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TITULO	Using interactive online educational games to motivate third graders towards improved abilities in writing descriptive paragraphs to foster their autonomous learning process
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	motivación		**juegos interactivos en línea y aprendizaje autónomo**	
	párrafos descriptivos			

RESUMEN DEL CONTENIDO
(Mínimo 80 máximo 120 palabras)

Con el propósito de mejorar las habilidades de escritura, este estudio da a conocer las contribuciones del uso de juegos interactivos en línea al desarrollo de la habilidad de escritura de párrafos descriptivos en estudiantes de tercer grado del Colegio Colombo Gales. Este estudio fue ejecutado con 31 estudiantes entre 8 y 9 años de edad. Las encuestas, el diario del profesor y los artefactos fueron utilizados para recolectar datos.
Se encontró que los juegos interactivos en línea generaron interés e influyeron en el desarrollo de la escritura en los estudiantes de tercer grado como resultado de prácticas guiadas que mejoraron dichas habilidades.

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Master in ELT – Autonomous Learning Environments

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Abstract

Focused on the need of improving writing skills, the paper presents a research study which reports the contributions of using online interactive games to the development of the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs in third graders at Colombo Gales School.   The study was carried out with thirty one third grade students (girls and boys) aged between 8 and 10. Students' surveys, teacher's blog and artifacts were used to collect data. This research demonstrated that online activities generated interest and influenced the development of writing skills in third graders as a result of guided practices that improved the learners' language learning skill. The predominant topics of this research were sentence syntax, paragraph organization, motivation and autonomy.

Key words: writing skill, motivation, descriptive paragraph, technology, interactive online games, autonomous learning.

Resumen

Con el propósito de enfatizar en la necesidad de mejorar las habilidades de escritura, este estudio presenta un proyecto de investigación el cual intenta dar a conocer las contribuciones del uso de juegos interactivos en línea al desarrollo de la habilidad de escritura de párrafos descriptivos en estudiantes de tercer grado del Colegio Colombo Gales. Este estudio fue ejecutado con treinta y un estudiantes (niñas y niños) entre 8 y 9 años de edad. Las encuestas realizadas por los estudiantes, el diario del profesor y los artefactos fueron utilizados para recolectar datos.

Como resultado se encontró que los juegos interactivos en línea generaron interés e influyeron en el desarrollo de las habilidades de escritura en los estudiantes de tercer grado como resultado de prácticas guiadas que mejoraron dichas habilidades como componente del proceso de aprendizaje de la lengua. Los temas predominantes en esta investigación fueron sintaxis de la oración, organización de párrafos, motivación y autonomía.

Palabras claves: *habilidad de escribir, motivación, párrafos descriptivos, tecnología, juegos interactivos en línea y aprendizaje autónomo.*

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Statement of the problem

When young learners are exposed to learn English as a second language, they are immersed in a process that involves the mastery of different abilities which are expected to be developed during the early stages of school life. Although writing is considered a significant skill, it is avoided by the teachers due to its complexity that makes it a time consuming and difficult issue. As a consequence, teachers should motivate their students to write by means of tools that awaken their autonomy. This is possible thanks to the use of the technology that invites young learners to interact with different kinds of knowledge in a funny way by means of online educational interactive games.

Writing is one of the most important production skills learners should learn. "Writing has implications across the curriculum at all school levels, and affects the academic performance of students in a wide range of subject matters" (Hidi and Boscolo, 2007, p. xi). However, inside the curriculum teachers avoid developing the writing skill in class. "in general writing lessons are uninspired and no stimulating" (Rijalaarsdam & Huub, 2004). "Typically writing is taught based on a prescribed textbook in primary school. Most teachers simply stick to the textbook and adopt a very traditional method that narrows down the concept of writing into testing new knowledge" (Poon as cited in Rijalaarsdam & Huub, 2004). Although the teacher's core task is to create opportunities for learning, often little comes of it in practice. The trouble appears because teachers do no differentiate between writing and learning to write. "The act of writing is complex and effortful." (Rijalaarsdam & Huub, 2004).

"Writing is an essential component of our day to day lives. Furthermore, it is a complex process that involves the mastery of different abilities which students are expected to develop during the first

years of school life" (Beltrán, 2010, p. 5). Hidi and Boscolo (2007), believe that writing tasks are often complex, demanding, and perceived as risky by students. Therefore, writing lends itself to be investigated in terms of a writer's beliefs of his or her ability to compose a good text. (p. xi) In 2000, Guthrie & Wiffield (as cited in Hidi & Boscolo, 2007) established that on the side of literacy learning research, emphasis was particularly on students engagement in reading, but " a few significant contributions to the study of motivational aspects of writing came in the 1990s". (Gambrell & Morrow, 1996. p. 5 as cited in Hidi & Boscolo, 2007). Not only students but also teachers reject working on writing because it is time consuming and there are not many alternatives to choose a fun activity to teach and learn writing any piece of text. Teachers do not have enough time to develop the different steps writing skill consists of. According to Reilly (2005), teachers' difficulties in teaching writing contribute to a students' lack of enjoyment in learning writing. This is a skill that demands time from teachers and students. For this reason, teachers prefer to leave activities concerned with this skill as homework. White and Arndt (1991) support such alternative when considering writing as an activity relegated to homework.

A study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated that three of every four students in the 4th, 8th and 12th grades belonging to the College Board, an organization of more than 4,300 American colleges, demonstrated only partial mastery of the writing skills. This concern argues that writing is not easy for learners in any stage of their lives in their mother tongue and is even more challenging in a second language. As Harris, Graham, & Mason (2006) indicated, primary grade children experienced difficulty learning to write. Lack of motivation is the major obstacle faced by teachers in writing instruction. "This problem may be due to both the difficulty and limited attractiveness of certain demanding academic genres and writing tasks" (Hidi and Boscolo, 2007. p. 6). In her article, Mandel (2004) emphasizes the fact that young learners need a

lot of motivation when writing. She argues that children must develop skills to become good readers and writers. "However, if we teach children to read and write but they have no desire to do so, we will not have achieved much. It is time for us to focus on motivation as well as skills, since motivation to read and write and literacy ability go hand in hand" (Mandel, 2004. p.6).

Over the last twenty years, researchers have been interested in understanding students' motivation and finding ways to predict and improve academic performance.   In 2000, Gould (as cited in Sparapani, 2009) argues that motivation is related to students' task performance: how students begin the task, their effort to perform it and their persistence in completing it. A study developed by the Center for Applied Research in Educational Technology (Caret) demonstrated that technology improves motivation, attitude and interest when students use computer applications that adjust problems and tasks to maximize students' experience of success. "Using technology to understand and assess student motivation levels fosters and atmosphere of respect and increases student academic achievement. (Gould, 2000. p. 13 as cited in Sparapani, 2009).

Among tools for literacy learning and instruction engagement, the use of technology plays an important role when developing children their writing practices.   This idea is supported by Witte (2007), when asserting that by combining writing with online technology, teachers can provide opportunities for students and future educators to develop their digital fluency while also strengthening their traditional literacy skills. Other scholars agree by adding "Technology is an integral part of the learning process. It is a tool used in the learning environment throughout all curricular areas to help teach written and oral communication skills, problem identification, and critical–thinking skills." (Doub et al, 2001. p. 4).   Online technology offers different possibilities to learners such as interactive games. By using interactive games students are engaged when performing spelling, typing, and punctuation during their learning process.

According to Chan and Ahern (as cited in Paras, 2005), when people are intrinsically motivated to learn, they not only learn more, they also have a more positive experience. Games meet both these tests for effective learning environments: they are active experiences, and they have the capacity to provide intrinsic motivation.   "Games promote levels of attention and concentration that teachers, parents and policy makers wished children applied to learning. These are interactive social experience that can be shared with friends and family. (Kirremuir & McFarlane, 2004)

Lepper and Malone, (1987); McFarlane, (2004) believe that interactive fiction and online games are two areas of gaming that have not been studied much at all, and can inform the design of learning environments. Developments in interactive games can produce guidelines on developing socially based micro worlds, and character development in interactive environments.

For third graders writing skill is not easy. It is perhaps the most demanding skill.   When the researcher decided to work on this area, the students were not enthusiastic with writing activities. At the same time, it was difficult to create an interesting environment in order to introduce activities where third graders enjoyed writing descriptive paragraphs as a requirement included in the language arts program at school. As Graham (2005, p.15) suggests "the most effective and engaging teachers were mindful not only of the instruction in their classrooms, but also of the way the room environments contributed to their students' learning from best practices. Teachers must be worried about how to engage students to develop their writing practices. "The most effective and engaging teachers had classrooms they were overflowing with writing materials, books and other tools for literacy learning and instruction" (Pricthard and Honeycutt, 2006. p.15 as cited in Graham & Mac Arthur, 2006).

Research objective and question

Based on these statements my proposal is focused on using interactive online educational games included in two websites designed for primary learners and teachers to motivate writing students' skills as a requirement for third graders at Colombo Gales School in order to achieve a basic performance according to the topics included in their English program.   The overall research aim of this study is to motivate and to develop the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs in third graders by using interactive online educational games and the question the researcher seeks to address is: To what extent do interactive online educational games motivate and contribute to developing the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs in third graders?

The idea of using interactive online educational games that contribute to the development of the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs in third graders came from the desire and interest of motivating third graders to improve their writing skills.   Due to the nature of descriptive writing, it uses a lot of flowery adjectives and adverbs to describe what is going on or how something appears. This aspect helps students writing be more interesting and full of details and at the same time, it encourages students to use new vocabulary words and clarify their understanding of new subject matter material. After working on specific writing activities that involved descriptions, construction of short sentences and short paragraphs, the researcher realized that third graders' performance was poor and they were not enthusiastic when writing descriptive paragraphs. The students lacked motivation due to the monotonous activities they performed each time they were requested to write. This statement was the result of a survey applied to third graders as a diagnostic test in order to check learners' motivation when writing a descriptive text. On the other hand, third graders' different learning styles were considered another important reason for searching an alternative that met students' needs. "While for some students writing is a reflective activity instead of the rush and bother of interpersonal face-to-face communication, other learners find in writing a hard activity that implies

to know other sub competences: spelling, handwriting, grammar, coherence and for them it is better to express their ideas in an oral way". (Harmer, 1998. p. 16).

As we enter the 21st century, everyday language use is so tied to technology that learning language through technology has become a fact of life with important applications for all applied linguists, particularly for those concerned with the facets of second language acquisition. (Chapelle, 2001, p. 1). It was also necessary to implement tools that helped both teacher and students be the constructors of their own knowledge. When working independently children behave differently from working under direction. Fisher (1996, p. 27) says that "observations of children working alone usually reveal fresh perspectives on the children as learners"   "Learner autonomy can be thought of as primarily a matter of taking responsibility of one's own learning. It is a goal, but more importantly it is an ongoing process requiring both individual and collective effort in the classroom context. (Tomlinson,1998. p. 20).   Advances in computer technology are often associated with learner autonomy in language learning. According to Blin (2002), Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is said to enable language learners to develop autonomy as well as helping them to develop competence and autonomous language use. "CALL can lead to the development of autonomy to a degree which allows the learner to maintain control of his or her learning with little dependence on the teacher." (Jones, 2001).   In the same way, online educational games and interactive sites, as applications of CALL, offer a wide range of possibilities for learners to become autonomous. Learners are engaged and motivation arises when interacting with an online educational game.

Rationale

This research work will benefit both students and teachers interested in searching tools that engage them to improve the pupils' writing process . "Motivation is so broad a research field that it is difficult to analyze its various aspects. There are different areas that can be related to writing. The first area regards the motives: goal orientation, needs, values and interests which activate a student's behavior." (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002. P.1).   Another important subject is the fact of maintaining a sensitive respect for children's independent responses and personal and creative contributions, while at the same time ensuring that curriculum targets are met. Moyles (1992, p.23) sees an important relationship between teachers' preferred teaching styles and their ability to learn from what happens in the classroom not just about the children, but about the children's contribution to the teaching and learning process.   As Kirriemuir & Mc Farlane, (2004) suggest, computer games are today an important part of most children's leisure lives and increasingly an important part of our culture as a whole.   Jacko (2009) considers that computer games play an important role in education and entertainment to make the children experiences more meaningful. Game is considered as a method for shaping children's experience and helping them construct meaning for themselves. Researchers and designers of learning resources are beginning to ask how this powerful new medium might be used to support children's learning. On the other hand, through this theoretical review and analysis of empirical data, future researches and scholars will find a support to continue working on technology as one strong proposal to work on motivation for achieving students' high performance in writing skills.

CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Framework

Based on observations carried out during art language classes, I realized third graders lacked of motivation to perform accurate descriptive paragraphs as a requirement of the program designed by the English department. The program requires young learners to develop the ability to describe different issues by means of their senses. By means of descriptive writing, the students must learn how to identify different parts of speech such as adjectives and adverbs and produce texts full of details captured by their senses. At this level, it is important the learners be able to establish a link between reality and illusion. This is possible by means of descriptions. During this process, children create a picture in his or her mind that can be described by means of joined ideas which communicate their sensations in a structured piece of writing. As a consequence, I decided to assume the role of teacher-researcher in order to find a possible response to the problem of motivation towards writing paragraphs within the classroom. Taking into account the necessity of implementing different strategies for increasing motivation toward improving writing skill in elementary children, I found that the use of technology inside the classroom and the different techniques, related to it, may provide means for improving motivation toward writing skills. Specifically I found that interactive online educational games handle most of the aspects learners need to improve their writing skills.

The principles and theoretical foundations that support the present study are the following: general insights on the writing skill, descriptive paragraphs, and motivation toward writing as a skill in young learners, online educational interactive games and autonomous learning. First, this chapter illustrates the general insights of writing skill and their implications in teachers and young learners. Second, conditions and requirements for building descriptive paragraphs and finally, the role of interactive online games as an essential factor when improving young learners' motivation to contribute to their performance in writing.

General Insights on the writing skill

Writing is considered the most complex but essential component of the language learning process. McArthur, Graham and Fitzgelard (2006), consider writing a demanding activity because complex processes including the cognitive, metacognitive and linguistic ones must be coordinated. When learners perform a writing task, they require to manage not only basic knowledge about a specific topic, but also get familiar with the structure of the kind of text they produce and at the same time to have a specific linguistic competence in order to be able of producing the most single piece of writing. "Writing is a multi-faceted, complex activity that requires the participant to incorporate many levels of thinking and manipulation of information" (Korbel, 2001). Young learners are not the exception. The writing process requires that children integrate many different kinds of information from many sources. They need to collect their ideas and select the relevant events by taking into account the expectations of the reader. Later, it is necessary to select a frame in order to organize the ideas, connect and print them. During this stage, it is necessary to use spelling, follow an order inside each sentence and join each sentence to have a paragraph.   The previous description was intended to demonstrate that "writing is an immensely complex language task. The challenges that children face as they develop into writers are substantial" (Coker, (as cited in Graham, 2006) p. 101).

It is important to consider what developing writing implies and how it is developed. The development of writing has been studied from a number of different perspectives. According to Wiener (2003), writing teachers think about two broad areas when they evaluate a child's work.

First, the rhetoric or composition. This aspect is the product of the way a mind works in dealing with thoughts. Inventions, logic, organization of ideas and style are involved in this approach.

Second, there is the area of correctness or "mechanics of spelling, handwriting and punctuation"   This is the domain more easily measured. Here, the teacher checks if a word is either right or wrong, a sentence is either complete or incomplete. "Clearly, writing to communicate demands that ideas, the language used to explore them, and the conventions of correctness all work together" (Wiener, 2003)

As I stated before, writing implies the management of diverse abilities interconnected that cannot be separated if the writer intents to produce an error-free text.   I think this writing characterization creates a barrier between teachers and students when the former expects that students produce pieces of writing with most of these features without offering a motive in order to make learners become successful writers. Due to the highly abilities that teachers demand from their students, writing is a complex issue that not only learners but also teachers prefer to avoid. Supporting this perspective, Conroy and Marchand (2009) conclude that although writing is   an essential part of academic success, it also requires practice and patience.

Richards (1997) considers writing a complex interaction process due to the asynchronous relationship between the writer and the audience. This statement is clearly reflected in the classroom when teachers and students establish a genuine communication system that deserves activities that feed this interaction. The Social constructivism approach contains a variety of elements that help teachers and students to interact by maintaining such a strong relationship. This perspective is supported by MacArthur et al. (2006). These scholars state in their research how writing is viewed as a meaningful activity that can provide its own motivation when students are guided to express and communicate thoughts and feelings related to the classroom activities and personal experiences. This view of writing makes it a social activity, which shows affective, as well as cognitive, advantages associated with collaboration in a community of learners and writers. However, when teaching writing, this process tends to be broken due to the lack of expertise many teachers have when teaching

this skill. Most teachers plan lessons where the activities' objective is to improve their handwriting by means of long sessions of dictation and spelling correction or simply asking students to write a whole text without modeling any basic structure. Nor do many teachers include strategies which promote writing as a motivational process rather than the usual rigid and simple subject to be taught.

As Montague (1990) argues most current perspectives place considerable importance to aspects related to schemata (Anderson, 1978) and also on metacognition (Brown, 1978) which is associated with the ability to control and regulate cognitive activity. No longer is writing viewed as a simple, linear activity consisting of several stages that are independent and temporally sequenced. In contrast, writing has been recognized as a complex, integrated set of processes that are interactive and recursive.

Graham (2007) considers writing as a powerful tool with important features that allow us communicate with others, allowing us to maintain personal links with family, friends and colleagues. Similar opinions are exposed by Hyland (2003) who focused his appreciations on teaching writing as a creative expression by means of which each person creates and shares their own views on a specific topic. This is reflected when children express their feelings and points of view about a specific topic. Writing is the evidence teachers have when learners print their creativity in a piece of paper. Burning and Horn, 2000 (as cited in Graham, et al., 2007) consider that writing complexity and its extended nature create unique motivational challenges when learners become writers and   reach intellectual and social recognition. At the same time these same authors focus their attention on motivational issues generated by a complex task like writing. They emphasize on the conditions writers need to develop when facing such a skill: persistence, patience and frustration resistance.

Drawing the World through the Senses

When teaching any skill it is necessary to consider students' age, their levels of understanding and their learning styles. Based on this premise, it is important to elaborate a program that covers not only students' necessities when learning to write but also that promote their abilities. Children learn more easily when the topics and abilities proposed are concrete and tactile. This means they can accurately express what it is familiar to them. They are able to transmit what they see, smell, hear, touch and taste. Sheehan (2003) supports this idea when asserting that description is perhaps the easiest task that a young learner can perform when writing a piece of text. This is basic and applicable to all other writing. The first task performed by a baby is to perceive his environment and this is done through senses. As consequence, children are powerful observers due to this natural curiosity.

However any simple written task can become the most complex issue if teachers do not support their learners with models and practical tools to structure a descriptive text.   It is mandatory to provide children with basic outlines that guide children when printing their ideas. McClanahan (2004) considers description as an attempt to present as directly as possible the qualities of a person, place, object or event. This author conceives description as word painting. This consideration reveals the essence of description, which is to illustrate with words what you perceive through your senses by following some conditions in order to achieve a good description.   The first requisite is to make a long, hard and honest view about our world by means of a careful and imaginative observation. This requirement is valid to the extent that describing means translating into words the perceptions made by our brains through senses without omitting any details that help the reader to visualize what the writer wants to transmit with words.

Another important condition is that writers must recreate reality by inviting readers to be immersed in emotional as well as intellectual moments. Enherenhaft, Lehrma and Obecht (2008) think about descriptive writing as a skill built of sense impressions that employs a dominant impression at the outset of the selection . This means descriptive writing offers the opportunity to the writer and the reader of creating a bridge between reality and illusion thanks to the words that give vitality to static objects.   This idea is confirmed by Atlee (1998), when stating the purpose of description as recreating, inventing or visually presenting a person, place, event or action. In this way the reader can picture whatever is being described. These features are present when students describe a simple picture. Their senses catch different details and later their brain produces a picture of what was read and finally expressed by words.

During this "showing writing" process, learners need to be guided through meaningful activities that engage them to use their senses and express what their environment offers by means of a structured piece of writing. When describing, the writer is attempting to communicate a representation of his or her sensory perceptions (real or imagined) through a verbal medium to the reader. This phenomenon is visible in the classroom when children are able to express those sensory perceptions by means of the elaboration of descriptive paragraph. As Jhonson (1998) expresses children are filled with imagination and stories. Teachers must encourage them to create and tell their stories. Writing keeps alive children's natural interests, motivation and enthusiasm for learning. Through writing, students learn to wonder, think, imagine, explore, and create. Learning to write is not always easy. Writing is one of the most important, yet complex and challenging skills that students can master. Teaching children to write is an equally challenging task. Young learners must face writing aspects as controlling the graph motor skills as well as the cognitive and linguistic traits of writing while maintaining interest in and motivation for the task. They must develop a working knowledge of

phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Cheri (2011) argues that beginning writers must come to understand the forms and functions of written language, and the meaning it can hold. Learning to write also involves social relationships and recognizing and participating in valued ways of doing- writing in particular discourse communities. Young learners' success at coordinating these complexities can have a profound impact on their writing development as well as their sense of self-efficacy and identity as writers.

Spencer (2005), argues that writing in a descriptive way allows the writer to enter inside a topic and shows readers what is going on rather than simply telling them. This is reflected when third graders elaborate descriptive paragraphs that allow them to express their own view about the world. This fact makes writing an enjoyable activity that creates a bridge between concrete and abstract spaces.

Motivation and Writing

Due to its nature, teaching writing descriptive paragraphs is a process that deserves special attention. When students learn any topic or subject in an appropriate environment, it may becomes a reason, a target goal which is relatively easy to achieve. The teacher's role is crucial when creating and maintaining spaces full of engagement and interest and this is only possible when they offer tools and mechanisms that activate their students' preferences toward any learning skill. Teaching young learners to write is "equally complex, and effective writing instruction in the earliest years of schooling can play a crucial role in children's learning to write". (Williams, 2011)

Research by Shunk, Pintrich & Meece (2008), define motivation as the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained. This definition reveals how the different stages of a

lesson influence the disposition learners have for a specific topic. If the lesson contains variety, learners' responses will be favorable for the performance of the activities. However, if the tasks and activities lack of a detailed planning and their monotony is displayed during the sessions, learners' response will be unfavorable and the development of the classes is disrupted by the reaction of non-motivated students.

The classic study on motivation in second language acquisition was done by Gardner and Lambert in 1959. They made a distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation where integrative motivation is usually motivation to learn a language in order to become a member of the community where the language is spoken, while instrumental motivation is a drive to learn for utilitarian reasons such as to do well academically, to get a job, to pass a course. However such a distinction does not apply for children at all and can be considered a long term motivation that cannot be relevant when teaching young learners. Children's motives are not included in this classification.

 According to Carlton & Winster (1998), young children are born with an innate curiosity to learn about their world. This is called mastery motivation. Patterns of motivation are established at an early age.   The early childhood years are crucial for establishing strong intrinsic motivational orientations which will last a lifetime. By the time many children reach school, much of their motivation has been lost or replaced with extrinsically motivated learning strategies. Intrinsic motivation is made up of three basic psychological needs that are thought to be innate in human beings: the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The newborn is filled with the desire to respond to many stimuli given by the environment. Little by little the child interacts with the environment and certain events occur. A sense of control is gained that build a competition feeling that leads the kid to further exploration and experimentation. The growing sense of competence is supported by the child's secure relationships with their caregivers. This fact facilitates children social

process. Children motivation is attached to variety. Children are engaged to learning when their teachers avoid monotony in their classes and intend to create a special space to share with their students supported by different tools chosen for this objective.   Wigfield & Eccles, (2002) confirms that children are motivated to work on the activities and learn new information and skills when environments are rich in interesting activities that arouse learners' curiosity and offer challenges that can be met.

In the classroom context, student motivation is related to the attention and effort students apply in different activities suggested or not by teachers.   Motivation is built by teachers based on their students' needs. Students are motivated when the teacher knows their students' learning styles. If the teachers know how their students learn and offer a quantity of possibilities, they will probably perform their tasks as expected by the teacher. Krause, Bochner, and Duchesne, (2003) argue that motivation is an expression that identifies the relationship between how people perform and what is expected of them and the degree to which environmental events affect his behavior. This perspective is valid when students can be offered from the simplest to the complex topic and they perform the different activities with enthusiasm and interest because their motivation has been raised thanks to the variety offered by the teacher. "Factors that can also influence students' motivation to learn include their observation of peer achieving success or failure, their ability to regulate their own behavior and their need for personal fulfillment." (Krause, et. al, 2003)

Although motivation and writing are constructs with complex meanings, different and varied contributions from various theoretical approaches to literacy have built understanding towards students' lack of motivation to write. According to Hidi and Boscolo (2007), one of the reasons is the limited options students face from elementary to high school. Free writing is reduced in high levels

where the topics are given and writers are forced to elaborate compositions about topics that demand important levels of knowledge not only of the content but also in their structure.

In order to reduce the risk of limiting students to a narrow space of options, Mandel (2004) proposes a solution based on classrooms rich of variety with access to materials, choice, challenge and collaborative experiences for students in order to motivate them to write. Reilly (2005) supports this proposal agreeing that giving children plenty of opportunities to write in a variety of contexts and encouraging them to share their writing with others is the best way of motivating them to write. This means learners must be offered a rainbow of possibilities in order to make young writers feel free and comfortable when selecting any topic to write about.

Writers, Motivation and Technology

When teaching writing, teachers are responsible of creating a varied learning environment with a wide range of   materials and tools that support their learners' writing process. As it has been demonstrated Pajares & Johnson(1994), suggest that learners goals and beliefs are also shaped by their perception of that learning environment. Witte (2007) claims that by combining writing with online technology, teachers can provide opportunities for students and future educators to develop their digital fluency while also strengthening their traditional literacy skills.

In 2001, Doub, Stirm, Hicks & Stevens confirm the importance of technology use to promote academic success by empowering students to become creative problem solvers as well as self-faced learners. According to Roschelle & Pea (as cited in Cox, 2003), computer technology can help support learning and develop demanding skills of critical thinking, analysis and scientific inquiry. Through technology use in the classroom, children's learning is enhanced by supporting active

engagement, participation in groups, frequent interaction and feedback and real-word contexts.   This means that the importance of technology has increased. Most educators find in this tool a useful resource to create classroom environments full of variety and opportunities to enhance students learning practices according to their needs, likes and abilities. For instance, when third graders were offered classes that include simple tasks where technology was involved, including movies, audio and interactive online games, their performance increased considerably.

As many other tools, technology has evolved and its uses in the classroom have changed the way teachers and students interact in the classroom. Liu, Moore, Graham and Lee (2000), support this argument when stating that computer technology became more accessible to both individuals and schools. Moreover, our growing understanding of its potentials has encouraged a shift in emphasis from computer technology itself to its applications.   One of the most important characteristics of technology use when teaching and learning a language is the possibility learners have to interact. Interactivity and the possibility of giving and receiving immediate feedback is one of the most relevant issues technology offers in a language learning process, (Chun & Brandl, 1992; Hoffman, 1995/1996; Jones, 1991, Legenhausen &Wolff, 1990).

However engaging these new technologies might be, small children will often demand more than interactivity itself. It is necessary to stimulate young learners with more alternatives which meet their needs as young learners. Nemerow (1996) offers one possibility when considering the use of games, simulations, multimedia instruction and interactive activities as valuable teaching methods that may be considered as useful tools to involve students with their learning.

Today's children are growing up in a rapidly digital age. A variety of technologies are around them. When used wisely, technology and media can support learning and relationships. According to the joint position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's media at Saint Vicent College (2012), when the integration of technology and interactive media in early childhood programs is built upon solid developmental foundations, and early childhood professionals are aware of both the challenges and the opportunities, teachers benefit children by optimizing opportunities for young children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical and linguistic development.

On the other hand, young learners are immersed in a world of interactive media or according to England & Finney (2002) the integration of digital media including combinations of electronic text, graphics, moving images, and sound, into a structured digital computerized environment that allows children to interact with the data for appropriate purposes. Technology tools for communication have transformed daily life and the education tendencies. It means, parents and educators must develop strategies for encouraging young learners to be balanced users of technology and achieve the great benefits this system has for children. "Technology and media should never be used in ways that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children" (NAEY, 1994). As Jugde, Puckett & Cabuck (2004) argue when educators appropriately integrate technology and interactive media into their classrooms, equity and access are addressed by providing opportunities for all children to participate and learn.

Interactions with technology and media should be playful and support creativity, exploration, pretend play, active play and outdoor activities. Play is important in children's development and learning. Children need opportunities to explore technology and interactive media in playful and creative ways. Educational media procedures are exploring the learning power of interactive games

which are a mixture of technology, education and entertainment, so it is evolving within rapidly developing of digital environment and collaborative play involving children and their family members or teachers.

When focusing on learners' needs, most researchers have concluded that the use of technology, interactivity and games are elements with a high motivating power inside the classroom. Through this combination, learners are able to develop new skills, increase their knowledge, express their insights and face challenge activities that promote their critical thinking. (Betz 1995, Gee 2003, Prensky 2001). "Interactive games are powerful environments for learning. Research consistently finds that players learn new skills, knowledge, insights, attitudes, or even behaviors in games that challenge them to think, explore and respond" (Betz, 1995; Gee 2003; Prensky 2001; Lieberman, 1997). This perception is the base of my own study in the present action research. As the authors argue interactive games constitute a wide field where learners can build knowledge by developing different abilities that will contribute to their learning process. When students find a motive like getting a prize when playing games, they improve their academic performance considerably, develop different abilities that were unknown including the fact of being good competitors, solve challenging situations and reach a goal.

Liebarman et al. (1997) agree with the arguments above when expressing the great advantages learners have when having the opportunity to learn by playing. "players learn by doing". These scholars conclude that playing interactive games rehearse different skills repeatedly. Lepper and Henderlong (2000) support this idea when arguing that interactive games can encourage people to learn, including those who at first are not interested in the subject matter. This is due to attractive elements like experiencing challenge goals, stimulation of curiosity, control over action, and fantasy theme that increase their interest when learning any topic. On the other hand, the social aspect is

reinforced when playing online interactive games. Learners can assume the personality of the virtual characters and assume their roles in the game by interacting with other partners or characters in each challenge proposed by the game.   This is perhaps the magic potion interactive online games offer to learners.

Another relevant issue, according to Sikszentmmi and Halyi (as cited in Vorderer, 2006) is the fact of interactive online educational games being a demanding activity that includes deep levels of attention, the management of more than one cognitive task at a time or making quick responses. Players actively participate in a game applying knowledge, devising strategies, making decisions, using skills and reviewing the outcomes. The authors' point of view reinforce the statement proposed by Lowery and Knirk (2000) "Through interactive games most players learn and improve the cognitive and motor skills they use while playing interactive games, and perception and visualization skills, such as the ability to recognize three dimensional shapes and mentally rotate them". This review of the literature would therefore appear to support the present researcher's proposal of using online interactive games in order to motivate third graders when writing descriptive paragraphs.

Learner Autonomy through interactive online games

According to Genzola (2007), one of the most important educational aims is to develop learner autonomy which requires a great amount of language, teachers' time, effort, ability, persistence, and dedication. Henry Holec (1981) defined autonomy as the mean accepting responsibility for one's own learning. Due to the enormous interest to researchers and teachers in ELT practice, various definitions have been given to refer to the concept.

It is a process that views a learner working on a task or activity largely independent of the teacher who acts as manager of the learning program and as resource person. (Higgi, 1988). Wenden

(1991) considers learner autonomy as a skill and illustrates learners who are autonomous to have acquired the learning strategies , the knowledge about learning, and the attitudes that enable them to use these skills and knowledge confidently, flexibly, appropriately, and independently of a teacher. Benson (2001) suggests that approaches to fostering autonomy may also focus on technology or other resources on the learner or on decision- making in the learning context. As the child becomes older, autonomy becomes more important. Autonomy is the need to regulate one's own behavior and to govern the initiation and direction of one's actions. (Ryan & Powelson, 1991). Learning gained through autonomy-suportive events, facilitates a feeling of self-determination and often results in greater understanding of the material being learned. (Deci &Ryan, 1987).

Different research studies support the importance of using online educational interactive games in order to improve learners writing skill.   A research study conducted by Belisle in 1996, showed that by using computers, students become better problem solvers and better communicators. By using e-mail and sharing files, students have the chance to collaborate and work together with other classmates, peers and teachers. The use of these tools free them from the limitations of traditional writing tools that often inhibit and restrict writing processes, by transforming learning from a passive activity into an experience of discovery, explanation and excitement. This was the answer to real interaction where the teacher was considered a guide of knowledge instead of a plane instructor in the classroom.

Cunningham (2000) developed a work by means of which he incorporated computers into his writing courses. Thirty seven Japanese female undergraduate students, enrolled in EFL writing classes, were the sample of this study. The researcher designed "work stations" where his students had the possibility to enhance other skills that supported the writing ability.   The stations had simple

instructions with time parameters to follow.   The analysis of questionnaires applied to the sample indicated that students, in general, found the word-processing class to be challenging and useful for the performance in writing. These results were revealed by this research when the surveys applied to the sample were analyzed.   This suggests that Computer- assisted language learning (CALL) usage probably awakes students' interest in a demanding skill like writing. These positive attitudes toward writing on the computer, improve learners' writing abilities.

According to a research study carried out by Wu & Lee, (2002), interactivity was not common in online education, as a consequence of teachers' lack of preparation in online pedagogical approaches. The study conducted in Singapore revealed that online education involved a great deal of planning on the part of the teacher and proper usage of the online tools for encouraging deep learning and hence produce thinking students.

Fidaoui, Bahous & Bacha (2010) discussed in their study the effectiveness of using computer assisted language learning in motivating Lebanese fourth-grade students to develop better writing skills, and the perceptions of ESL teachers and students regarding the use of CALL in the ESL classroom. The study involved forty eight fourth graders and their four teachers. The data was collected during a three month period using questionnaires, interviews and observations. Findings revealed that teachers as well as students shared similar perceptions toward the use of CALL in the writing classroom and identified the same motivational factors that would encourage students to produce well-developed written work. The use of computer assisted language learning in the writing classroom has indicated that it creates a supportive and motivating environment for learners conducive to students to work at their own pace and linguistic development level and enhances their independent writing skills in term of quality and quantity.

On the other hand, Florence (2003) carried out a study aimed to find out if it was really worth it for Hong Kong undergraduate Engineering students to spend time surfing vocabulary sites with online games to learn vocabulary. More importantly, the study attempted to compare the effectiveness of the online learning mode and the face-to face learning lessons. The study focused on a group of male Engineering students with Chinese as their mother tongue and English as their second language. As a result, the researchers concluded that online games are regarded as a more effective vocabulary learning tool due to its learning effectiveness when giving learners a sense of achievement and scope for maturity.

Another research conducted by Gupta & Woldemariam, (2011) examined the influence of motivation and attitude on the writing strategy use of undergraduate EFL students at Jimma University, Ethiopia. The students were required to develop their writing skills to meet academic requirements and future demands of writing in professional settings. Results obtained indicated that undergraduate students with strong motivation demonstrated high level of enjoyment, confidence, and positive attitude towards effective teaching methods of writing and those were found to have employed writing strategies most frequently. Highly motivated students exerted adequate effort, scored expected grades and obtained early support and were considered high writing strategy users. This study also revealed that the majority of the undergraduate students were instrumentally motivated when learning writing. This motive has been found to be the one of main driving forces in developing writing skills of learners in the EFL context.

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CHAPTER 3: Research design

Type of study

This chapter will make reference to the type of study carried out, the researcher's role, the context in which the study was developed, the participants implicated in this investigation, the data collection instruments and procedures. This study was based on the action research methodology. For this reason, one of my objectives is to observe to what extent interactive online activities motivate third graders to write descriptive paragraphs. I therefore believe that it is relevant to consider some concepts regarding what action research is in order to become familiar with the different aspects that I as researcher found during the development of my investigation.

As Mertler (2008) argues, action research allows teachers to study their own classroom by emphasizing on a specific aspect that needs to be improved in terms of its quality or effectiveness. Based on these specific characteristics I decided to carry out my study on action research. When I perceived my students' lack of motivation when writing pieces of texts where they were asked to describe different patterns, I found that action research would meet all my expectations as a researcher. This is because this methodology is considered by Mills (as cited in Mertler, 2008) as a systematic inquiry conducted by teachers with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process. Cohen and Manion (1980) emphasize that Action research provides the opportunity for researchers to find an immediate situation for a concrete problem.   This is why action research is considered as the alternative many teachers have in order to enrich not only the teaching but also the learning environment. By means of this methodology I was able to monitor step by step over periods of time and with a variety of mechanisms as surveys, a blog and written samples, the lack of motivation third

graders presented when writing descriptive paragraphs for their language art class and one possible solution by means of interactive online educational games.

I really found this approach to be particularly attractive. According to Bell (1987) its main strength is its practical problem-solving emphasis. At the same time Stringer (2007) in his action research interacting spiral describes action research as a powerful framework with different stages where the researcher looks, thinks and acts by creating a cycle that gives to the investigator the opportunity of observing, reflecting and taking any action that leads to the next stage and so on. The risk on this type of study is the lack of time and continuity teachers must face when they are removed from different courses. However, I was able to develop my study thanks to the cooperation of the school staff and some colleagues who supported my research and showed interest in the kind of research I carried out at the school. As Mills (as cited in Mertler, 2008) states numerous researchers have proposed models for illustrating the action research process that have many common elements, although they look different in the structure by means of which they are represented.

I adopted the model proposed by Stringer (2007) where he shows action research as a powerful framework represented by an interacting spiral. Through this model my role as researcher consisted of a routine of looking, thinking and acting.

During each stage I observed, reflected and then took some sort of action. This action leads me into the next stage.
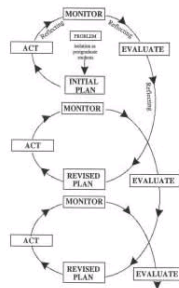

Figure 1. A spiral of action research cycles. Taken from Stringer, E. (2007) Action Research

Researcher's role

When I carried out this qualitative study, I assumed the role of teacher-researcher.   According to Freeman (1998), the teacher can transform both the teacher and the classroom by moving from lesson plans, activities and students to research – oriented questions, data analysis and findings. As a teacher, I designed and implemented different activities according to a previous action plan, while as a researcher I was involved in the design of tools and instruments for collecting data, and the analysis and reflection on the observations made during the implementation process.

Context

This study was developed at Colombo Gales School, a bilingual school located in Guaymaral. This educational institution bases its philosophy on fomenting values and academic performance in their students. It is ranked in a high standard level according to Instituto Colombiano para el Fomento de la Educación Superior (ICFES). The school has been certified by ISO 9000 twice and the next step will be to get the belonging status given by International Baccalaureate Organization.

As a requirement for belonging to this organization, the system of teaching English as a second language has acquired important dimensions. Nowadays its students, mostly middle and high school students, have being prepared for entering in this demanding process and the use of English constitutes one of the most relevant tools used by students. According to the standards of the Common European Framework for teaching, learning and evaluation, Gales students are classified in B1but they are expected to reach C1.

The school is composed of different buildings where technology is represented by two computer rooms where students interact with a personal machine not only for having their technology

classes but also as a support for different subjects. The Language Art Program is based on the development of Literature. Through it, learners improve their English profiency by developing different competences performed inside a specific pedagogical model: Social constructivism and Communicative approach.

Third graders are required to use English as a means of communication in which they are requested to describe different patterns according to given instructions. At the same time, students produce writing pieces that support any specific topic seen in class. However this skill is left as the last option due to its complexity and lack of teachers' interest for finding new strategies that help learners to enjoy a demanding process as writing.

Participants

This study was carried out with thirty one third grade students (girls and boys) aged between 8 and 10. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, their English proficiency corresponds to the A1 level. It means they are able to understand and use every day expressions and very basic phrases to meet specific needs. They can interact in a simple way; introduce themselves and others; ask and answer questions about personal details.

They take eight hours a week of English classes and have studied it for four years. The language art program for elementary level was designed according to the general parameters stated by the English Department where literature is the core content developed during the whole process followed by a Gales bilingual student. Third graders are able to develop critical thinking skills such as comparing and contrasting ideas, drawing conclusions, summarizing, identifying main ideas and supporting details and establishing cause and effects among others. Although they are able to write comprehensible sentences, they lack of the facility to write coherent paragraphs. These third graders

enjoy activities that involve movement, group work and technology devices. For this reason, most of the time classes were designed taking into account their needs in order to promote their participation.

Data Collection Instruments

Considering the fact that reliability is a requisite in action research, the selection of data collection techniques was based on giving objectivity to the study. After reflecting on the participants' profiles and their needs, I decided to use surveys, blogs, and artifacts as research instruments for gathering relevant information.

Surveys

Taking into account that the aim of surveys is "to get answers to the same questions from a representative sample in order to enable the researcher not only to describe but also to compare and demonstrate that certain features exist in certain categories" (Bell, 2010), I decided to select this tool as a means to get more relevant information from students. According to Burns (2003) by means of this technique participants can answer questions most rapidly and researchers do not need to use additional recordings or notes.

Additionally, Sagor (2005) suggests that a survey is a very suitable instrument to gather data related to affective, cognitive or attitudinal issues from a good deal of students in a short period of time. Surveys are useful for small samples because the researcher can provide depth and individual meaning to the questions of interest.   A reliable survey results in consistent information. A valid survey produces accurate information. "A reliable and valid survey is obtained by making sure the definitions and models you use to select questions are grounded in theory and experience" (Arlene, 2006). The designed surveys were answered by the sample at the end of each class session in order to collect impressions related to the online games performed during the sessions.

Blog diaries

Through blogs I was able to obtain valuable information about key aspects involved in the research project. " Diaries are an attractive way of gathering information about the way individuals spend their time" (Bell, 1987. p. 11).   Beltrán (2009) considers that blog diaries are personal tools used for making comments, sharing and registering information related to different or specific topics. Complementing this assertion, Hook (as cited in McKernan, 1991) states that diaries contain observations, feelings, attitudes, perceptions, reflections, hypotheses, lengthy analyses and cryptic comments.   "A diary can be used to promote educational objectives such as enabling pupils to communicate through the written as well as oral mode. The use of the personal diary or journal encourages description, interpretation, reflection and evaluation on the part of the teacher as well as the pupil". (McKernan, 1991. p.84).

The researcher must keep the diary daily or regularly. The information must be collected immediately because it is possible that the researcher forgets or fails to include important details that occurred during a class or specific session. Using journals or diaries as a source of data gives validity because these tools offer a series of benefits that encourage the researcher to discover hidden variables that affect not only the learning but also the teaching process.

One risk I assumed was that blog diaries are time consuming; however, they gave me the opportunity to keep valuable information on what was required. I wrote down the particularities observed in each class session like many different aspects observed through the activities. I used them during the piloting process because "diaries can provide valuable information about work patterns and activities, provided subjects are clear and what students are being asked to do and why" (Bell, 1987. p.80).

Artifacts

Artifacts include school records, official documents, children's work, teachers' lesson plans or materials used in the setting being studied. Valcarcel (2009) considers artifacts as items that are readily suitable in the research setting. Their disadvantage is that interpreting the meaning and significance of objects is difficult because connecting them to relevant contexts is highly demanding. There is not a strict formula to analyze artifacts. "In the process of analysis, we are asking the data to tell us something. An artifact has a story to tell about the person who made it, how it was used, who used it and the beliefs and values associated with it." (Norum as cited in Given, 2008) .

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedure was implemented during four weeks in order to determine whether using interactive online educational games, third graders are motivated towards improved abilities in writing descriptive paragraphs. This procedure was developed in three stages.

In the pre-stage students were asked to write a short paragraph in order to describe their pets. The objective of this activity was to check the previous observation in regards to the problematic situation: lack of motivation of third graders when writing descriptive paragraphs. Later, they had a training session in the computers lab in order to get familiar with the interactive online educational games.

In the while-stage students had three sessions where the online activities were implemented as complementary resources to support the different steps while writing descriptive paragraphs. The first

step was an overview of the vocabulary clue included in the online activities. This activity included

riddles by means of which students guessed the words of the vocabulary clue. The next session was

related to online exercises that included the vocabulary clue trained in the previous activity. The third

session was developed around the main characters belonging to   another of the online activities. In

this session students were asked to introduce the characters by using adjectives. Later, they performed

another online activity related to descriptive words.   During the last session, a brainstorm where

students completed an idea web with descriptive words around the name of their favorite character was

completed (see Appendix B). Then, they elaborated sentences that included the descriptive words of

the web. Finally, the students built their descriptive paragraphs about their favorite character and

shared their descriptions with their partners. It is important to clarify that students solved a survey at

the end of each session (See Appendix C).

In the post-stage I applied the last survey in order to know the students' opinions about the

different sessions performed by them.   Additionally, students refined the last version of their

descriptive paragraphs by taking into account spelling, grammar and style.

Validity

In qualitative data, validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of

the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the

researcher. It must be seen a matter of degree than as an absolute state. The explanation given to each

event or issue included in this study is sustained by the data, and the findings describe accurately the

problem developed through this research. On the other hand, as Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, (2007)

declare it is important that the results generated by the research process can be generalized to the wider

population, cases or situation.   This research results can be applied in other fields as a confident source to support future studies.

Reliability

According to Metler (2009), reliability refers to the consistency of collected data. Izzo (2006) clarifies and contextualizes this concept when stating that "It is unlikely that another researcher can replicate your classroom context precisely. Reliable results depend on the similarity of the contexts and on the methods used". (p.120)   Based on these notions I can affirm that this study is reliable because it can be adapted to another contexts thanks to the detailed and descriptive account of the setting, participants, methods and findings I included through the elaboration of this research.

CHAPTER 4: Pedagogical Intervention and Implementation

The pedagogical intervention took place in four weeks. This chart illustrates the steps followed in order to implement the pedagogical intervention. Most of the activities were performed according to the dates included in the chart program.

Week	Date	Activity
1	Sept. 3rd/09	• Initial sample writing (Describing my pet) • Initial survey • Elaboration of the blog
2	Sept. 7th/09	• Selecting the online activities based on my students needs
	Sept. 10th/09	• Exploration session: building background; • Taking notes in the blog
	Sept. 11th/09	• Exploration session: vocabulary riddles • Taking notes in the blog
3	Oct. 8th/09	• Interacting with one of the online activities(describing characters) • Survey • Taking notes in the blog
	Oct. 10th/09	• Second interaction session with another online activity • Elaborating idea maps with descriptive words • Survey • Taking notes in the blog
4	Oct 16th/09	• Third interaction session with another online activity (spelling, capitalization) • Writing sentences with descriptive words • Survey • Taking notes in the blog
	Oct 28th/09	• Elaborating a descriptive paragraph • Revising process (pair work) • Survey • Taking notes in the blog

Chart 1: Steps followed in order to implement the pedagogical intervention

First week

During this week students were asked to write a description of their favorite pet. The teacher showed a picture and modeled one example where she described the pet in a short paragraph. Each student had to draw their favorite pet and then write a short description according to the given model. This lesson was developed in one session and its objective was to diagnose students' prior knowledge when elaborating descriptive paragraphs. Later, each student answered the first survey with the purpose of testing the suitability and pertinence of the questions and at the same time   to assess learners' attitude and motivation toward activities that imply writing tasks.

Second Week

The exploration session took place. Its aim was to create an appropriate background for the students by selecting pertinent online activities that met third graders needs and expectations. The selection of the online activities was not a single process. Although there are a variety of interactive games aimed to help learners to reinforce different skills, it is a demanding process in which there are target objectives to achieve by using those interactive online games. After searching for some days, I found two sets of different activities that would satisfy my students' needs: Magic key http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/magickey/.   This web site contains interactive online educational games belonging to BBC . These games were produced by Collingwood O'hare Productions. The different games are performed by the characters included in the Oxford Reading Tree. These games were designed in order to improve visual and kinesthetic skills in young learners. By means of these games, children can check their knowledge of some parts of the speech: adjectives and its position inside a sentence. The other set of activities came from the website Room 108:   The Primary Kids

Education Site where kids can find spelling, grammar and writing games. These educational games were designed based on different competences by means of which young learners can test their knowledge by developing kinesthetic, visual and hearing skills. These games provide stimulus for their senses. http://www.netrover.com/~kingskid/hanglist.html

Previous to the piloting process, I designed a lesson plan where students explored the vocabulary clue belonging to the magic key environment by means of some riddles and the use of flashcards that introduced the main characters of the site. The last step was to update the diary blog by including the experiences obtained during these sessions.

Third Week

According to the lesson plan designed for this week students were in touch with the activities included in the Magic Key: Fraser the eraser (making descriptions) where the game consisted of describing different characters according to different features given by the computer. Students used the vocabulary seen in the previous class. Next session was about completing an idea map around their favorite character. Each student was asked for bringing as homework ,in the previous lesson, a picture of their favorite character. Then, the teacher handed out a worksheet with a pre-designed idea map that kids completed based on the characteristics of their characters. (see Appendix B). At the end of each session notes were taken in the diary blog.

Fourth Week

This time students interact with one of the activities of Room 108 where they showed their abilities in spelling, capitalization, punctuation and the order of sentences. Later, they were asked to build sentences by using the descriptive words from the idea map (see appendix D). After giving feedback on the elaboration of the sentences, the next session was devoted to elaborating the

paragraph with the sentences written by them (see Appendix E). The last step was considered one of the most important due to its aim: to work in pairs in order to revise their works.   The last survey was applied (see appendix C) and the diary blog was filled with the observations regarding the lesson.

CHAPTER 5: Data Analysis

The approach adopted in this project is qualitative because I intend to analyze the effects, consequences and results when using interactive online educational games with a sample of students in the classroom. "Researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned about understanding individuals' perceptions of the world. They seek insight rather than statistical analysis." (Bell, 1987, p. 6).

The mechanism followed was grounded theory considering that this approach "allows to develop hypothesis by listening to what the research participants say by means of a data analysis procedure (theoretical coding). (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). This method offers the possibility of generating hypotheses instead of testing it. This approach was based on two basic principles: questioning rather than measuring and generating hypothesis using theoretical coding. It suggested a series of steps well defined to carry out a research study.   Straus and Corbin (1990), propose that once all the data is gathered, the researcher must label relevant information with specific codes, which at the same time are grouped by similarities. These concepts form categories which are the basis of a theory that leads to answer the initial question of the research.

In order to organize data, Hopkins (2008) suggests that researchers must categorize information in a functional way, due to the complexity and time-consuming process that represents analyzing voluminous amounts of data. The first step of the grounded theory approach implies classifying the data in groups according to the most remarkable features since all the information is analyzed, conceptualized and rearranged differently according to the purpose of the study. Once categories were organized, different connections were established that aimed to answer the initial question: to what

extent might online interactive games motivate and contribute to developing the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs in third graders?

Subsequently, it was necessary to code the different categories. This complex process implied reorganizing the information collected in the different sources and assemble it taking into account the study objectives and research question. When reducing the database, I compared all the patterns to identify hierarchies or sequences. In order to organize this information, I designed a chart to register the frequency of the patterns in the instruments by comparing them in order to know whether the resultant information answered the research question. Then, I marked the data under categories, each of which was given a subcategory. I illustrate this coding process as follows:

Research question	Main Categories	Subcategories
To what extent do interactive online educational games motivate and contribute to developing the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs in third graders?	*1. Writing skill*	**1.1 Sentence syntax**: constructing descriptive sentences
		1.2 Paragraph organization: sequence of ideas when describing a specific pattern.
	2. Use of technology to foster motivation and autonomy	**2.1 Interaction with the computer:** Evidence of motivation when using online interactive games.

		2.2 Using online interactive games: Evidence of autonomous learning behavior

Chart 2: Coding the information

The next step was to interpret the information organized in the categories and subcategories. This explanation was elaborated based on the different theoretical factors specified and described below, which were previously included in the chapter of the literary review of this research.

1. Writing skill*:   constructing descriptive sentences and the ability of sequencing ideas when describing a specific pattern.*

Based on the overall research of this study: to motivate and to develop the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs in third graders by using interactive online educational games, it was pertinent to analyze and organize data according to this. This category generated a subcategory related to constructing descriptive sentences and the ability of sequencing ideas when describing a specific pattern.

Constructing descriptive sentences

This pattern was frequent in the initial descriptions written by the students, the opinions given in the surveys and my perceptions registered in the diary when checking some previous samples in their notebooks.

The following excerpt contains clear examples of how the students expressed their ideas when describing their favorite TV characters. They achieved this by using descriptive words. However,

they clearly lacked the necessary syntax awareness when collocating adjectives and nouns correctly in a descriptive sentence.

Most students identify and associate descriptive words with adjectives. This may be seen when students refer to different characteristics like colors, abilities, and personality: "handsome", "long hair", "moustache black", "excellent", "eyes brown".

Nemo : "the color of the eyes are blak and wite" S3

Juanes: "handsome", "intelligent"   S5

The Simpsons: "yellow", "funny" S6

Chicken Little: "the skin is white", " has a jean color brown"   S7

Excerpt 1 . Students initial sample (Idea map with words that describe their favorite T.V characters)Taken from artifacts

However, during the second session when they were asked to elaborate a sentence with those descriptive words, they were not conscious of the grammatical arrangement of words in a descriptive sentence. This may be ratified by the check list included as a proofreading session in the activity of sentence construction (see Appendix B). Most of the students elaborated their sentences fast enough to realize they lacked of awareness of word order in their sentences. As consequence, I decided to interchange their papers in order to facilitate their proofreading tasks. However, the results were not improved as they failed to detect the mistakes.   Graph 1 displays the consolidated results of all the check lists regarding the consciousness of sentence syntax.   The outcome confirms unconscious grammatical arrangement. The graph shows how students are conscious when evaluating capitalization

and spelling. However, they were not able to identify syntax mistakes. According to the teacher's proofreading the item which displayed more detected mistakes were: word order, followed by spelling, punctuation and capitalization. In contrast to students' proofreading, the teacher's identified word order as one of the most important elements to be improved.
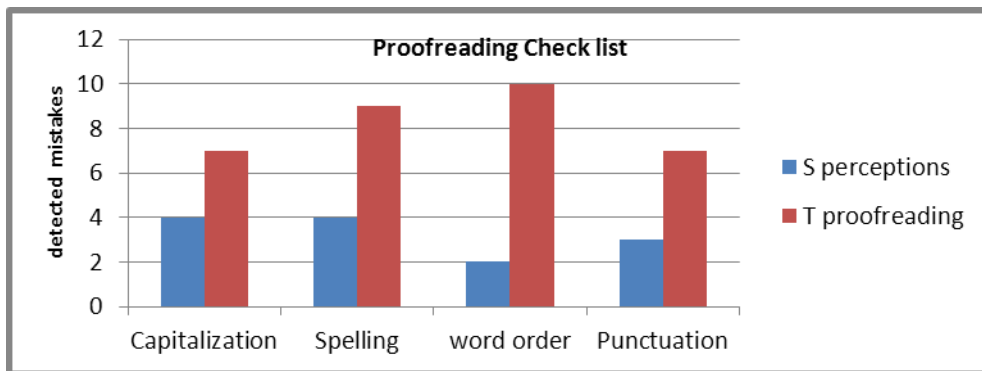
Graph 1. Consolidated results of all the check lists regarding the consciousness of sentence syntax

When I introduced my students to the second and third online sessions, their syntax awareness improved greatly. After these sessions, where students interacted with the online games, their perspectives toward self-assessing their sentences changed considerably. When students proofread their sentences and paragraphs identified their word order mistakes more accurately than in previous sessions. This may be validated by the data collected mainly in the teachers' reflection blog during the pedagogical intervention.

T: "After finishing their descriptive sentences they are conscious of having word order mistakes. Although they corrected them before completing their proofreading check list, it is a good thermometer to measure their ability to check and correct their

mistakes".

T: "When organizing sentence elements they were able to collocate adjectives and nouns properly. It is a good sign. They recognize adjectives as descriptive words; it means that they will accomplish their descriptive paragraphs correctly".

Excerpt 2. Teacher's blog comments and reflections

On the other hand, Graph 2 illustrates this positive tendency. Student 1 and Student 2 are clear examples of the impact generated by the interactive online games on students' syntax awareness. Their performance registered a considerable decrease in the number of mistakes related to syntax. While in activities 1 and 2, they had between 10 and 15 mistakes, during activities 3 and 4, the students performance increased substantially. Their mistakes were reduced significantly from 3 to 1.

This is validated by their outstanding performance shown in activity 4 in contrast to their lack of knowledge when constructing single descriptive sentences in Activity 1 (Appendices B and D). It is worth noting that during Activity 1 and 2, students were asked to write descriptive sentences by following a model given by the teacher during the instruction process, while in the Activities 3 and 4 (Appendices F and G) students lacked of this model.
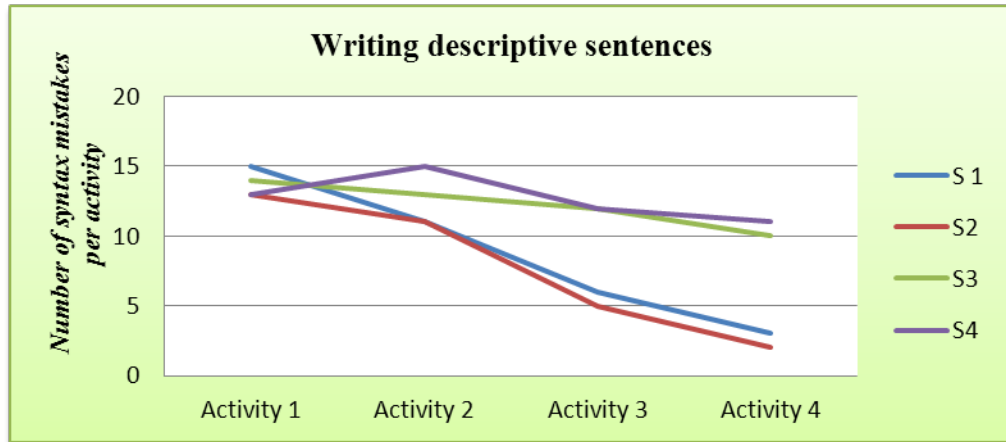
Graph 2. Writing descriptive sentences performance. This graph compares students performance when writing descriptive sentences before and after using online interactive games.

As Beltrán (2010) argues the use of ICT in language instruction is an open path full of opportunities for learners when acquiring grammatical rules. This is a strategy that makes this process more meaningful and appealing to them. The following excerpts evidence the progress acquired by the students when elaborating descriptive paragraphs, after performing online activities. Excerpt 3 presents descriptive sentences that include certain organization among the elements which conform to acceptable descriptive sentences, although fail, at this stage, to display syntactic awareness.   In Excerpt 4, their sentence constructions improved totally. Although some spelling and capitalization mistakes are frequent, students were able to write structures that reveal a clear organization of the elements which conform a descriptive sentence.

S1: " The lion is eyes brown"

S2: "Chicken little has a jean color brown"

S3: "Bugs Bunny is famus"

Excerpt 2. Activity 3

S1: " Chicken Little has a big feet"

S2: "He has big brown eyes"

S3: "Her ears is long and blak"

Excerpt 3. Activity 4

Paragraph organization

This category is the result of the data present in the students' artifacts and the teacher`s blog. For this reason, it is mandatory to help students recognize the structure inherent in text and match it to their own cognitive structures in order to support their understanding, text production and spoken discourse. Third graders attempted to follow the rhetorical structure of a paragraph when writing the descriptions about their favorite character.   On the other hand, Mahendran (2012) argues that a paragraph is a unit of thought presented in a sequence of sentences. In a paragraph, words and phrases are arranged in a specific way to bring about coherence and cogency of content. A paragraph presents content aimed at improved understanding.

"This is Juanes, he have green eyes, he is intelligent and sings very nice. He is long hair and black. He play guitar and is very good. He loves arepa and beans. He is tall. He wear black T-shirts.

Excerpt 3. Activity 5

After completing the second session online and students interacted with the games , they were able to maintain a sequence of ideas according to paragraphs structure. It was evident they intended to offer the reader a general characterization of their favorite characters. However, in spite of the performance of the interactive online educational games, learners failed to develop the ability of

writing well structured descriptive paragraphs. This is clear in the sample of Activity 6 and the comments recorded in the teachers' blog after finishing the activity.

"Today my students participating of an activity where they identified some characters according to a series of features and matched with their corresponding names. Later they elaborated a short paragraph where they included as many characteristics as they could. The result was good however I realized they lack of organization when sequencing the different traits of each character. They are not aware of the order. Most of them described the characters with a lot of details but they did not follow a sequence. For example, they described characters' face but suddenly they continue with their personality and then they described their hair and so on…"

Excerpt 4. Teacher's log comments and reflections

"This is Juanes, he has green eyes, he is intelligent and sings very nice. He has long hair and black. He play the guitar and is very good. He loves arepa and beans. He is tall. He wear black T-shirts.

Excerpt 5. Activity 6

2   *Use of technology to foster motivation:* Taking into account the main objective of this research, which includes the use of online interactive games to motivate and to develop the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs in third graders, the second category was highlighted. This category emerged

as a result of the different reactions, attitudes, work performances and replies accomplished by the students in the computer room.

The two subcategories that match with this category are: interaction with the computer: *evidence of motivation when using interactive online educational games* and using interactive online educational games: *evidence of autonomous learning behavior*.

2.1   Interaction with the computer: *evidence of motivation when using interactive online educational games*

This category appeared from the data given by the students and the different notes collected in the teacher's blog. Students were highly motivated when performing the interactive online educational games of each "give me five online session". The Excerpt 6 exemplifies their positive attitude and enthusiasm when participating in these exercises.

> "Today everything was great. My students enjoyed each minute in the computers' room.
> They were anxious and the expected moment had arrived. They were in front of the
> computers, interacting with the different activities and enjoying the fact of learning
> through a different environment"

Excerpt 6. Teacher's log comments and reflections

At the end of each session, each student answered a survey by means of which their interest, engagement and level of eagerness was registered (see Appendix C). Based on the data obtained in the surveys, a high motivational level toward the different activities performed in the different sessions was observed.

Most of the students agreed that interactive online educational games were a different way of learning, full of interesting elements such as colorful images, sounds, challenges and rewards.
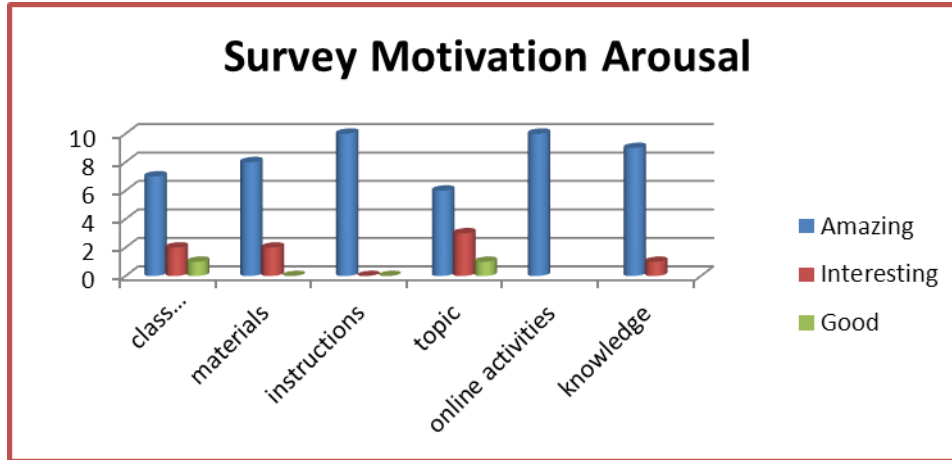
Graph 3. Motivation Arousal Survey. This graph describes the Motivation Arousal level at the end of each online session

In addition to these results, students reveal great enthusiasm when performing the interactive online educational games. They recognize online lessons as different proposals easily repeated as learning experiences. This aspect is perceptible from the next fragment taken from the answers given to the open questions included in the surveys.

Q: "Would you like to repeat the experience?"

S10: " yes, because is very interesting and is very good"

S2: "yes, because all the class very good"

S6: " yes, because it was very nice"

Excerpt 7. Surveys Motivation Arousal

Q: "What did you like the most from this lesson?"

S6: "that we play in internet"

S4: "That we were playing in the computer"

S2: "that we play in computers"

S10: "the teacher instructions and the activity online"

S9: "that we came to computers room"

Excerpt 8. Surveys Motivation Arousal

These artifacts are testimony of students' motivation to the extent that most of the students included the online games' characters as models for writing their description paragraphs in the final sample. Similarly, students felt admiration for some of the characters of "The Magic Key". This is palpable in the activity "can you describe things?" students selected characters like "Floppy" and "Fraser the eraser" as their models for writing a descriptive paragraph and described them by including positive adjectives that demonstrated admiration for the characters. Another good example is the way my own third graders improved their ability for writing short descriptions with the simple fact of offering a different environment to learn including the computers room and the opportunity to interact with characters with movement and sound.

S2: "Floppy is a beautiful dog. He has the magic key in his nek. He has long tongue.

He likes bones. He has a long tail. He is yellow and intelligent. He loves to chase cats"

S10: "Fraser the eraser is an angry eraser. He is white and yellow. He has two arms and two red legs. Its nose is big and his eyebrows are green and thick. He likes erase. He is nice". I would like to have a Fraser eraser in my pencil case."

*Excerpt 9. Students final sample (writing descriptive paragraphs)*

2.2   Using interactive online games: *Evidence of autonomous learning behavior*

After three sessions, it was evident how third graders became more independent when performing each activity. This aspect was obvious in the blog diary and the surveys applied at the end of the sessions. Through these instruments it was noticed that the students were able to carry out the assigned activities without help. Students were more confident when facing the sub-tasks and exercises proposed by the different interactive online games.

"by means of interactive activities (specially games) students learn how to be more independent day by day. It is the first step of being autonomous learners. Although it is not easy, technology is a good alternative to help students to be autonomous"

Excerpt 11. Teacher's log comments and reflections

This condition of being autonomous is argued by Erben, Ban & Castañeda (2009) who claim that new roles are assumed by teachers and students, the more a teacher employs instructional technology in the classroom, the less teacher-centered and the more student-centered a classroom will become. This means that technology –enhanced classrooms have been found to promote discovery learning, learner autonomy, and learner-centeredness. This aspect is evident in the answers registered in the surveys replied by learners during the last sessions of class (see Appendix H).
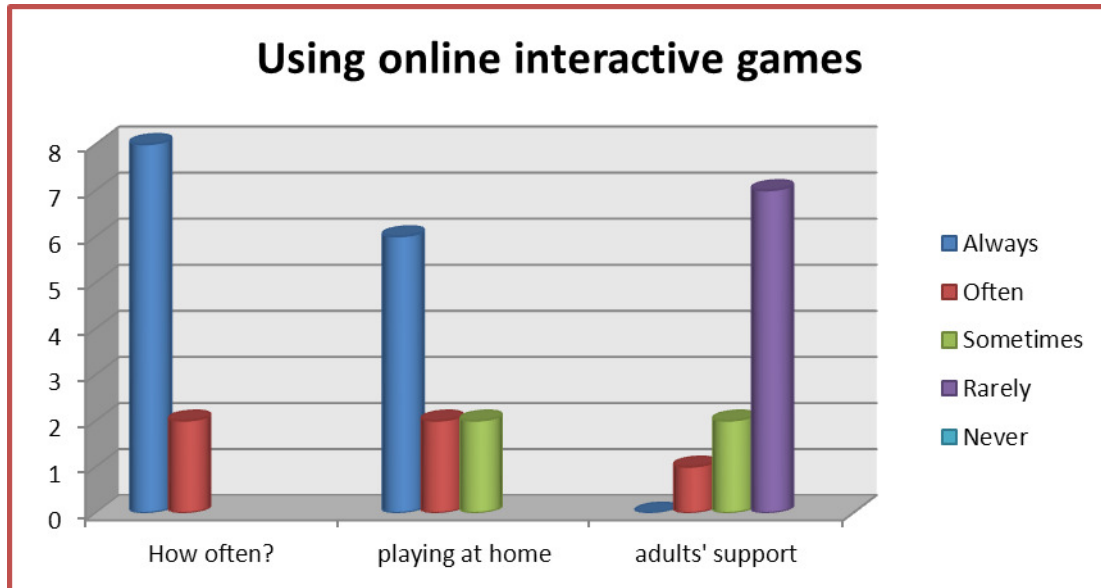
Graph 4. This graph illustrates Students' autonomy when using the interactive online games

On the other hand, Benson (2001) suggests that approaches to fostering autonomy may also focus on technology or other resources, on the learner himself or herself and / or on decision-making in the learning context . When students are able to perform their activities by their own, it is said both students and teachers work in their own pace. As Beltrán (2009) argues "the more ability students have to manage the program, the more motivated they are to continue working on the proposed class activities on their own".

This fact was revealed when my own students answered the question related to the level of difficulty perceived by them when interacting with some activities from "Room 108 Kid's writing". During the first practices students were given many strikes for picking wrong letters and the animals popped their balloons very fast, but little by little they preferred to perform the hardest level with few strikes and felt the satisfaction of improving their performance in spelling.
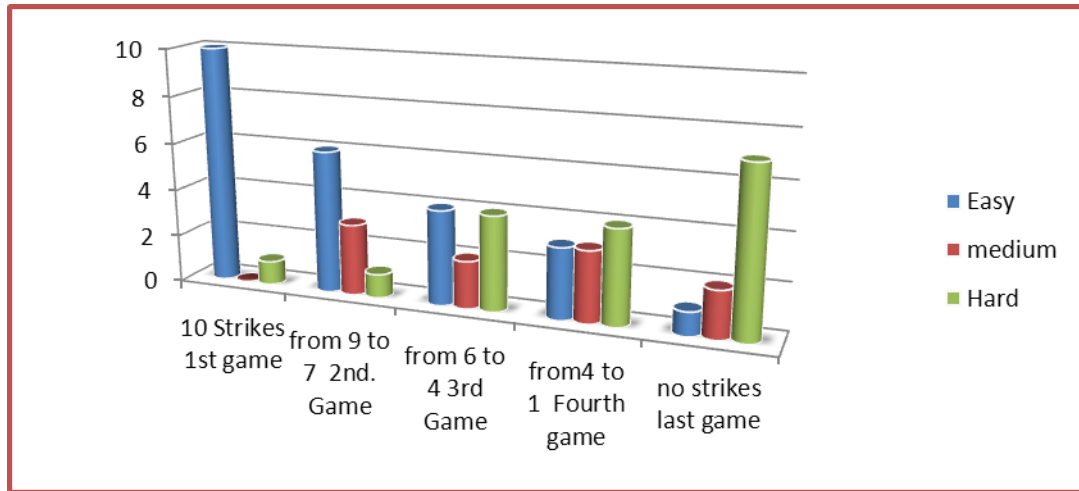
Graph 5. Students'performance on the spelling game "Safari". This graph illustrates the difficulty degree of the chosen activities by the students and its improvement.

It appears clear that technology fostered motivation and autonomy in third graders. The use of ICT is an important factor which appears to improve the effectiveness of educational environments. As Beltrán (2009) suggests the use of ICT in language instruction can improve diverse issues referent to the students' learning process in terms of language and other cognitive issues.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusions, Pedagogical Implications and Further Research

This session presents the conclusions of the main findings of this study, the pedagogical implications, the limitations and the further research recommendations for the other researchers interested in conducting a similar study.

Conclusions

The first conclusion is related to the research question stated at the beginning of this study: To what extent do interactive online educational games motivate and contribute to developing the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs in third graders? This question may be answered by the claim that using interactive online educational games motivate third graders to develop the ability of writing descriptive paragraphs. The interactive online games support language learning writing by improving interest among children while they explore the different aspects demanded by the writing process. While learners interact with screens full of color, listen to the sounds to cheer their strengths or invited to try again to cover their weakness of any task, their brains are processing the information they need to use different parts of the speech inside a sentence correctly.

At the end of the data analysis procedure, it is evident that interactive online educational games engage third graders positively when structuring descriptive sentences, to be used as the pre-writing step to elaborate well-constructed descriptive paragraphs. Based on data which emerged from data analysis students are highly motivated when the teacher includes technology in the planning of different classes and specifically when the target skill lacks attractiveness.

As second conclusion it might be claimed that the research objective was accomplished through the implementation of the pedagogical intervention due to the students' improvement in their abilities when writing descriptive paragraphs and their disposition when performing activities related

to writing skills.   Interactive online games generated interest and influenced the development of writing skills in third graders as a result of guided practices that improved children as a literacy component. When considering writing as a process where interaction and progress are clue elements, the teacher must offer a literacy rich environment with opportunities, interaction, a wide audience and support.

Moreover, it may also be argued that the inclusion of technological tools in language teaching also contributes to motivating students to take control of their own learning process. Most of literacy principles emerge from the use of technological devices including the Internet where teachers may find a wealth and range of interactive online educational games through which students can be empowered and stimulated with sensory experiences to enrich their thinking. The use of interactive online games may improve students' writing because they are immersed in a social context where not only teachers but also peers are part of this process where students are called writers, authors. This fact has a positive effect on how they view themselves and whether or not and how they write.

Pedagogical Implications

The following are the pedagogical implications of this study. These are related with the special interest that the school demands in the improvement of the writing skill. Based on one of the priorities of the curriculum, which is the enhancement of the writing skill in elementary children, it is important that not only teachers, but also the principal and the administrative staff consider as an important requirement the use of technological issues as a relevant element and as an opportunity to support students' learning process, not only regarding to writing skill but also other educational fields development. Within the curriculum and the design programs the writing skill should be seen as a crucial area that deserves special attention when designing activities for engaging students toward this

necessary component of language learning. Regarding the importance and the influence of ICT's in education, it is necessary to prepare teachers to face this field in order to develop not only writing skills but also listening, speaking and grammar by using online educational games that promote interactivity among students not only with their school partners but also national and international schools. This may well provide the means whereby the learners might be immersed in meaningful learning, full of opportunities to learn, share and communicate.

Limitations

External problems as the closing of the school during two days due to weather problems changed the programmed schedule for going to the computer's room. After returning to normal classes, it was difficult to program the same number of sessions in this place, so the sessions were reduced because of lack of time. Another important difficulty was the speed of connection and the availability of the computers. Most of them had technical problems that were not solved in the required moment. Students were not able to complete some tasks during specific sessions. As a consequence, it was necessary to take extra sessions from other classes in order to complete the training sessions plan.

Further Research

For further research it may be fruitful to create an online community where not only students but also teachers and parents interchange their products, opinions and comments about their work, innovations, and discoveries in new tendencies, queries and doubts. This community will be considered as a Virtual Language Resource Center with a mission, a clear vision, objectives and mainly special components that promote online interactivity and collaborative work in the writing process supported by interactive games and activities online.

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Appendix A

Consent Letter

Bogotá, septiembre 10 de 2009

Señores

PADRES DE FAMILIA

Respetados padres:

Me encuentro adelantando estudios de Maestría en la Universidad de la Sabana. Por consiguiente debo desarrollar un proyecto de profundización como requisito para acceder al título que ofrece el departamento de lenguas.

Por consiguiente, su hijo (a) ha sido seleccionado (a) para participar en el proyecto que tiene como objetivo contribuir al desarrollo de la habilidad de escritura de párrafos descriptivos mediante el uso de juegos y actividades en línea.

Por tal fin se realizarán varias sesiones desde el 15 de septiembre al 29 de octubre de 2009. Las actividades se realizarán durante las horas de clase con mi acompañamiento. Dichas actividades no afectarán el desarrollo del programa curricular dado que fueron diseñadas de acuerdo al currículo.

Agradezco su valiosa colaboración diligenciando y enviando el desprendible adjunto , autorizando a su hijo (a) a participar en este importante estudio.

Cordial saludo,

Olga Lucía Alarcón M.

Docente de Inglés

Favor diligenciar este formato y enviarlo a la profesora de inglés

Nosotros_____ y
_____

Autorizamos a nuestro hijo (a)_____ del grado
_____ para participar en el proyecto de investigación adelantado por la docente Olga Alarcón, auspiciado por el departamento de lenguas de la Universidad de la Sabana.

_____   _____

Madre   Padre

Appendix B

Idea map

Appendix C

Initial Survey

It is nice to see you again! Your opinion is the most important. Please read the statements and select your

The class organization was	😁	🙂	😟	😞
The class materials were	😁	🙂	😟	😞
The teacher instructions were	😁	🙂	😟	😞
The topic was	😁	🙂	😟	😞
The online activity was	😁	🙂	😟	😞
The thins I learned were	😁	🙂	😟	😞

What did you like the most from this lesson?

_____
_____

Would you like to repeat the experience?

_____
_____

Appendix D

Writing Sentences

Look at your idea map and write 5 sentences that include those descriptive

_____

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

When you finish to write your sentences, please re-read them and check the following aspects by answering these questions:

1. Did I use capital letters correctly? _____

2. Did I check spelling of the words? _____

3. Did I use punctuation?   _____

4. Did I use subject + action + complement in my sentences? _____

5. Did I include connectors: first, next, then, so, when   _____

Appendix E

Building a Paragraph

Did you check your sentences? Great! Now it is time to build up a descriptive paragraph

Write your sentences in group. One sentence and continue with the next one and so on until to have a paragraph.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

When you finish to write your paragraph , please re-read it and check the following aspects by answering these questions:

1. Did I use capital letters correctly? _____

2. Did I check spelling of the words? _____

3. Did I use punctuation?   _____

4. Did I use subject + action + complement in my sentences? _____

5. Did I include connectors: first, next, then, so, when   _____

Appendix F

Describing your favorite animal

Look at the picture of your favorite animal. Write 6 sentences to describe it. Do not forget to use descriptive words

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

When you finish to write your sentences, please re-read them and check the following aspects by answering these questions:

1. Did I use capital letters correctly? _____

2. Did I check spelling of the words? _____

3. Did I use punctuation?   _____

4. Did I use subject + action + complement in my sentences? _____

5. Did I use descriptive words correctly?   _____

Appendix G

Building a Descriptive Paragraph about your favorite Animal

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

__

When you finish to write your sentences, please re-read them and check the following aspects by answering these questions:

1. Did I use capital letters correctly? _____

2. Did I check spelling of the words? _____

3. Did I use punctuation?   _____

4. Did I use subject + action + complement in my sentences? _____

5. Did I include connectors: first, next, then, so, when   _____

Appendix H

Autonomy Survey

We have had a nice experience during this semester. Congratulations! I hope you have learned a lot of interesting things!!!

It is true! Now I would like to know your opinions about these great web sites and their activities. Please write and X on the item that corresponds.

When you play with "the magic key" or "Room 108"....					
Questions	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1.How often do you play ?					
2.Do you play at home?					
3. Do you need an adult's support?					