results of this study suggest that feedback on both grammar and content, whether given alone or simultaneously, affect rewriting positively. White and Arndt (1996) suggest that the first reading should be concerned with meaning and purpose of the text. Similarly, Kern (2000) maintains: "grammar, spelling and other issues of form come into play in the editing phases, but are not emphasized up front, so as to encourage students to express themselves freely" (p. 183).

In addition to the teacher's feedback, we have peers' feedback which can be as beneficial as the teacher's or maybe even more beneficial for the writing. Probably, this is one of the aspects that have not been widely considered as relevant for the writing practices; probably due to the conception that the teacher is the only one who knows and that students are just learning and might not be qualified to give appropriate feedback. According to the findings of a research done by Rollinson (2005) in regards to peers' feedback, he asserts: "Peer response operates on a more informal level of response. This may encourage or motive the writer or at least provide a change from the one-way interaction between the teacher and the student, where the student ends up making revisions without necessarily agreeing with or even understanding the teacher's authoritative comments" (p.27). Based on the findings of his research, the author suggests that by giving the opportunity to revise others' writings, students become more critical readers and at the same time it helps them to become more self-critical to self-edit and revise their own writings. As it can be seen, feedback should not be only the teacher's responsibility but should

be a collaborative activity where students contribute with each other, but at the same time where students enrich their own writing through the activity of looking at the other's work with a critical eye.

With the avenue of 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. Pennington (2005) asserts: "All types of network arrangements have the potential of motivating L2 students to write and to revise in response to a real audience, for helping them to gain more input in writing, for encouraging them to experiment in their writing, and for empowering them to seek out resources for developing their ideas" (p. 294).

Thanks to technological changes, now students can write for an audience other that the teacher who is, as in this research case, native speakers of the native language. In this way, students-writers feel motivated to compose good texts in order that the interlocutor can understand them. It is a very enriching experience since often students do not consider the teacher a reader but simply the person who judges and marks their texts, as it was stated above. By means of the interaction, students can also receive feedback from their peers in a very relaxed way, and within a communicative objective. Communication in these virtual environments can change some of the dynamics of peer feedback sessions found in traditional classrooms, Pennington (2005). We will now see how technology can become a useful tool in the development of writing in EFL.

How can technology contribute to the language classroom?
A recurring theme in the literature on computer mediated communication is that New Technologies offer opportunities for treating teaching and learning as truly social activities where knowledge is built through interaction and dialogue rather than lectures and recitation (Brown, 2000, Hardwick, 2000, Rice, 2003). Technology goes beyond the delivery of information and lies instead in the power to create collaborative, learner-centered educational spaces (Deitering & Huston, 2004). Thanks to technology now language teachers have new tools that can provide students with opportunities to interact with

virtual communities while at the same time they can construct knowledge and exchange cultural issues with the participants. This interaction fosters communication among the individuals in the community which at the same time can enhance construction knowledge, socio-cultural understanding and language learning. For this specific research project, blogs were used as a tool to provide students a different learning writing environment that allowed them to interact, communicate and learn with people from an English speaking country.

The blog or weblog, as it is also known, is a relatively new web tool that has spread all over the world during the last years. However, it was only after 2003 that language teachers started to use it with teaching/learning purposes. The general online consensus, according to Ward (2004) is that "a weblog is a website that is updated regularly and organized chronologically according to the date, and in reverse order from most recent entry backwards. Weblogs can also provide decentralized access rights which allow(s) multiple authors." (p. 2). However, these are only technical definitions of what a blog is; there are other considerations that deal with the use of the blogs.

From other perspectives, a weblog is a personal webspace where learners can post any kind of information they want. Ward (2004) states: "the weblog is usually motivated solely by the need of self-expression, and often communicates something about the personality, or adopted person, behind the blog, through the style of writing and choice of topics." (p. 2). Certainly, the texts each blogger posts resemble a lot the kind of person he/she is. Blogs allow students to show their inner voices in a world where little by little humans tend to be voiceless beings who just follow mainstream trends. Blood (2000) highlights that: "blogs are nothing less than an outbreak of self-expression. Each is evidence of a staggering shift from an age of carefully controlled information provided by sanctioned authorities (and artists), to an unprecedented opportunity for individual expression on a worldwide scale" (P. 7)

For the language teacher the weblog is a timely arrival tool which can fulfill any of the needs identified for the teaching of writing. It provides a genuine audience different from the teacher, who in most of the cases does not act as a reader but simply as a judge. It is authentically communicative, since the students are using the language to actually construct meaning and to communicate something. It is process driven because the writer has the chance

to edit and correct anything at any point, since the technical features of the tool allows bloggers to edit or rewrite the whole version of the same, Ward (2004). Additionally, it gives the opportunity for peer review and feedback, it can be given by peers in a different country or even by peers from the same class.

There are some studies that have shown the advantages of using weblogs to enhance students' writing development. Ward (2004) carried out a short term study with forty non-native English speaker students with an intermediate language level. The study was developed in order to see how weblogs could benefit his composition class. The teacher chose four different tasks for students to write; he says that even though blogs are thought of spaces where little attention to form is paid, he wanted his students to advance in their writing. Therefore, he helped them in the process of writing the texts. In this case, the audience for the students was peers from the same class. His findings suggest that students enjoyed the experience a lot and they said that it had helped them to improve their English. Other students expressed that the blog was a form of self expression, something similar to a diary where they could put all the things they wanted to share with others. In general, according to the author, students were highly motivated to write. Some of them continued keeping their blogs after the course finished.

A similar study was undertaken by Deitering and Huston (2004) at Western Oregon University with a group of Geography and Film intensive writing course offered in spring 2004 with eighteen students. A class weblog, *filmtalk,* was created as a space for students to publish their own ideas about course content, and also to share with the others their ideas and writings. This was a collective weblog where all students wrote at least three times a week. Based on the comments, students created discussions which provided a space for informal writing. However, they were also required to write formal pieces of writing -specially film reviews and critiques- as it was the main focus of the class. The instructor only used the blog to write announcements and new tasks, the rest was entirely created and produced by the students.

Similarly to the study previously mentioned, students felt it was a great opportunity for them to self-express and at the same time, to keep record of the discussions to be further used. The authors point out that the weblog, *filmtalk*, worked well as a community forum where every student contributed to the enrichment of the discussions. Additionally, the blog provided the medium for

informal writing in the course without excessive attention to the mechanics or disciplinary specificities of their fields.

These two experiences suggest that weblogs can change greatly the dynamics of our classes, especially writing classes which sometimes appear to be a heavy load for students and teachers. Weblogs are particularly easy to integrate into the traditional classes affording students' freedom, creativity, own voice and self-learning not easily achieved in traditional classes. Thus, as emphasized above, writing becomes something to be done for a real audience, with a communicative purpose, through a process approach, with the opportunity to get feedback and something that is not normally easy, with the opportunity to publish the pieces of writing. What is more important is that students can work jointly with peers from the classroom and other parts of the world and create a group that share similar interests and that looks for the achievement of similar learning objectives for the members. These groups of people are recognized as communities of practice, which is the last aspect that I want to address in this section.

Why Communities of practice?

The idea that learning involves a deep process of participation in a community of practice has gained significant ground in recent years (Lave & Wenger, 1998). "All theories are based on the assumption about the person, the world, and their relations, and we have argued that this monograph formulates a theory of learning as a dimension of social practice" (Lave & Wenger, 2005, p. 168). Based on Vygotsky's ideas, they strongly believe that learning is not the result of a single individual, it is rather the interaction among members of communities which can facilitate and make learning happen.

Lave and Wenger (2005) claim that activities, functions and understandings do not exist in isolation, they are part of broader systems of relations in which they have meaning. These systems of relations arise of and are reproduced and developed within social communities, which are in part relations among persons.

Social relations are everywhere, all of us are always involved in communities whether that is at home, school, university, workplace, and even in leisure interests. In such communities there are members who are more experienced and knowledgeable and can help others advance in their learning.

The family is the first community children belong to and as they grow up, the communities are also expanded but in all of them the individuals are engaged in learning together.

With the advent of technological changes and thanks to the great variety of resources that ICTs offer, the idea of communities has been broadened beyond groups of people in the same geographical places. Now it is possible to think of virtual or online communities of people who share similar interests and who engage in a specific practice. By means of the regular interactions and joint effort to learn the individuals can learn from one another.

We, teachers, need to understand that computers and Internet have made a great change on people's lives and so too in the way our students learn. Pennington (2005) points out that these new technological trends require a great demand for literacy in computer writing tools. Many of our literacy practices in education, work, and social life have moved off the page onto the screen. If we take a look at the current literacy practices, we find that nowadays the majority of reading and writing tasks are done in the computer. Therefore, the modern language teacher needs to understand the nature of electronic writing media, the impact they have on students' literacy processes, and the ways s/he can best employ them in the teaching of writing.

Research design

Type of study

This research study was based on the action research paradigm which is a methodology that combines action and research. It means that during a study the researcher is repeating the process of performing an action, reflecting on what has happened and using this information to plan the next action. The most important focus of action research is to work on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to particular social groups or communities (Burns, 2001). O'Brien (2001) highlights that this type of research has its foundations in the writings of John Dewey, the great American educational philosopher of the 1920s and 30s, who believed that professional educators should become involved in community problem-solving. Similarly, Nunan (1998) affirms: "The [action] research is initiated by the practitioner and is derived from a real problem in the classroom which needs to be confronted" (p. 18). Thus, action research is mainly concerned with the problems that a teacher faces in his/her classroom and how s/he can find solutions for the specific problem.

Nevertheless, the aim is not only to know the causes of such problem; it is rather a fact of improving and changing teachers' daily practices through systematic research.

Based on this research paradigm, I proposed two questions to be dug out and answered along this empirical study:

❋ What insights about writing in EFL can we gain from a blog writing experience?

❋ How does feedback provided in the blog writing experience shape Colombian students' writing in EFL?

In order to answer the above research questions, there were basically three different action research moments that started in April 2006 and ended in December of the same year.

❋ Exploratory work, Canadian and Colombian students' interaction through personal blogs.

❋ Exploring Writing through the activities in a Virtual Wall

❋ Writing argumentative texts and debates

Research setting

This research was conducted at Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, which is a public university, specifically at the School of Sciences and Education. The mission of this School is to educate professional citizens by providing them with strategies that empower them to construct new alternatives in order to transform subjects and national collectivities. This School, founded in 1973, is specialized in programs of Education, such as: Physics, Spanish and Literature, Social studies, English, among others. They have the responsibility of forming students who in the future will be teachers, especially in Primary and Secondary school. The program I undertook this study with was "Licenciatura en Educación Básica Primaria con Enfasis en Inglés." This program consists of ten semesters. Students are required to do a pedagogical practicum in public schools from sixth semester until they finish the programme. The areas of Pedagogy and English are at the core of this program.

Participants

I carried out this study with 17 students from second semester of the above program whose ages ranged between 17 and 23 years old. Most of the

students were studying because they wanted to become teachers of English in the future; however, there were some who did not, some of them are in the program because they could not study engineering, business administration or something different. For some others, the reason to study this program was only to learn English in order to be able to travel abroad and have a better quality of life. Independently of what their purpose to learn English was, most of them were motivated to learn the language. Although I worked all of the pedagogical activities with the whole group, I selected only eight participants to collect data from and to analyze all their process. All of the participants signed a consent   letter in which they accepted to participate in this action-research project, as well as to allow me to collect and analyze their written productions (See annex 1).

Instruments for data collection
With the purpose of collecting data that could answer my research questions I used interviews, students' artifacts (writing drafts) and students' blogs.

a. Interview
 In action research, interviews are used in order to understand the perspectives of students or teachers. The interview is a good way of finding out what the situation looks like from other's point of view, Elliot (1993). I applied a semi-structured interview almost at the end of this action-research process (see annex 2).

b. Students' artifacts (writing drafts)
From Hubbard and Miller's (1999) point of view, students' artifacts is one of the richest sources of data for teachers-researchers as "it is tangible evidence of what kids [learners] are able to do and of the range of responses kids [learners] make to different learning task" (p. 102). Although I was not working with children, this perception was very important for me since as the authors argue, it was tangible evidence of my students' actual writing development. I kept the original and copies of the drafts students produced in the process of writing each text.

c. Students' blogs
The blog was the main data collection instrument I had since it is the record of all that the   students wrote as well as of the interaction with their Canadian

peers and the kind of feedback they received from them. This is another kind of artifact since it is the last step of the writing process which was the publication of students' texts in the blogs. This was a very rich source of data to analyze and also to find particular issues that were later deepened in the personal interviews. (See annex 3).

Data analysis and findings

As with all data, analysis and interpretation are required to bring order and understanding to the lots of information that are gathered during the research process. This requires creativity, discipline and a systematic approach. The analysis for the present research study is based on the grounded approach. This approach is an inductive form of qualitative research where data collection and analysis are conducted together. Constant comparison and theoretical sampling are used to support the systematic discovery of theory from data (Graham and Taylor, 2005).

After the long journey of systematic analysis, I came out with three main categories that could answer the two research questions:

Research questions	Categories
1. What insights about writing in EFL can we gain from a blog writing experience?	1.1. Community of writers
	1.2. Blog writing: portraying students' selves
2. How does feedback provided in the blog writing experience shape Colombian students' writing in EFL?	Providing feedback: coaching the process

The first research question of this study proposes to search for insights about writing in EFL. The dictionary defines insights as follows: "it is a clear understanding of something, or part of something, specially a complicated situation or idea. It is also the ability to understand what people or situations

look like." Other synonyms for this word are: *knowledge, understanding, comprehension* and *vision*. The second question intends to find the role that feedback played in the experience of writing with blogs. Therefore, I analyzed feedback from two different viewpoints: feedback from Canadian peers and from the teacher. We will try to gain some understanding and knowledge about writing and the role of feedback from this experience with blogs. This research focuses only on the outcomes of the Colombian students as the data was collected from them. I will start with the analysis of the first category named Community of Writers.

1. Community of Writers:

The word *community* comes from the Latin words "communicate" and "common", which makes it appropriate for groups of people who share experience and interests and who communicate amongst themselves to share and learn about their interests (Mercer, 2003). Thus, a community is a group of people who are united by common purposes and who engage in joint activity; such joint activity leads to the idea that there is a common practice amongst the members which allows them to engage and build relationships and interactions that enable the members to learn together.

The first aspect that characterized the writing community in the context of the present research was the shared learning practice that both groups had. On the one hand, both groups were foreign language learners (Colombian students were English learners and Canadian students were Spanish learners) enrolled in the virtual forum with the aim of practicing the language by using the language to communicate and interact with the others through the use of blogs. On the other hand, the participants also had similar interests: regarding music, arts, hobbies, etc., which allowed some of them to build strong relationships that resulted in the consolidation of a community. In addition to sharing the same practice and similar interests, members of the community also agreed to write in the target language in order to practice and learn about it, as well as to learn about the target culture (For the purpose of this research the data samples were taken only from Colombian students' blogs, therefore the pieces are in English).The common practice empowered students to use the target language to build learning relationships mainly based on topics of culture and personal issues.

The following quotes taken from students' personal blogs illustrate the exchange of a pair of students from Colombia and Canada based on their passions and interests.

Posted at May 11/2006 12:12AM:

D.R:

MY PASSION

In general, Art (painting, drawing, music) allows people to show feelings about something or someone. I like art a lot. I'm going to show something about my passion: "Drawing". Since I was four years old I like drawing, I learned by myself. I don't know, but when I stay in front of the table I begin to imagine other world: in this world there aren't limitations, not rules, not pressure, only peace, freedom and imagination. I feel very well, this is the way that I can express my feelings, also I relax from everything. My favorite is Japanese drawings. They are the best in the world. They have big beautiful eyes, long hair and perfect bodies. Here are some of my drawings that I want to share with you. What about your passion?

Posted at May 15/2006 04:06PM:

DCSED: I can't draw, but I get a similar feeling when I read, sing or dance. I like to read suspense novels because you never want to put them down. I like to sing and dance because it is relaxing and fun. My favourite pastimes are at the cottage with my cousins. I used to be on a synchronize swimming team, diving team, a swimming team and a curling team. In middle school I used to play volleyball and soccer. I am on many committtees in school. I am on Graduation Council, the Winter Formal committee, and many others. I work at the great canadian bagel.

What places you have visited? I have been very lucky to travel to many places in the world. I have been all across Canada except for Newfoundland and the territories. I have also been to New York, New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont. I have been to Florida, the islands of Caymen, Jamaica, Nassau in the Bahamas, Mexico, St.Thomas, the Dominican Republic, and some other places as well.

My favorite sport to watch is hockey. It is a world-wide sport with many diverse leagues such as the QMJL and the NHL. My favourite hockey league to watch is at the High School level. My favourite player is my boyfriend Jordan Rice. He is an excellent goalie. I also love to watch my sister Brenna play hockey. Hockey is played on ice, but you also can play it outside. One team has a minimum of 15 players and 2 referees. My favorite NHL hockey team is the Calgary Flames. Hockey is also an Olympic sport! Team Canada recieved a gold medal for the girls this year. Hockey is one of the most watched sports in Canada and is a favourite past time for many families. You must use the protective gear of the hockey and use a small stick to move the puck around the ice.

(Student D: Blog 1/11/05/06)

In the previous extracts the Colombian student writes about his passion and then he closes his text with a direct question for the reader (Canadian peer) as a way to engage him/her in the text and provoke an answer in order to build communication and interest. The reply from the Canadian peer makes it evident

that the students established a kind of communication around topics of their particular interests; and at the same time, it makes evident that the Colombian student had it clear that he was writing for a real reader or audience, which is precisely the second feature that characterizes the community.

The Colombian student wrote a specific question for the audience/reader in this case the Canadian peer. This kind of communication required Colombian students to write to address a specific audience that would react as an authentic reader. Students found their writing meaningful and useful as they wrote for genuine purposes not just as a teacher's requirement. In the interview one of the participants highlighted the impact of the blog writing experience in the task of writing in English as a foreign language. She also pointed out the significant fact of composing with the purpose of making herself understood with the other participants (audience) in the group:

> "E: pues yo creo que nos ayuda bastante [the experience of blog writing] a que podamos interaccionar con personas de otros países con el fin de intercambiar ideas, e igualmente hacernos el feedback que de una u otra manera nos ayuda a…para nuestra formación como docentes de inglés. También creo que… pues… durante estos dos semestres que he tenido la oportunidad de trabajar con los blogs me ha ayudado a mejorar la escritura. Pues más que todo la adquisición de palabras desconocidas, ya que con esto uno puede… en el momento en que se está haciendo un escrito usted tiene que… se ve en la necesidad de buscar las palabras para poder realizar el escrito y así hacerse entender con la otra persona." (Student E: Interview 5; 16/11/06, lines: 3-12)

In the context of the forum, language was used as a means to communicate something to someone (audience) who belonged to the same community and who might be interested in reading the content of the blog entries and who would react based on the meaning that he/she (re)constructed from the text. In this regards Scarcella and Oxford (1992) mention that using writing purposefully to convey authentic messages to real audiences facilitates writing development.

The third feature that characterized the community of writers was the feedback that the members in the group had through the interactions. One way to make it evident that a group of people feel part of a community is the joint tacit/explicit commitment members have to help the others to progress in their learning. In the community that we are looking at, community of writers, there were some cases in which Canadian students gave direct feedback to

the Colombians in terms of the use of the language. This excerpt illustrates the interaction of a Colombian and a Canadian student around a topic of culture. I will concentrate principally in the reply that the Colombian student received from her Canadian peer. It is interesting to see the way the reader - interlocutor (Canadian girl) engages with the text and understands the content of it. Then, she first made a comment on the content of the posting which shows that she grasped out some knowledge from the blog entry and finally she makes a very gentle comment on the formal aspects of the language.

Posted at Apr 04/2006 01:19AM:

J.R: hi! i`m jenny , i`m 17 and i`m going to talk about the gold museum. These are some photographs . i wait you like them.bye

J.R: THE GOLD MUSEUM:

The Gold Museum was founded by the republic Bank in 1939, 65 years ago in order to help the Colombians to preserve the archeological patrimony that belongs to everybody. This is the world`s most important collection of this kind (gold).It contains some 34.000 objects in bone, stone ceramics and precious stones of the quimbaya, Calima,Tayrona,Sinù , Muisca,tumaco, San agustin and tierradentro cultures,among others.

The first floor has a program of archeological and anthropological exhibitions. The second level is a tour by the different cultures, whit a comprehensive display of gold work of each, in a geographical and anthropological context. The third floor contains the most exquisite examples of the symbolism of gold for each of the cultures. At the end is the Goldroom which shows the mistery and fascination of gold with 8.000 pieces on display. The Gold Museum has a document room which provides educational material for schools and universities; guides and videos are also available. There is a shop which sells photograps , souvenirs and replicas of pre-Columbian figures.

It`s amazing how you can see all your culture in just one place. you feel in other period , and you analize everything that you can see. you only can take photographs whit a digital camera, it isn't allowed to enter whit flash cameras. Here come people from different countries of the world, there are Japanese, American, Venezuelan, etc... among others. Colombian people are friendly and good workers.

Although the first men and women arrived to colombia 16.000 years ago (aproximately), just for 2.500 years , societies with Indians prince and agriculture who used gold objects.

The indians`prince used to wear big ornaments show their importance and to make their autority visible.Those were sacred objects that expressed ehe world and human`s. the common people used to wear numerous simple ornaments. The metals could be used too to make tools and to do gifts. Nowadays those are for us, a symbol of our identity as colombians it is a pride for us.

Posted at Apr 12/2006 03:57PM:

KMSED: Hello Jenny! My name is Katherine Meloche, and Im from Moncton, Canada. It not a very large town. We have 90 000 people. Im eighteen, and my birthday is on april 4th. I have a sister named Jennifer who is 20, and a twin named Christina. Christina and i are not similar, and do not look alike. Im in the 12th grade at high school, and Im planning to go to Atlantic Baptist University next fall to be an English teacher...well I will talk to you later

     P.S.- The pictures of the Gold museum are amazing, I enjoyed reading your posting. You're excellent at english!!!!, However you forgot the "h" and the end of "with", and you used the word "wait" instead of "hope" when you said "I wait that you like them"... other than that EXCELLENT work! (Student J: Blog 2, 04/04/06)

In addition to the previous features presented above, there was a fourth component dealing with negotiation. Students had it clear that the objective of belonging to the group was learning together as they interacted regularly through the blogs. In order to be able to contribute to each other's learning, some of the participants negotiated the way they would benefit the other members attain their learning goals. Negotiation, therefore, was a very important ingredient in the interaction between the Canadian and Colombian students. The next two fragments of the interviews clearly illustrate these ideas:

"G:…por ejemplo yo con el muchacho que me comunicaba el semestre pasado,pues todavía me comunico, me hablo con él por Messenger y pues a él también le gustan mucho los idiomas y entonces escribimos así un pedazo en inglés otro en español, y cualquier cosa él me corrige el inglés y   yo le corrijo el español. Cualquier cosa, o palabras que no sé, cosas así yo se las pregunto. Y… sí…eh me parece muy importante porque juntos estamos aprendiendo." (Student G: Interview 3, 15/11/06, lines: 105-111)

"M.P: Me mostró por ejemplo también los perros que tenía. Decía que tenía su bebé grande y su bebé pequeño, me dijo los nombres, me… me… describió por ejemplo la habitación en la que se encontraba en español y trató de hacerlo lo mejor posible. .. Ella me corregía también cuando yo empezaba a responderle, ella me decía no tú me puedes decir así o lo puedes decir asá. Entonces eso claro… es una motivación porque de todas maneras no es lo mismo estar aquí solo entre nosotros una lengua que no es de nosotros a estarla compartiendo con una persona que sí es su lengua y que de alguna manera quiere que el resto de gente la hable bien. Lo mismo conmigo, yo amo mi lengua, el español… entonces es muy rico poder enseñarle a otra persona cómo hablarla correctamente." (Student M.P: interview 3, 11/11/06))

The students (community of writers) also explored topics of common interest in a different virtual space, debates. In this common space, they had to use

convincing arguments to provoke reactions from the other participants, which also required the use of argumentative writing devices. I want to point out that it was one of the blog spaces that contributed to fostering critical reflections from the students as the majority of them were truly motivated to express their beliefs on the topics. Through the discussions in the debates students moved from individual group writing to contributing to the construction of a whole group text that reflected each member's contribution, knowledge and understanding as well as their vision of the world. Even though there was not much participation from the Canadians, Colombian students were very much into it, and it helped them to consolidate the internal Community. The next excerpts were taken from a debate on Music. The question that guided the discussion was: *How does current music affect young people's behaviour?* The dates in the example appear in reverse order as in the blogs entries appear chronologically from the newest to the oldest.

Question: How does current music affect young people's behaviour?

M.P: posted at oct 03/2006 08:02pm:
Music is culture, is art. I love the feelings you can get when you are listening to music, or on the other hand, the kind of music you want to listen depending on your mood.

I agree with Edward, the chilhood has to be watched by its parents. Not all the music is good, even though, in this moment there are more bad music than good music. the comercial world just try to sell, no matter what the human being think what he wants be, and his growing as a being of cultural man.

In fact, we have to be concieous , and try to not help that comercial world, looking for another kind of music, which base doesn`t be sex or boys, or rythms without meaning. We should look for music that believe in man and his differents cultures around the world. On that way maybe chlidren of today and tomorrow can be more sensible. The music must be a good expression of the art... is a comunication form, the music espress each life style.. And "tell me what do you listen and i will tell you who are you" simple.. i think that people that always listen reggaeton ... only thinks on sex... but in their brains there isn´t something of sencibility and art...like poetry ... altough some songs of reggaeton have a message , and a good rhythm... in the end we are Latinamericans and this rhythm is latin (although it has some influences from another continents) but I think that young people should listen constructive music.

Posted at Sep 29/2006 07:58PM:
J.P: also I think that the music is a form to read the world, see the violence and listen to the heart then is the music bad

Posted at Sep 29/2006 07:46PM:

E.A: I think that current music is a problem for peple, because almost all crurrent music bring sublimal massages, as for example REGGAETON MUSISIC, more exactly MICAELA AND QUEMONA, IT say so: Micaela enferma, enferma de amor Le dice a su papa que la lleve al doctor, El doctor le pone la mano en la cabeza Micaela dice: Por hay no se empieza, El doctor le pone la mano en la frente Micaela dice: Por hay no se siente…

"Posted at Oct 03/2006 07:41PM:
E. M:

But reggaeton is not the only music genre that gives a wrong behavior impression. Excessive sexuality in popular music in divas like Britney spears, jessica Simpson, Paris Hilton or Christina Aguilera give a new conception of feminity in girls, but in a wrong way. Today's music shows a very wrong image to our children's bahavior and we need to educate them to listene to it and understand their inner message; don't matter if it is good or wrong.

Posted at Sep 29/2006 07:38PM:

G: I think each person decide which music love, it depends on the culture, age, style, personal likes. So some people think this music is bad, but for another person can be the coolest music. The influence on people´s behaviour can be the worst for someone, but for this person can be normal. We have to understand and tolerate the other people´s likes, because «among likes there aren´t dislikes». music affects people's bahaviour, for example: metal music can become people more violent, reggaeton incites to sex and so on. But it doesn´t happen wiht all of people. Nevertheless, music also leaves good things on people. (Debate Blog 3, 29/09/06)

The four characteristics discussed in this category explored how the participants smoothly became and consolidated a community of writers. Now, in the following category I explore in depth the content of the blog entries and the exchanges that occurred in the community.

2. Blog writing: Portraying students selves

Most of the written pieces that were posted in the blogs were somehow pieces of every student's life. Every word that flowed into every fragment was an attempt for students to utter something that was intrinsically linked to their likes, feelings, dreams, ideologies, beliefs and personalities. Most participants were very much invested into the things they wrote about, the pieces they

created gave the rest of the class a better idea of who they were as integral individuals who made part of a wider community (society) that went beyond the classroom walls.

This second category emerged from two different patterns that characterized students' writing with blogs. The two patterns are related to freedom in two different yet interrelated ways: freedom for students to choose the topics and freedom for students to use their voice (self-expression). This category was present during all the implementation of the three research cycles; as a new space was created there was a wider variety of possibilities for students to write about. Consequently, the written genres also varied from on phase to the other as the new spaces required students to produce different texts.

The first pattern I want to refer to is the one related to the freedom to choose the topics students wanted to write about. Students had the opportunity to select the topics they were interested in writing and, in most of the cases, it gave reasons for them to write. As they wanted to tell others about the things that were important to them, they found a purpose to write and to look for ways to use the appropriate structures, vocabulary and even look for strategies to overcome the lack of knowledge of the language in order that the messages were not distorted. In discussing students' choice to write Scarcella and Oxford (1992) remark: "Choice is a critical component of writing. When students are allowed to choose the topics they write about, they elaborate their ideas, clarify their thoughts, and revise their texts."(p. 121). The following extracts from the interview exemplify students' opinions about the freedom to choose what to write:

"M.P: [the blogs] Es algo como… la mejor forma de aprender a escribir, no porque toque sino porque nos gusta, porque podemos expresarnos, podemos hacer las cosas que nos gustan, podemos por ejemplo hablar sobre nuestros cantantes, sobre las cosas… sobre el arte, sobre el cine, sobre todas aquellas cosas que nos llaman la atención… me divierto muchísimo haciéndolo. Creo que mis compañeros también y cuando tienen el tiempo y lo saben hacer lo hacen muy bien y también les gusta hacerlo. Pues obviamente ha desarrollado en nosotros muchas cosas que antes no teníamos…Por ejemplo el hecho de tener una mejor escritura. Mi writing ha mejorado muchísimo desde el semestre pasado." (M.P. Interview 3; 10/11/06, lines: 3-12)

"G.E: …por ejemplo yo soy encarnizada con los poemas… a mi me fascinan y yo busco en español, en francés, en inglés… Entonces eso es fácil porque es lo que a mí me

inspira. Entonces cuando a mí algo me inspira, yo escribo y me riego en prosa y de todo… yo soy feliz en ese blog. Todo está relacionado conmigo… yo estoy contenta porque digo: ¡por fin voy a darme a conocer! Y lo mejor es que no voy a imponer nada… es decir que como soy gótica me voy a vestir así… no impongo mi imagen sino que… en el blog me dan la libertad para quien quiera conocer mi imagen." (G.E: interview 6: 16/11/2006, Lines: 34-41)

"P:…lo del foro porque uno opina sobre temáticas que suceden en la actualidad, las polémicas y todo eso. Lo individual es muy chévere porque uno puede escribir sobre lo que le gusta, lo que no le gusta, lo que uno   sabe de la vida y de todo. También ideas sobre las situaciones que ocurren." (P: Interview 2, 8/11/06, lines: 66-76)

The second factor related to freedom was self-expression. It was one of the major principles that underlined this research project along the three different research phases. As new spaces were created the range of topics that students chose was much richer, therefore there were more alternatives for them to express what they wanted and to portray themselves from different perspectives. Blogs empowered individuals to use their voice freely in order to express whatever was important to them, to write things that they considered worth exploring. I show and analyze two examples of two different participants in the present research in order to put together some blog entries written at different moments of the pedagogical intervention. I selected these two students because the content and style of their writings were very different, so it allowed me to illustrate how fragments pieced together over time (Blood, 2000) can give us an intimate view of the ideologies, beliefs, vision of the world and personalities of the two students behind the blogs.

Example 1: Participant C

Posted at May 15/2006 04:58PM:
" C: today, I am going to tell you about the thing I most like doing.

I love all the things related to the plastic arts. I enjoy drawing, painting and learn techniques to create beautiful things.
I take a seminar about glass. It's very interesting because we are learning how to cut glass in different forms create a concept and put it in a craftwork. Also, we are learning about making sculptures by using ovens and others machines that trough heat transform the original structure of glass. Additionally, we are usung acids to engrave on pieces of glass.
I think art is one of the ways trough wich peolple can explore themselves and go out from the rutine. As an artist you can open that wayto people and make them to think

about themselves, and obo, and obout other people and their problems. However, there are some things I enjoy doing in my fre time, like dancing, listening to music, traveling… but, my real passion are art, especially." (Student C: blog 4, 15/05/06)

Posted at Sep 05/2006 07:14PM:
 "C: The morning after pill is creating controversy. It is being selling in drugstores without a medical prescription. Some people think and say: "the pill is not abortive", and their opinion and arguments are respectable. However, I have to say : "I don't agree with the after morning pill". I`ve found some information which says pill is really abortive, because it doesn´t let the implantation of the pheto in the womb.

If you are going to have an active sexual life, I think you should settle down with a person, and if you don´t want to get pregnant, look for information and use an anticonceptive method, go to the doctor... I just have to say It´s better before than after. Think about the moral side, nobody´s owner of other´s life". (Student C, debate blog 1, 05/09/06)

Wed Oct 11/2006 19:58
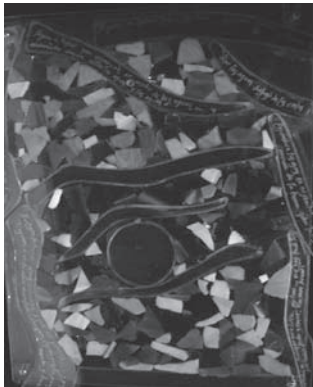
"C: Here there is one of my works when I was in a glass seminar the last semester. It`s like a picture to put in a wall. I tried to represent many things in that work for example, in first place you can see a part of a face, especially an eye, that for me means how the humanity can see and show feelings, in this case about the creation. If you see closer you can find the story of creation as the bible says. In the hair is every single day of the creation. The word used as a poetic instrument. The color plays a very important role in the interpretation because every single color is present around us, in the nature, even in us. If you see the picture when you get far, maybe you can see or create in your mind a landscape, just using color, the basic colors, at least the colors I consider are always present, maybe I'm wrong. Furthermore, every color has variations that represent nature diversity, variety even in the human being, how different we can be, and how beautiful we can be together if we remember our roots."

(Student C: Blog 3, 11/10/06)

The student overtly writes about her passion for art as she describes her picture in depth and gives her personal interpretation about what art means to her. She understands art as a way for people to know themselves and to help others think and reflect about themselves and others' problems. In addition to those

different explicit passions and visions of art, there are some implicit personal thoughts and ideas about religion and love, just to mention two. She also subtly refers to the concept of world creation and the Bible when she interprets her own picture and when she gives her opinion on the morning after pill debate.

Next I present some blog entries from a second participant written at different moments of the project:

Example 2: Participant G

Posted at Sep 27/2006 0

G: I love drawing because when I was a little girl, I loved watching Sailor Moon (this was my firts manga program) so, I started like it (this kind of programs) so my dream is when graduate, i would like to travel to Japan and create my manga story, so I WOULD like to be a real otaku, maybe I will marry with a japanese man.

Otaku it is known outside Japan as a fanatic with taste marked enough by animates or Manga. In its country of origin, the meaning is closest to the definition of friky, a person who goes back to himself and lives alone because he enjoys, like the computers, a singer, automobiles or models on scale. This Japanese term has passed to the West with the meaning of "Manga fan". In Japan the term is generally contemptuous, although recently, some Japanese use it with pride. In the West it can have as much negative connotations as positive

"Posted at Oct 06/2006 06:49PM:

Hi classmate today i'm going to tell about other topic that I like and it is the culture gothic. Everybody think that this culture is only for persons that listen to gothic music but that is wrong when you say I'm gothic mean i'm a person that i like 80's literature, i like clothes from victorian times, I like gothic art too all tihs things are parts of the wonderful goyhic world.

The Gothic concept. Gothic it is briefly pain, fear, it distresses, satire and depression. it is a form to live marginally in this rotten world. It is to do of our life which is desired, without involve to people that do not understand to us, it is to tolerate the existence and it is to frees thought, it is to create freely what it is created advisable, is to ejaculate mentally with the pride of knowing what it is becoming, it is in fact one form of life, it is a way of thinking.

In conclusion, the gothic art is not more but an expression of the beauty, the elegance, the feeling and the art, together in a so vast movement, so rich, as it can be the soul."

Posted at Nov 15/2006 05:50PM:

G: I am the happiest person of the world when you say: "hello" or you laugh me, because i know, although for single a second, you have thought about me.

Love me, love me, my razor blade. Peel my skin, make me scream. Sink so deep, make me weep. Cut my flesh, make me bleed. Take my life, set me free.

My break heart so hollow inside me, there is much pain, my soul crying, lost love, tearing me apart... I am cursed to the sorrow, screams inside, heart slain. Without you I am dying, farewell, queen of my heart" (G: Blog 4, 15/11/06)

This student also refers to the concept of art as the first one does, but from the concept of Gothic Art. She explicitly affirms her love for this kind of art when she gives her own definition of what it means to her. She also refers to her passion about Manga drawing and what the word OTAKU means. Her two passions Gothic art and Manga are somehow related in that both are art, and in that both, from the girl's definition, conceive the human being as a part of a decayed world that marginalizes her and that obliges her to get used to living isolated in her own world. Similarly, student G writes a love poem in which it is possible to see her idea about the human feeling.

Perhaps you as a reader have already portrayed an image of who each student is as students' texts are full of personal meaning and knowledge that allow the reader to build a picture of the individuals beyond simple English language learners, but as individuals whose ideas are rooted in their lived experiences. Blood (2002) asserts: "The sole purpose of a weblog is to describe the world as seen through one person's eyes…your authentic voice will come from articulating the world as you experience it, whatever that experience is. There are many things that can be drawn about the individuals from reading the blogs, some that are explicitly said and others that can be inferred from analyzing the words, the images, music, videos among others posted in the space. Every good blog has a point of view, whether it is openly articulated or whether it is made evident through the material the weblogger chooses to link (Blood, 2002). Precisely, one the most powerful features of blogs is that they provided individuals with spaces for them to self-express and explore any topic

that attracted them as a result of living in a world that let them experience, learn and construct personal knowledge of what existing is. Students' words were laden with the meaning of their existential experience, Freire and Macedo (1987). Huffaker (2004) points out that the potential of blogs is that they empower individuals to use their voice to accumulate and manage knowledge of their personal interest as well as to share it with others freely.

In the interaction with students from Canada there are some responses that make it evident how they could create their own image of the Colombian person immersed in the blog entries. In some Canadian students' replies they explicitly wrote about what they thought about who the other Colombian person was, based on the blog entries that they read. These replies were done to the first student presented in the analysis of this category:

> *Posted at May 01/2006 5:45 PM:* <u>HSED</u>: "Wow these are reeally amazing pictures. You seem to really love art and just simple beauty of things. It looks like there is a lot of history and culture in your city. It's seems very beautiful" (Student C: blog 3, 01/06/06)
> *Posted at May 17/2006 05:29PM: "*<u>MSED</u>: Your intrest in artwork is fascinating! It seems to be a big part of your life. It would be nice to see some of your pieces sometime. Would you consider doing something with art in the future maybe as a career? I have to go, I look forward to meeting younext week! Buenos Dias! (Student C: blog 3, 17/05/06)

Finally, there was also a key aspect that contributed to the creation of students' pieces and that played an important role in the overall process; it was the explicit feedback provided by the teacher of English and the implicit sometimes explicit one by Canadian peers through the interactions.

3. Providing feedback: Coaching the process

As mentioned above in the theoretical discussion, writing is a process that requires a lot of guidance from others, especially from the teacher. The teacher becomes a *coach* or *mentor* in the process, as he/she is a "more knowledgeable" person in the field, he can help in the improvement and development of the students' writing by contributing in the scaffolding of such process. Within this focus, the teacher is viewed as an expert member of the classroom community whose role is primarily facilitative (Mitchell, 1996). It is assumed that scaffolding occurs in the presence of an identifiable and stable expert participant who helps the others to reach a step further from their actual thinking process, what Vygotsky (1996) calls zone of proximal development (ZPD). This concept which derives from cognitive psychology and L1 research, states that in social

interaction a knowledgeable participant can create supportive conditions in which the novice can participate and extend, current skills and knowledge to higher levels of competence" (Greenfield, 1984; Bruner & Rose, 1976 cited in: Donato, R. 1990)

The first category discussed in this analysis was community of writers. It illustrated how the people from the Colombian and Canadian groups consolidated a community in which they shared similar learning interests. Now, I want to analyze how I, as the teacher also became an expert member of the community who facilitated the interaction between the groups and helped Colombian students to improve the quality of their written texts. I also provided students with a learning environment that encouraged them to take on responsibility as they wrote and interacted with the other participants.

On the one hand, I helped students identify and solve their problems in writing by offering them clear information about where their problems were as well as helping them solve such difficulties. Thus, my role as a teacher was altered from the function of a judge to taking on a coaching role during the writing process. In this regard Vygotsky (1996) claims that knowledge within a discipline is important, but solving problems that encourage students to go beyond their current skill and knowledge level is critical to effective instruction. I want to illustrate these ideas by showing how through the feedback the students and I could establish a kind of interaction that finally helped students to scaffold in the process of writing. I present a sample of the process that a group of students went through to have the final product of a text about Vallenato music (a Colombian music genre).

First writing draft, taken from group: Two and a Half Men 19/10/06

History

Vallenato was born in the Atlantic coast. Since its beginnings, this kind of music is have been one of the most important tradition inn the Colombian culture and a product to export to another countries. In the vallenato rythms, you can find differents styles like "paseo", "pulla", "son", etc. actually we can listening "the Nueva Ola" and the most representative singers are: Celedón. Dangond, K. Morales, and we can see a traditional singers that has unit to this genre like: Villazón, Zulet, "Los Diablitos" and others. The traditional, vallenato sound is produced with Acordeón, Caja and Guacharaca. The new sounds introduce key boards, bass, guitars and other instrumentsand effects. About the festivals the vallenato has one special festival celebrated each year in April. In this festival is selected the best interpreter, song, composer, young revelation.

> Traditionally in every party the people listening and danceing vallenato specially in the coast caribean zone.
>
> In the new population, the vallenato is a little rejected new rithms like reggaeton, bachata are invaded the colombian culture and let the vallenato like an old and bored sound. We invited you to listen and know about this rithm because is part of us. and it is so funny. About places, in each city of Colombia we can find a "Parranda" places, here we can drink beers or better drink Ron, listening good music and dance, in Bogotá, the most famous places are "La Trampa", "Aguadepanelas", "Maramaos". go and enjoy it.

Teacher's feedback and recommendations

Organization

1. Divide your writing in paragraphs because there is no clear division of the information.

2. Differentiate the introduction from the rest of text.

3. There are some ideas that are not developed in the text, they are just mentioned.

4. Write a paragraph for conclusion.

5. In the last part you talk about places but you should develop this aspect more extensively in a different paragraph.

Content

1. You have included relevant information that might be important about this rhythm but sometimes you do not expand the themes. For example, you should mention some places from the coast to help the reader to have an idea of the places you refer to.

2. You also mention some typical rhythms (son, paseo, puya) but you do not specify anything about them. Remember that you are writing for readers who perhaps do not know much about this music.

3. On the other hand, you refer to the Festival Vallenato and even though you try to explain the information sounds rather unclear to me. Please reorganize it.

4. Finally, you can create one paragraph with the places you recommend in Bogotá.

Second writing draft, taken from group: Two and a Half Men 23/10/06

Vallenato music

Vallenato in colombia was born in the Atlantic coast. Since its beginnings, this kind of music has been one of the most important traditions on the Colombian culture and a product to export to another countries.

In colombia the vallenato music is present in special places for example the Caribbean zone that have to Barranquilla, Santa Marta, Guajira and Cartagena. These cities represent the vallenato culture. But besides of these places the vallenato is listened in all the country.

In the vallenato music you can different rythms like paseo, "pulla" and "son". In the "pulla" style the accordion and the guacharaca are the principal instruments. In songs of this type sometimes the singers don't sing, just play the instruments. This is characterized for a fast interpretation and the song's duration is between five and nine minutes.

"The paseo", in this rythm the songs are interpreted slowly and in all the songs there are some lyrics. This style is a very traditional because the lyrics talk us about life's stories, places and love stories. Finally, the son style is accompained with other instruments like "maracas", "clave" etc. this sound has influence of Cuban rythms the song is slow but in some moments changes and get more "tropical."

Nowadays, the called "Nueva Ola" (new style) is taken a very important position in the vallenato music. This kind of music is the combination of different styles and instruments, those are the "cumbia", "pop" and rock music. About the instruments, someone like the electric guitars, keyboarst and bass guitars are included in this new purpose. Is necessary explain that in this new kind of vallenato music the new instruments don't replace the classic instruments as the "accordion", "caja" and the "guacharaca".

Something important is the impact of vallenato music in the actual people the vallenato is a little rejected because new Center American rythms as "reggaeton" and "bacahta" are invading the Colombian culture and let the vallenato outside.

About the festivals, the vallentato has one special festival celebrated each year in April in a place called Valledupar. In that festival is selected the best interpreter, the best song, the best composer and the young revelation.

But in Bogotá there are some good places for the party too, for example: ""La Trampa" (the trap), "aguadepanelas" and "Maramaos". In those places, you can drink a lot of different national and international drinks, you can dance all the night some rythms of the tropical music (salsa, merengue) and obviously vallenato too. Those places are characterized for a good environment, big space to dance and a tradition that has been built in ten years, approximitly.

We invite you to listen and know about this rhythm because is part of us ad is very cool.

Teacher's Comments:

1. Your writing improved a lot from the first writing to this one.
2. The organization is much better and clear.
3. The division by paragraphs gives a sense of clear organization and development of the ideas.
4. Now you have more relevant information for the reader to understand.
5. Correct the few mistakes and post it in your group in the VIRTUAL WALL of the forum.

☺ Good luck

Last version of the text posted in the group blog (virtual wall) taken from group:

Two and a Half Men 08/11/06

"Vallenato" in Colombia was born in the Atlantic coast. Since its beginnings, this kind of music has been one of the most important traditions on the Colombian culture and a product to export to other countries.

In Colombia, the vallenato music is present in special places. For example, the Caribbean zone has to Barranquilla, Santa Marta, Guajira and Cartagena. These cities represent the vallenato culture. But besides these places the vallenato is listened to in all over the country.

This is the colombian coast This is a very popular hat called "sombrero vueltiao"

In the vallenato, you can find different rhythms like "paseo", "pulla" and "son". In the "pulla" style the "Acordeón" and the "Guacharaca" are the principal instruments. In songs of this type sometimes the singers don't sing, just play the instruments. This is characterized for a fast interpretation and the song's duration is between five and nine minutes.

The "paseo", in this rhythm the songs are interpreted slowly and in all the song there are some lyrics. This style is very traditional and common because the lyrics talk to us about life's stories, places and love stories. Finally, the "son" style is accompanied with other instruments like "Maracas", "Clave", etc. This sound has influence of Cuban rhythms. The song is slow but in some moments it changes and gets more "Tropical".

Nowadays, the called "Nueva Ola" (a new style) is taking a very important position in the vallenato music. This kind of music is the combination of different styles and

instruments, those are the "cumbia"(other kind of musical genre), pop and rock music. About the instruments, some of them like the electric guitars, keyboards and bass guitars are included in this new purpose. It is necessary to explain that in this new kind of vallenato music the new instruments don't replace the classic instruments as the "Acordeón", "Caja" and "Guacharaca".

Something important is the impact of vallenato in the actual people. The vallenato is a little rejected because new Center American rhythms as "Reggaeton" and "Bachata" are invading the Colombian culture and let the vallenato outside.

About the festivals, the vallenato has one special festival celebrated each year in April in a place (city) called Valledupar. In that festival is selected the best interpreter, the best song, the best composer and the young revelation.

But in Bogota there are some good places for parties too, for example: "la trampa" (the trap), "aguapanelas" and "maramaos". In those places you can drink a lot of different national or international drinks, you can dance all the night some rhythms of the tropical music (salsa, merengue) and obviously vallenato too. Those places are characterized for a good environment, big space to dance and a tradition that has been built in ten years, approximately.

We invite you to listen and know about this rhythm because is part of us and is very COOL.

This learning environment mediated by technology placed me, the teacher, in the role of a guide or facilitator, who intervened only as necessary (Peters, 1996). The students and I established a kind of interaction within the community not focused on discussion of common topics as they did with the Canadian peers or within the group, but I became a member in the sense that I was contributing to the improvement of the texts. My interventions helped students identify and find solutions to their writing weaknesses whenever it was necessary as there was a context for student and expert interaction (me the teacher) who contributed to scaffolding students in their writing, it represented a joint activity to contribute to the students' writing development.

The next excerpts from the interviews exemplify the way students perceived my role in the three different cycles of the research process and the pedagogical intervention:

> **G:** "Cuando la profe me lo pasó (feedback)… o sea primero me aterré porque es que punto por punto, o sea todo, o sea media página de comentarios más que lo que yo había escrito de lo que yo le pasé de todos mis errores... me gusta que usted me dice: "niña usted está fallando en esto… niña a usted le falta esto, a usted le sobra esto… a mí me gusta que me hagan esa retroalimentación porque así uno realmente aprende. Otros profesores dan una nota y uno como qué… uy y aquí qué pasó si yo me esforcé tanto. Pero si le muestran a uno dónde está fallando uno como que dice si… verdad no me había dado cuenta…" (G.E: Interview 6, 16/11/06, lines: 70-80)

> **J:** "…así como usted lo hace en el feedback de ahora que no nos ayuda a re-escribir todo como el semestre pasado, sino que nos dice qué bueno, buena organización esto ta ta ta, por qué no mejora esto… le da a uno unas sugerencias. Me parece muy bueno porque eso lo ayuda a uno para ver uy! claro… aquí fallé por esto, o aquí no hice o sí hice, sí tiene toda la razón. Entonces como que uno reflexiona sobre lo que uno hizo y puede avanzar en el proceso… Entonces uno ahí ya se va dando cuenta que cada vez va avanzando más en el proceso de escritura" (J: Interview 8, 22/11/06, lines: 91-103)

On the other hand, the interaction that Colombian students had with the Canadians, especially in the first research cycle in which the communication was more constant, generated a kind of feedback that was another way to mentor and stimulate students to write in the foreign language. The feedback that Canadian peers provided in this context was rewarding as Colombian students felt that they were writing something comprehensible to an audience that was not the teacher but to native speakers of English. This fact made the task of writing more challenging and at the same time motivating as students always had to use language devices much beyond their writing developmental level. Being successfully understood by the members of the community gave students a sense of improvement and at the same time self confidence as learners of the English language. The fact of receiving a reply on what they had written was a kind of feedback as it meant that their texts were comprehensible. The next extracts from the interviews reveal students' positions towards these aspects:

> **"D:** …bueno… y… el feedback que ellos nos brindan es muy bueno, bueno porque el hecho de que ellos nos escriban no más… nos estén respondiendo a lo que

> nosotros les enviamos entonces quiere decir que estoy escribiendo de una forma entendible, que me hice entender. Y sé ellos no nos van a subrayar no esto es así, pero digamos no se… x oración ya la puedo usar de esta forma… y uno bueno… el feedback que ellos le brindan no se ya tan directo sino está como implícito." (Student D: Interview 7, 14/11/06, lines: 164-171)
>
> **"J:** Yo creo que los blogs son una manera diferente de aprender inglés, ya que ayuda a … ya con el solo hecho de interactuar con la otra persona y que otra persona se lo va a leer allá y le va a decir uy es bien su trabajo, o está bien siga progresando. Es muy interesante eso." (Student J: Interview 8, 22/11/06, lines: 8-12)

However, students not only received this indirect feedback, some of them also received explicit feedback through the interactions with the Canadian peers. The next snippets taken from a Colombian student's blog clearly explains the mentoring offered by a Canadian peer; the majority of the interactions between the two students generally contained some kind of comment on the text and use of the language in general.

> [''Posted at May 23/2006 06:16PM:''
> [#AFSED]:
> Hi! I like your new pictures! The I've never heard of the caja before but it looks kind of like a drum. Is it used to make the beat or something? I've also never heard of the goucharaca but it looks cool. :D Your english is getting better and better! The only thing I noticed was that the tenses of some of your words were a bit off but I could understand what you were saying so its not too bad. Well, I hope you have a good week!
>
> Posted at May 02/2006 02:57PM:
> AFSED:
> That looks like it must have been a funny play. Wow, it must be some play that costs $10 000 to get in! Have you ever been to one of them? You should probably say play instead of tale because a play is performed in theatres and a tale is like a story in a book or that someone told you. (Student E: Blog , 02/05/06)

Conclusions

After the analysis of the data gathered along this research path, I can say that I gained some knowledge on writing and feedback. One of the most important insights in regards to writing in EFL is the need for the creation of a community of people who share similar interests and writing objectives, and who are engaged in constant interaction and communication. Interaction with the members is precisely the departure point for writing as the exchanges with the members create the need and desire for students to write and take part on the common practices and interests of the other members. As pointed out

by the followers of Vygotsky's principles, learning always if/when happens in community, any individual can reach higher developmental stages if at least he/she is surrounded by a group of people who interact with and at the same time who help him/her to scaffold in his/her learning process.

Another fundamental understanding on writing in EFL is the creation of writing environments that encourage and motivate students to write. Blogs are powerful tools that can act as alternative writing environments in which technology is the principal mediator to facilitate the design of the spaces. The innovative environment produced an interest in writing and consequently students engaged in the practice of writing in EFL regularly. Writing in this kind of technology mediated environments allows students to freely express and say what the world is for them, based on their own thoughts and experiences of living in it.

The role of feedback provided by Canadian peers and by the teacher was to help students to create better quality texts along the process. The amount and quality of writing that students produced during the implementation of the pedagogical intervention of this study revealed that the feedback played a scaffolding role as it was one of the factors that helped students to move from writing simple texts, in the first research cycle, to more complex and longer ones in the last cycles. The teacher became part of the writing community acting as a "more knowledgeable person" in the group to help students in the production of texts that were beyond their actual writing development. The interaction with the Canadian members of the community was one of the most powerful resources that motivated students to write good quality texts because their responses to and engagement with the students' texts gave them confidence as writers and at the same time represented a challenge.

References

Baynham, M. (1999) Literacy practices: Investigating Literacy in Social Contexts. London: Longman

Blood, R. (2000) "Weblogs: A History and Perspective", Rebecca's Pocket. 07.Retrieved the 25th October 2006, from: http://www.rebeccablood.net/essays/weblog_history.html.

Burns, A. (2001). Collaborative Action Research for English teachers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, D. (2000). Educational beliefs: An overview. In D. Brown (Ed.), Interactive learning: Vignettes from America's most wired campuses (pp. 3-7). Boston, Anker Publishing Co.

Cássia O & Johnson, K. (1994). Peer Review Negotiations¨Revision Activities in

ESLWriting Instruction. TESOL QUARTERLY JOURNAL, 28 (2), 273-292.

Coffin, C. (2003). Giving feedback on student writing. In: Coffin, C. Teaching academic writing. Routledge: London.

Chohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2004). Research methods in Education. London: Routeledge flamer.

Chomsky, N. (1975). Aspects of the theory of syntax. Massachusetts : The Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Deitering, A. & Huston, S. (2004). WEblogs and the "middle space" for learning. Academic exchange Quaterly journal, 8:4. Retrieved the 5th of June 2006 from:

Donato, R. (1990). Collective Scaffolding in Second Language Learning. Paper presented at the Intenational Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning, Illinois. Learning Research and Development.

Elliot, J. (1993). Action research for educational change. Open University: London.

Fathman, A., & Whalley E. (1994). Teacher response to students writing: focus on form versus content. In Barbara Kroll (ed.), Second language writing (pp. 178- 190). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Freire, P., Macedo, D. (1987). Reading the world and the word. Bergin & Garvey: London

Graham G. & Taylor C. (2005). How and what to code. University of Huddersfield. Retrieved the 28th December 2006, from http://onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/how_waht_to_code.php.

Hardwick, S. (2000). Humanizing the technology landscape through a collaborative pedagogy [Electronic version]. Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 24(1),123-129.

Hedge, T. (2005). Writing. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hubbard, R. & Miller, P., B. (1993). The Art of Classroom Inquiry. Portsmouuth: Heinemann.

_____ (1999). Living the questions. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Huffaker, D. The educated blogger: Using weblogs to promote literacy in the classroom First Monday, volume 9, number 6 (June 2004), Downloaded from: http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue9_6/huffaker/index.html.

Kern, R. (2000). Literacy and Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kroll, B. (1994). Second language writing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kroll, B. (2005). Exploring the dynamics of second language writing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (2005). Practice, person and social world. In: Daniels, H. An introduction to Vygotsky. London: Routledge.

Lee, C. (2000). Signifying in the Zone of Proximal Development. In Lee. C & Smagorinsky, P. (Eds.), Vygotskian Perspectives on literacy research. Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry. (pp.191-225) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mercer, N. (2003). Words & Minds. How to use language to think together. London: Routledge.

Mitchell, V. (1996). Rethinking foreign language writing. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nunan, D. (1998). Understanding language classrooms: A guide for Teacher-Initiated Action. Hertfordshire.

O'Brien, R João Pes. (2001). An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action

Research: In Roberto Richardson (Ed.) (2002):Theory and Practice of Action. Retrieved: November 28th 2006 , from: http://www.web.ca/~robrien/papers/arfinal.html.

Pennington, M. (2005). The impact of the computer writing in second language writing. In: Kroll, B. (2005). Exploring the dynamics of second language writing. . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Raimes, A. (1995). Out of the woods: emerging traditions in the teaching of writing. State of the art TESOL essays. Celebrating 25 years. TESOL journal, 237-260.

Reid J. (1994). Responding to ESL Students' Texts: The Myths of Appropriation. TESOL Quarterly Journal, 28 (2), 273-292.

Rheingold, H. (1993). The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier, Reading, MA, MIT Press.

Rice, J. (2003). Writing about cool: Teaching hypertext as juxtaposition . Computers and Composition, 20: 221-236.

Richards, J. (1990). The language teaching matrix. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rollinson, P. (2005). Using peer feedback in the ESL writing class. ELT journal, 59(1) 27-30.

Scarcella, R., & Oxford, R. (992). Writing: In Scarcella, R., & Oxford, R. The tapestry of   language learning. The individual and the communicative classroom. (pp. 117-134).   Boston: Heinble & Heinle publishers.

Smith, M. K. (2003) 'Communities of practice', the encyclopedia of informal education, www.infed.org/biblio/communities_of_practice.htm.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1996). Vygotsky in the classroom. Mediated literacy instruction and. Assessment. USA: Lisbeth Dixon-Krauss.

Ward, J. (2004). Blog assisted language learning (BALL): Push button publishing for the pupils. TEFL Web journal, 3(1). Retrieved June the 5th 2006 from:

Warschauer, M. (1995). E-Mail for English teaching. Bringing the internet and computer learning networks into the language classroom. Teachers of English to speakers of other Languages, Inc.: Illinois.

Wells, G. (2000). Dialogic Inquiry in Education. Building on the legacy of Vygotsky. In Lee, C. & Smagorinsky, P (Eds.), Vygotskian Prespectives on literacy research. Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry. (pp. 150-164). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E. (1998), Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity, Cambridge University Press.

White, R. & Arndt, V. (1996). Process writing. England: Longman

Annex 1: Consent Form Format

Estudiantes

<div align="right">

Segundo semestre
Licenciatura en Educación Básica con Énfasis en Inglés
Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Calda

</div>

Estimados estudiantes:

Actualmente estoy cursando tercer semestre de la maestría ofrecida por la universidad Distrital, Lingüística aplicada a la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera. Para optar al titulo de Magíster estoy desarrollando una investigación en el desarrollo de la escritura en lengua extranjera a través una interacción escrita en weblogs con estudiantes canadienses.

La investigación tiene como propósito observar y analizar en detalle el proceso de desarrollo de la escritura a través de una experiencia que les proporciona objetivos reales para escribir, y una audiencia diferente del profesor que estará interesada en leer sus escritos. Con este proyecto no sólo tendrán la oportunidad de desarrollar su escritura, también podrán interactuar con miembros de un país de habla inglesa y así enriquecer su conocimiento cultural y competencia lingüística. De la misma manera, tendrán la oportunidad de acceder al aprendizaje y uso de medios digitales como herramienta de apoyo de su escritura. Este último aspecto es de absoluta importancia para los docentes quienes cada día estamos a los retos y desafíos de las nuevas tecnologías en un mundo en constante cambio. Así, ser alfabetizado, en un sentido más amplio es la capacidad de (re)construir y expresar significado del mundo a través de la lectura y la escritura, como también la capacidad de conocer y hacer uso de las tecnologías en dichos procesos.

Los datos para dicha investigación serán recolectados a partir de la fecha y hasta el final del próximo semestre académico. Para tal propósito se harán entrevistas, grabaciones, conferencias y se archivarán cada uno de sus escritos publicados en sus weblogs y de su portafolio personal. Esta información será recolectada por mí Luz Mary Quintero, docente investigadora con el objetivo de ser analizados posteriormente.

Las personas que decidan participar lo harán bajo las siguientes condiciones: se asegura total anonimato de su identidad, se usarán nombres ficticios. Si usted quiere escoger su nombre lo puede escribir en el espacio provisto al final. La información recolectada será usada con absoluta confidencialidad. Usted tendrá la oportunidad de revisar sus declaraciones antes de ser hechas públicas para evitar posibles interpretaciones erradas. Las entrevistas, por ejemplo, se revisarán después de ser transcritas, especialmente en aquellos casos en que sus comentarios no sean muy claros para la investigadora.

Agradezco su participación en este proyecto. Para hacer formal su aceptación debe firmar la presente carta y devolverla lo más pronto posible. Si tiene alguna duda al respecto puede hablar directamente conmigo.

Cordialmente,

Luz Mary Quintero
Docente -investigadora
Nombre: _____
Firma: _____
Nombre ficticio: _____

Annex 2: Semi-structure interview

The purpose of this interview is to talk about the experience that you had had on writing in blogs during these two semesters. I want to explore all your opinions about the things related to this activity. There are basically five questions that you can read in advance, and then we can have an informal talk to know your answers.

1. What is your opinion about the use of blogs as a pedagogical tool in the English class?

2. You have received two kinds of feedback during this process. Last semester I used to help you a lot to rewrite your texts, so what I did was to underline where the problem was and then to suggest to you how to change it by reorganizing and rewriting your ideas. This semester things have changed. Now, we have adopted some codes to identify problems related to form. So I underline and assign a code and you are in charge of finding out what the problem is and also you correct it. Additionally, there are some descriptive comments in terms of organization and content. I would like to know your opinion about these two kinds of feedback.

3. Last semester you only had one blog. This semester you have two other spaces, the virtual wall where you write in group, and the debate. However, you still have you personal blog that is even more personal. What do you think about those three spaces that you have to write?

4. You had had some interaction with a group of Canadian students. During this interaction you have received some feedback from them. A feedback that is not necessarily similar to your teacher's. Sometimes they are just positive comments, a question, or an appraisal but still feedback. So, I would like to know, what is your opinion about your English that Canadian students had given you?

5. Finally, based on all the things you have done throughout this time, what linguistic aspects related to the English based on the feedback Canadian students have given you?

   If you have any different comments you can add them.

Annex 3: Students' blog sample
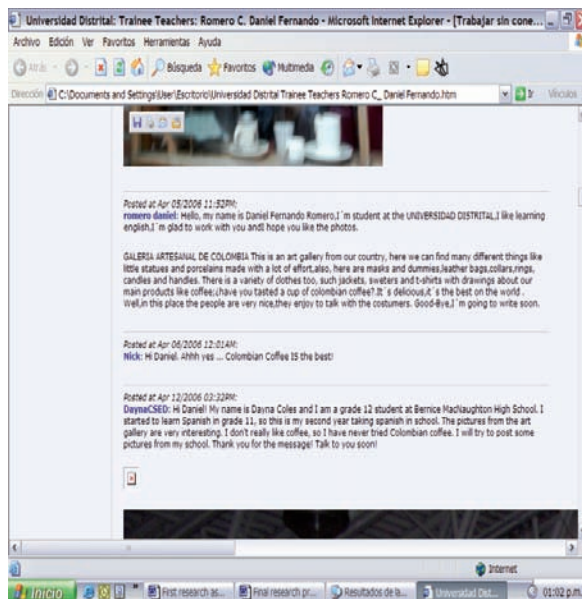
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Luz Mary Quintero holds a M.A. in Applied Linguistics to TEFL from Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. She also holds a B.A. in Languages from Universidad Industrial de Santander. She is currently working as a part-time teacher in the Undergraduate Programs of Languages at Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas and as a full-time teacher at Universidad La Gran Colombia. Her research interests include: literacy processes and Technology Applications in Language Teaching/Learning. She is part of the Research Group: Lectoescrinautas from Universidad Distrital.

Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas
Facultad de Ciencias y Educación