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Peer Feedback and Out-of-Class Blogging to Develop Informal Writing Skills in an EFL Course

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Master in English Language Teaching – Autonomous Learning Environments

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Chía, 2013

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in English Language

Teaching – Autonomous Learning Environments

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Chía, Colombia

August 2013

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my family, my teachers, colleagues and students for their continued support and contribution to the successful completion of this stage of my life. This is to Jenny, my parents and my siblings for your love, patience and support; you are my motivation to succeed and to do my best every day. To Professors Esperanza, Luz Dary, and Jermaine for their professional insights; to my friend and colleague Luisa for her priceless and always generous help and friendship; to my friend and colleague Carmen Celina, and to UIS, for keeping doors always open to me; and to my students at UIS for their interest in participating in this study with unmatched dedication.

To all of you, thank you!

Abstract

This paper presents the findings resulting from a study conducted online with a population of students of an English teacher education program. The study intended to inquire into the role that peer feedback played in the development or maintenance of coherence in non-fictional narrative blog writing. Participant students received online training in blog creation and maintenance, in feedback, and in the development of textual coherence. They produced narrative blog entries and peer feedback, which were doubly assessed to examine the possible relationship between feedback and coherence. Learners' logs were also kept to obtain second-order data. Data were collected via computer- and internet-based tools and later analyzed from a grounded approach. Findings suggest that peer-feedback and blogging can act as boosting factors to help students enhance or maintain levels of coherence in text, provided that some conditions are met within the students' cognitive and affective domains. Results reveal the potential of student-centered strategies to enhance learning and foster autonomy through a higher degree of student control over learning. In addition, this study proposes that new language assessment paradigms be applied in the classroom, acknowledging student peers as a valid and reliable source of assessment information. Finally, the possibility is left open for new, innovative practices to be initiated by the population of this study, once they become in-service teachers.

Keywords: writing, blog, peer feedback, CALL, coherence, autonomy, assessment, community-building, cognition, affection, teacher education

Resumen

Se presentan los hallazgos de un estudio realizado en línea con una población de estudiantes de licenciatura en inglés. Se proponía indagar sobre el rol ejercido por la retroalimentación entre pares en el desarrollo o mantenimiento de la coherencia en la escritura narrativa y no ficcional a través de los blogs. Los participantes recibieron formación en la creación y mantenimiento de un blog, en el intercambio de retroalimentación, y en el desarrollo de coherencia textual. Estos, a su vez, produjeron entradas narrativas de blog e intercambiaron comentarios de retroalimentación, todo lo cual fue evaluado dos veces para establecer la posible relación entre la retroalimentación y la coherencia textual. También se crearon y recolectaron diarios de aprendizaje con el fin de obtener datos de segundo orden de los estudiantes. Todos los datos se recolectaron a través del computador o de internet y fueron analizados desde el enfoque de la teoría fundada. Los hallazgos sugieren que la retroalimentación entre pares y los blogs pueden actuar como factores potenciadores en el mejoramiento o mantenimiento de la coherencia en un texto escrito, a través de la intervención de los dominios cognitivo y afectivo del estudiante. Los resultados revelan el potencial de las estrategias centradas en el estudiante para mejorar el aprendizaje y para promover la autonomía a través de un mayor control del estudiante sobre su aprendizaje. Adicionalmente, se propone la aplicación de nuevos paradigmas de evaluación del lenguaje, que reconozcan al estudiante como una fuente válida y confiable de información evaluativa. Finalmente, se abre la posibilidad para que la iniciación de prácticas de aula innovadoras en el futuro desempeño profesional de los participantes.

Palabras clave: escritura, blog, retroalimentación entre pares, CALL, coherencia, autonomía, evaluación, construcción de comunidad, cognición, afectividad, formación docente

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The present paper aims at exploring and documenting whether there is a possible relationship between peer feedback given on written personal narratives and the development of coherence in students' informal writing. It attempts to do so through the use of weblogs, or blogs, as an interactive tool that allows for one-to-many communication, as well as feedback from blog followers. The idea originated from an earlier, undocumented and unpublished class initiative that involved students in the use of blogs through class assignments. In that case, students wrote informally about several topics as the content of the syllabus was covered, and their participation, not the quality of their output, was assessed.

By the end of the initiative the researcher observed that the vast majority of the students had become involved in the activity and had eagerly read and commented on their peers' compositions. Some even decided to write about themselves, or posted other materials (e.g., visuals) to share with the class. The students acknowledged having found the activities rewarding, reporting a change from reluctance to participate into appreciation of the task. However, no observations were made on the quality of writing or on how comments from peers shaped students' subsequent posts.

Statement of the Problem

Young students' contact with technology is increasing on a daily basis. Their online time is longer every day, from their laptops, smart phones and other internet-enabled devices. Research in the United States, for example, reveals that "nine in ten (93%) teens have a computer or have access to one at home [...and] about three in four (74%) teens ages [sic] 12-17 say they

access the internet on cell phones, tablets and other mobile devices at least occasionally” (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013, p. 2). This trend is not too different in Colombia which is the country in America where it is cheapest to buy a computer (16% cheaper than in the US) and to equip it with internet access. The Colombian Government has implemented different measures and policies to make technology accessible: low- and mid-range computers (of about USD \$1100 or less) are tax-exempt and so is the cost of Internet access to the middle class and to the lowest-earning population. Thus, Colombian teenagers are not far from following the trends in the US as to the use of computers and access to the Internet; it is increasingly common to see them clutching smart phones to keep up to date with the latest post on their favorite social network or to chat with friends online, and if they happen to have missed something, they will always find a way to catch up. They complement their real lives with the online environments where they have projected their personalities and where their circles of friends now are. If you are their friend, you need to be in their social network circles; it is a must if you want to belong.

Thus, the interest arose to see to what extent, if at all, a more systematic, documented and focused way of using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could help their learning outcomes. Writing is, to the researcher, the most difficult skill to develop in an English class. It requires attention, practice, monitoring and feedback from the teacher, which cannot always be achieved when other content in the syllabus need to be covered; this often results in a higher development of students’ oral skills compared to that of their written ones. That is the conflict that motivated this writing-related project.

The focus of this study was the incorporation of out-of-class blogging into an EFL course as a tool to observe whether the development of coherence in informal writing could be aided by peer feedback. In doing so, students wrote personal narratives outside the classroom,

individually, and shared them with some of their peers. The researcher chose the narrative genre as it could be approached from a more informal perspective and its outcomes could originate from everyday situations at school, or from the content usually found in the class syllabus.

The objectives here described were for undergraduate student-teachers at Common European Framework Reference (CEFR) B1-B2 level of proficiency in English. The study had each student maintain a personal blog to share with his/her peers, to exchange feedback on compositions. The researcher and the teacher were different in this study: the teacher directed the face-to-face English classes, and engaged in the study as an assessor of the students' written products. The researcher, in turn, was a participant-observer who guided students in the blogging process, trained them in concepts such as feedback and coherence, and, like the teacher, assessed the artifacts produced by the students.

Research Question and Objectives

The following research question, general objective and specific objective reflect the focus of this project.

Research Question

To what extent does peer feedback on blogs written outside the classroom shape students' writing of informal, personal narrative texts with specific regards to coherence?

Objectives

General Objective

To identify the relationship, if any, between intra-group peer feedback and the development of coherence in writing through the use of Blogger™ as a tool to write outside the classroom.

Specific Objective

To document the effects, if any, that peer feedback on blog entries has on students' writing of informal, personal narrative texts outside the classroom.

Rationale

As mentioned above, the problem at which this study was aimed arose from class observations of teaching initiatives that were not systematically documented. These led to questions that might be answered through research and whose answers might turn out to be of significant potential for classroom learning. Since the development of writing takes a greater deal of time and systematic effort than do other language skills, the researcher considered worth exploring the possibilities of improvement that may lie in the incorporation of everyday technology into EFL. This study was supported greatly by Ducate & Lomicka's findings that students have positive experiences writing blogs, and that blogging could prove useful in helping them "learn from their peers and improve their vocabulary and writing" (2008, p. 22).

Although some of the literature has approached the use of blogging in educational contexts cautiously (e.g. Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Murray & Hourigan, 2008; Wang, 2009;

Wu, 2006), there is yet much to be found about its usefulness in the classroom, as acknowledged by Godwin-Jones (2006, as cited in Ducate and Lomicka, 2008):

Blogs by their nature and page structure encourage feedback and represent both a reading and a writing activity. In the best of cases, this kind of online writing stimulates debate, furthers critical analysis, and encourages articulation of ideas and opinions” (p. 10).

It could be suggested, then, that blogging can prove effective in helping students improve their writing skills by making the prompt exchange of feedback possible. Blog writing, as well, can give students a chance to assess their work from their own perspective and from that of their peers; it can also lead them to reevaluate work according to the way they see their peers perform and to how their posts are responded to. A suggestion like this is also made by Robertson (2011) who emphasizes that social support is important, and that students do pay attention to their peers’ work. She quotes a student who claimed to have found the keeping of a learning journal through blogs useful, mainly because he could establish communication with peers who he considered could help him advance in his own project. However, Robertson warns, caution must be taken to avoid demoralizing students with low self-efficacy who might feel down when they see their peers’ accomplishments. Robertson suggests that “it might therefore be useful for the teacher to look out for posts which might inadvertently make peers feel bad and put them in context for the rest of the study group” (2011, p. 1636). Thus, this study expected that blogging would help students take steps towards the development of learning autonomy with an easily-accessible web 2.0 tool. Also, the strategy could be replicated by other teachers in other contexts to make the best use of it, to make the writing-development process more effective and efficient for both teachers and learners.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

The following is a discussion of the constructs that underlie the study and what they represent, as well as similar studies.

Blogging and Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL)

It is not easy to define a blog, and there is no current consensus so as to what a blog is. Since there are so many variations, blogs are not regarded from a prescriptive perspective for this study, but instead their definition was to be adapted to its needs. Banks (2008), for example, has found it difficult to provide a definition of blogging:

If you want a pure definition of a blog, you should probably select the one that makes the most sense, or make up your own, because just what a blog is, or what a blog should be, is often a bone of contention. It is sometimes easier to say that a certain site is a blog than to define “blog”. (p. xix)

It would be accurate to say that blogs are web sites, or web logs that allow someone to write or post about anything they feel like. Demopoulos (2006) adds to this reflection by acknowledging: “it comes as no surprise that there are no rules, for these mediums are so new. No one knows where they may lead, and there are no “best practices” or large body of experience to guide us” (p. 2).

Other authors have approached the nature of blogs with a more-or-less accurate definition for the purposes in this study. Silver and Hayder (2009) state that:

A blog, which is short for weblog, is a website that usually contains regular entries like any other kind of log [and that] can be of various types such as commentary, descriptions of events, photos, videos, personal remarks, or political ideas. They are usually displayed in reverse chronological order [...and] can be organized in a variety of ways [...]. A blog is a special type of website that gets updated regularly [, which] behaves more like an online diary wherein the blogger posts regular updates. Hence, blogs are dynamic with ever-changing content. A blog can be updated with new content and the old content can be changed or deleted at any time. (p. 7)

The former definitions of blogs are accurate as to what the blogger can do. However, they fail at addressing the interactional nature of blogs, which is of relevance to this study as blogs can become tools for community-building and collaborative learning. As Hyland (2009) points out, blogs “have emerged as distinctive kinds of texts with characteristic ways of commenting, arguing, interacting and making sense. Analysis of the language can therefore reveal something of how language helps users to interact and construct social identities and communities” (p. 225).

Blogging allows for several constructivist affordances due to its interactive and community-oriented nature: through their interaction, both the writer and the audience construct knowledge and democratically broaden their view of the world. While the former finds a way to have his or her voice heard in a community that has interest in his or her ideas, the latter acts as a live body that reacts in exactly the same way as any face-to-face community would. Blogging is a constant exercise of dialogue. Likewise, the very nature of blogs as technology-mediated writing shapes the ways in which a writer engages in a writing task. Supporting this affirmation is

Hyland's (2009) list of some effects of electronic technology on writing, five of which have been highlighted in italics due to their close relevance to this study:

- Change creating, editing, proofreading and formatting processes
- Combine written texts with visual and audio media more easily
- *Encourage non-linear writing and reading processes through hyper-text links*
- Challenge traditional notions of authorship, authority and intellectual property
- Allow writers access to more information and to connect that information in new ways
- *Change relationships between writers and readers as readers can often "write back"*
- *Blur traditional oral and written channel distinctions*
- Introduce possibilities for constructing and projecting new social identities
- *Facilitate entry to new on-line discourse communities*
- Increase marginalisation of writers who are isolated from new writing technologies
- *Offer writing teachers new challenges and opportunities for classroom practice* (pp. 58, 59)

Thus, for the purposes of this study, a blog is defined as a personal web site where an individual can post his or her opinions, feelings, perspectives, narrations, reactions and many other means of expression making use of written prose, pictures, sound, video, or any other tool made available by the blog-service provider. In this study, any posted entry was available for the learning community to see and comment on, which was a sensible characteristic if collaborative learning was expected. It is important, though, to narrow the use, if not the definition of blogs for the purposes of this study. Since this study mainly aimed at analyzing coherence in written narratives, the researcher worked with blogs whose post contents were primarily made up of

written prose, though visual content was accepted at the student's discretion. It is important, too, to make the reader aware that the words *entry* and its more colloquial analog *post* are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

Blogs are web services that can be accessed through the use of computers. It follows, then, that this study incorporates theory and practice regarding CALL. Despite extensive work on CALL, a specific definition is hard to find that accurately describes what it entails because of its constantly-changing nature. Computer use, in broad terms, is the common factor to consider teaching and learning practices within the realms of CALL. Different authors provide similar-yet-different definitions: Richards and Schmidt (2002) denote CALL to be “the use of a computer in the teaching or learning of a second or foreign language” (p. 101). Beatty (2003), in turn, defines it as “any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language” (p. 7). Finally, CALL is defined by Chapelle and Jamieson (2008) as “the area of applied linguistics concerned with the use of computers for teaching and learning a second language” (p. 1). The first definition is, of all the three, the broadest, incorporating *teaching* and *learning*, as well as the conceptions of *second* and *foreign* language. To sum up, CALL is, for the purposes here set, enhancement of language learning with the aid of computers, be it with or without the help of a teacher; this closely relates to Beatty's (2003) definition: “[an] amorphous or unstructured discipline, constantly evolving both in terms of pedagogy and technological advances in hardware and software” (p. 8). From this perspective, there cannot be theoretical constraints or rules that govern learning a language with the use of a computer, given that every context and way in which it is used can, and probably will be different. CALL, in turn, can be considered an umbrella term covering other terms relating to it, and to the nature of learning through mediation or learning with the aid of a computer. For this study, a subterm of CALL can be applied given its web-based nature: WELL—Web Enhanced Language Learning, which,

according to Beatty (2003), “refers to CALL that focuses on the WWW as the medium for instruction” (p. 10). Blogs are web-based environments where people can post entries about anything they want. Different from Beatty’s definition, they were not used as a medium of instruction in this study, but instead as a medium to try to foster language development.

As to the use of blogs in education, Ducate and Lomicka (2008) carried out a one-year study with intermediate university-level students of French and German. In their action research project, the authors aimed at observing the steps through which students progressed from blog readers to blog writers; they also examined the students’ reactions to blogging as well as what characterized self-expression in non-native speakers of a foreign language. The study was conducted in two six-month-long stages; in the first one, students had the chance to follow a particular blog writer, or blogger, with whom they felt identified due to their interests and their culture. The second stage had the participants maintain their own blogs on whose posts they were to receive peer feedback. The participants were trained in the use of discourse strategies such as agreeing and disagreeing.

It was noted by Ducate and Lomicka (2008) that blogs provided students with a larger audience, sense of purpose, and friendlier interaction from peers than they usually would find in the traditional teacher-oriented journal. Eight steps were identified as those the participants went through to move from blog readers to blog writers. It follows, from the authors’ findings, that students should be acquainted with the blogging phenomenon before having them maintain their own blogs, especially if blogging is to be done in a foreign language; this is why an entry stage was implemented in the study presented in this paper. Ducate & Lomicka (2008) mention some advantageous aspects of blogging; not only do they claim that their participants evidenced linguistic improvement, but they also emphasize that “due to this learning potential, students reported that they see blogs as having high academic value and would like to use blogs again in a

future FL class” (p. 22). The authors also highlight that personal topics were very engaging to students to the point of encouraging participation beyond the levels usually seen in the classroom.

A similar study regarding the use of blogs and peers’ feedback was conducted by Quintero (2008) in a public university in Bogotá, Colombia. The study was carried out with a group of Colombian undergraduate students interacting with a group of Canadian learners; all were foreign language learners. The study aimed at 1) describing the insights obtainable from a blog writing experience, and 2) analyzing the way in which feedback (teachers’ and peers’) could shape Colombian students’ writing in EFL (Quintero, 2008, p. 23). The results showed that blogging led students to engage as a community of writers that generated the need for communication and interaction; additionally, blogging allowed learners to portray their own selves, giving them the chance to approach writing within a different, inviting environment, to express their view of the world. As to feedback, it is stated by the author that a coaching stance, rather than a judging one, was seen as profitable by the learners as it played a scaffolding role to help students move from simple to more complex texts (Quintero, 2008, pp. 43-44).

Other studies have been carried out, such as Robertson’s (2011), which support the claimed usefulness of blogs in the process of language learning and the development of learner autonomy. In her study, Robertson resorts to Dewey’s definition of reflection as the process of actively and persistently considering any belief or knowledge, using supporting evidence to come to a particular conclusion. Robertson (2011) goes on to say that “reflection is indeed an important aspect of self-directed learning, but self-directed learning encompasses other high level skills which can also be developed through blogging” (p. 1629). In her study, the author shows that her participants used their learning journal blogs while planning their learning, monitoring progress, and evaluating their own performance, among other autonomy-related activities. The study was carried out with students of an introductory module in a course called “Interactive Systems” in an

engineering-focused institution in Scotland. In the course, a design diary was a requirement and a course assessment element, along with peer reviews and the design of an interactive three-dimensional pet. The author used the design diaries (via blogs) to analyze the students' self-directed skills, after the students had become acquainted with the elements required in a learning log.

In her study, Robertson (2011) defines reflection as “the process of exploring an experience in order to learn something new from it, [which] is an important aspect of self-directed learning” (p. 1631). Her findings reveal that “most of the students were capable of reflective writing which gave an account of their self-directed learning strategies” (p. 1635). She mentions, nonetheless, that planning sub-skills were used less frequently than were evaluation sub-skills, and that “students were more inclined to evaluate their task performance directly after lab sessions and less likely to evaluate their progress on the project as a whole” (p. 1636). Although this is not the most promising finding in terms of full autonomy, it moves towards it. Similarly, an important consideration can be made about the usefulness of blogging to develop autonomy through interaction, even if blog entries are not reflective in content: the nature of blogs could potentially trigger participants' reflections on their own advancements by means of interaction via peer feedback. This reflection, in turn, could possibly exhibit the three elements that Boud (2001) proposed to be present in an *after-event* reflection process: *return to experience*, *attending to feelings* and *re-evaluation of experience*. Therefore, when students receive feedback on their work, they engage in communication with their readers, can reflect on what they did, how they felt and what they would do differently in future writing experiences.

Writing

The researcher has noted, from experience, that writing is one of the most difficult skills for students to develop. Besides, the approach that we teachers have adopted in the classroom is likely to have been acting as an obstacle to meaningful learning. In the typical English classroom learners do not write to communicate, but to complete tasks and to show mastery of grammar forms and vocabulary. In this regard, there has been debate on the nature of writing and the way in which a writer achieves text.

Taking the writer as the point of departure, an expressivist view of writing conceives thinking as a preceding step to writing; it also holds that “free expression of ideas can encourage self-discovery and cognitive maturation” (Hyland, 2009, p. 18). As further stated by Hyland (2009), writing is, from this perspective, a developmental process that cannot be learned nor defined narrowly based on notions of grammar accuracy. However, he adds, this view fails to offer clear theoretical principles to evaluate good writing.

Flower and Hayes (1981) proposed a theory on the cognitive processes of writing, in which they perceived it as a problem-solving situation. Their model conceived writing as a non-linear, even probably simultaneous set of inter-related elements: task environment, (i.e. decision to solve a rhetorical problem, and the text that is written so far) the writing process (i.e. planning, translating, and reviewing) and long-term memory (i.e. knowledge of topic, audience and writing plans). This model dominated, or still does, mainstream pedagogical approaches to writing perhaps due to its simplicity and potential for adoption in the classroom. However, as Hyland (2009) points, out, the model fails to describe *why* learners write the way they do, and leaves teachers alone as to how to advise their students to improve their writing practices (p. 23).

Another perspective to writing places greater emphasis on the performance of writing rather than on the cognitive processes that underlie it. Regarded as a situated act, Hyland (2009) defines it as:

[...] a social act that can occur within particular situations. It is therefore influenced both by the personal attitudes and prior experiences that the writer brings to writing and the impact of the specific political and institutional contexts in which it takes place. (p. 26)

For the current study, these three models or views are accepted as complementary. Blogging can support the development of writing through self-expression and self-discovery, although that would not be the only thing that counts towards the achievement of the objectives here outlined. As to cognitive theory, despite its poor explanatory power, it does provide useful insights to approach writing in the classroom. Finally, writing as a situated act can be observed in writing in a blog setting, where a confluence of internal and contextual elements exists. For the case of the present study, these internal and contextual elements could be seen in students' interest to engage in externally-initiated writing, as well as to share their products with a community of readers with whom they want to establish communication.

Pedagogically, two approaches to writing are worth mentioning, both of which are pertinent to this study when used from a principled perspective.

Hyland (2009) describes a text-oriented approach to writing, which, in turn, contains two sub-approaches: *texts as objects* and *texts as discourse*; the former views writing as a product - a disembodied entity devoid "from context and the personal experiences of writers and readers because meanings can be encoded in texts and recovered by anyone who speaks the same language as the writer" (pp. 8-9). The author goes on to describe this type of writing using the linguistic concept of "*langue*" as an exhibit of the writer's knowledge of forms and of his or her

awareness of rules to create texts. The pedagogical practices within this view of writing lead to learners being trained in accuracy, with the purpose of avoiding errors (p. 9). However, favoring form and accuracy over meaning poses a lot of difficulties for this study if learners are to build a community within which peer feedback is a core element to develop textual coherence.

Nonetheless, Hyland (2009) describes another sub-approach of a text-oriented approach: texts as discourse. The belief that when we write we aim to create meaning and we have a purpose in mind is crucial to consider this sub-approach as suitable for this study. The view of text as discourse represents a step forward where language is used with communication in mind; it regards writing as situated within a social context (Hyland, 2009, p. 12).

Blogging can be a powerful communication tool. Whatever is posted in a blog, the author knows, may, and probably will, be read by somebody in the cyberspace. When bloggers create and post an entry, they do so with the intention to communicate a message that might be interesting to someone, somewhere; they also do so with the hope of engaging in social interaction around the topic at hand. These practices lead to considering writing from an additional, expanding view, as proposed by Hyland (2009, p. 28): writing as social interaction.

Hyland (2009) expands the notion of context by including audience within the scope of writing. According to Nystrand (1989), meaning is elaborated through “a unique configuration and interaction of what both reader and writer bring to the text” (as cited in Hyland, 2009, pp. 30-31). Therefore, meaning does not lie in the text, “nor does it reside in the writer’s cognition [...]. It is created between the participants themselves” (Hyland, 2009, p. 31).

Viewing writing from a social perspective implies being aware that: 1) meaning is created dialogically between text and its audience through the relationship that readers can establish between contents and their own knowledge and experience; and 2) that coherence is understood as a construction in the reader’s mind, impossible to achieve only through effective use of

language rules and structures, without any consideration of the audience's reality. Blogs allow for these two considerations to be applied while writing; they allow for community-building through interactional comments, and they offer more than plain text to bring in context to text.

Coherence

A textual characteristic whose possible improvement this project aimed at evaluating was coherence. In general terms, coherence refers to the capacity of a text to “make sense.” That is, the elements of a text not only should cohere, but they need to “play along” in order to communicate a message effectively. It is then that the concept of coherence starts playing its role, being defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002) as “the relationships which link the meanings of utterances in a discourse or of the sentences in a text [...]”. In written texts, coherence refers to the way a text makes sense to the readers through the organization of its content, and the relevance and clarity of its concepts and ideas” (p. 85). Nunan (2007), in turn, defines coherence as “the extent to which discourse is perceived to ‘hang together’ rather than being a set of unrelated sentences of utterances” (p. 205). It follows from these definitions that coherence is a perceptual concept that exists in the reader's mind (Nunan, 2007, p. 205), and a characteristic that allows the reader to understand the discursive meaning of a text.

It is not easy to assess writing. There has been debate for decades on the most suitable way to determine the quality of a piece of written text. Yancey (1999, p. 484) reports three “waves” or approaches to writing assessment: the first one took the form of objective tests, the second consisted of holistic scoring, and the third wave has been dealing with the assessment of portfolios and programmatic assessment. The extent to which assessment exhibits validity and reliability has also been a matter of interest and back-and-forth debate, to the point that the two concepts are equally important in what Yancey calls “the third wave.” Assessing writing

analytically (with rubrics) is common, but as Yi (2013) reports, “there is little consistency in the approach to narrative writing assessment criteria” (p. 73). Therefore, in this study, an assessment rubric was devised taking into consideration the definitions of coherence offered by Richards and Schmidt (2002) and Nunan (2007) (see Chapter 3).

Informal Writing

Through blogging, this study aimed at seeing the extent to which coherence in informal narratives could, if at all possible, be improved. Then it is important to note what is considered informal writing. Harmer (2001) argues that the choice of structures and words is determined by a number of factors among which we can find genre, purpose, setting and channel, which operate on different levels of formality. Formality, then, he defines as a level of intimacy, or how distant or close the writer feels to his/her setting (p. 247). Harmer (2001) adds that

[...] a feeling of distance will make the use of well-formed sentences in writing a priority. It will suggest the use of full forms and written equivalencies in spoken communication. Closeness, on the other hand, leads to spontaneity so that in conversation the occurrence of ellipsis, non-clausal sentences, tags, hesitators, etc. is more common. (p. 248)

Harmer, then, considers informality as the choice of spontaneous language caused by the writer’s feeling of closeness to his or her readers. Since this study aimed to work within a community of fellow students, and given that a sense of fellowship was expected, Harmer’s distance-based definition serves for the purpose.

Narrative Text

There are various reasons why narrative texts were chosen in this study. Because it is not easy for everybody to handle a genre with which they are not acquainted—such as comparative or

argumentative writing–narrative writing offered an accessible option. Narrative writing implies, then, as suggested by Marchese and Forradelas (1991) that it “should comprehend one or various sequences at whose center exists a character defined by certain qualities [...] [and] a process of transformation that modifies the initial qualities or situation of the character as they were initially presented” (personal translation) (p. 280). Basically, a narrative text involves telling a story that can be your own, and whose center, in this case, could be the writer himself or any other person about whom the writer wants to speak. Similar definitions are offered for narrative texts, such as Beristáin’s (2006), “one of the types of discourse [...] and the presentation of some facts. [...] It is a type of story [where] a series of events are presented [that] develop in time and derive from each other, [...] offer simultaneously a relationship of consecutiveness and a logical relationship” (personal translation) (p. 352). Most, if not all, of the participants in this study were familiar with narrative texts. Additionally, attention was not paid to whether the participants’ blog entries really met the requirements of a narrative text, but basically that they told their own stories with their chosen sequence and organization.

Feedback

It is important to make students aware of how to achieve text coherence - without using unnecessary meta-language - in order to empower them to provide effective feedback to their peers. Since coherence and feedback were the core units of this study, the researcher trained the participants in providing feedback that could effectively add to the development of text coherence. Feedback has been defined in different ways, depending very much on the school of thought from where the definition originated. Seeing feedback as a tool to construct knowledge, this study considers suitable, among others, the approach provided by Richards & Schmidt

(2002) who define feedback as “comments or other information that learners receive concerning their success on learning tasks or tests, either from the teacher or other persons” (p. 199).

A good model of feedback was provided by Vigil and Oller in 1976 (as cited in Brown 2007) with their communication feedback model. With a set of traffic-light metaphors, the authors aim at discerning how affective feedback and cognitive feedback can serve for error correction in language classrooms. In short, affective feedback should determine whether the speaker should continue with his or her attempts to convey a message. Cognitive feedback, in turn, appears to be the point where corrective feedback is located and where error correction takes place (red or yellow lights) (p. 274). It is worth noting that green lights symbolize non-corrective feedback and that too many of them may lead to fossilization. For this study, it is believed that this model serves to illustrate that feedback must have a point: it should enable the learner to modify the language that is being produced, if any advancement is expected to be made. This affirmation is supported by Brookhart’s (2008) view of feedback:

Feedback can be very powerful if done well. The power of formative feedback lies in its double-barreled approach, addressing both cognitive and motivational factors at the same time. Good feedback gives students information they need so they can understand where they are in their learning and what to do next—the cognitive factor. Once they feel they understand what to do and why, most students develop a feeling that they have control over their own learning—the motivational factor. Good feedback contains information that a student can use, which means that the student has to be able to hear and understand it. (p. 2)

If a student is to take advantage of feedback, then the classroom should provide an environment where students feel that learning comes out of practice, as suggested by Brookhart (2008):

Good feedback should be part of a classroom assessment environment in which students see constructive criticism as a good thing and understand that learning cannot occur without practice. If part of the classroom culture is to always “get things right,” then if something needs improvement, it’s “wrong.” If, instead, the classroom culture values finding and using suggestions for improvement, students will be able to use feedback, plan and execute steps for improvement, and in the long run reach further than they could if they were stuck with assignments on which they could already get an A without any new learning. It is not fair to students to present them with feedback and no opportunities to use it. It is not fair to students to present them with what seems like constructive criticism and then use it against them in a grade or final evaluation. (p. 2)

Díaz (2010) conducted a study that examined the effects of peer-editing in the writing process and reported a series of positive aspects of fostering peer-to-peer interaction when entering a writing process in the classroom. Díaz (2010) considered peer-writing within the Vygotskian concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, ZPD, which views learning as a product of social interaction. The findings reflected the positive outcomes and the meaning of the experience and behavior that peer-editing can bring into the classroom, as follows: *scaffolding when peer editing* (which contained *students’ empowerment in collaboration with more capable peers, and contact*); and *thinking when revising* (containing *clarifying and noticing*) (pp. 92-94). In brief, the author concluded that peer-editing worked as: a cognitive tool that led students to use learning strategies while revising their partners’ papers; and also as a social-interactional tool that

helped novices internalize the expert's strategic processes as the latter provided guidance (Díaz, 2010, p. 96).

Unlike Díaz' (2010) study, peer-editing was not within the scope of this study, but peer feedback in the form of comments was. However, her findings are of great relevance as in both studies the concepts of community-building and social interaction play a central role to facilitate or enhance learning.

It could be concluded that, when handled well, feedback could prove useful in helping students gain better control over their own learning; it also could help them make informed decisions on the steps they should follow regarding what is expected of them and what they expect from themselves.

Autonomy

Good feedback, from the perspectives above, could be the stepping stone for the development of what Nunan & Lamb (1996) consider as autonomy—at this stage called “semi-autonomy”: “the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions” (p. 156). However, the achievement of autonomy is a process that poses struggle and difficulty, as rightly suggested by Dickinson (1987):

Autonomy is an ultimate; it constitutes a kind of nirvana to be achieved through struggle.

Learners do not achieve autonomy by being told to nor by being denied conventional class teaching [...] Autonomy is achieved slowly, through struggling towards it, through careful training and careful preparation on the teacher's part as well as on the learner's [...]”. (p. 2)

Given that autonomy is a goal, an ultimate, this study was an attempt to see whether the implementation of blogging and feedback could enable students to realize their current situation in the quest for autonomy, or if autonomy, from this perspective, is an elusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

This chapter has presented and discussed the theoretical underpinnings of this study. The constructs for this study were defined and their application made explicit. The next chapter presents the research design within which this study was carried out.

Chapter 3

Research Design

This chapter deals with a presentation of the nature of this study and its implications in the classroom. Presentation of the research question and the objectives is also made, as well as a description of the context in which this study was carried out. An account of the participants and of the data collection instruments is also given. Finally, a brief discussion is shown of the ethical considerations of the study and of the ways in which validity and reliability were achieved.

Type of Study

The present study falls within the action research paradigm. Action research, as defined by Sagor (1993, p. 7), is the process through which a teacher wants to improve his/her own work situation, motivated by what s/he is doing or should be doing. Nunan (1992), in turn, describes action research as the process initiated by classroom teachers who are “interested in exploring processes of teaching and learning in their own context [...]” (p. 18). Nunan’s perspective encompasses several possibilities of classroom inquiry that are not necessarily concerned with “change.” In his words, “a descriptive case study of a particular classroom, group of learners, or even a single learner counts as action research if it is initiated by a question, is supported by data and interpretation, and is carried out by a practitioner investigating aspects of his or her own context and situation” (p. 18).

Burns (1999) adds to this definition by arguing for action research as a true research process. She stands for action research as it:

addresses questions of real practical and theoretical interest to many educational practitioners [whose results] have the potential to be replicated by other teachers working in similar situations. Furthermore, teachers are involved in a genuine research process of data collection, analysis and interpretation, which contrasts with intuitive reflection. (p. 25)

Despite not currently being a practitioner, the researcher found motivation for this study in earlier undocumented pedagogical interventions made as a teacher—both individually and collaboratively—as well as in past class observations on students’ writing. Thus, the study’s population was a small group of students from the same educational environment in which the interventions and observations referred to had been implemented; they were, however, not under the researcher’s EFL instruction. In order to obtain valuable insights from the point of view of an insider, the course teacher played an important role in the stages of data collection and analysis. Thus, it follows from this that the data collected in this study reflected both emic and etic perspectives.

As to classroom implications, this action research study was thought of as a step towards a better understanding of the classroom realities, as well as a way to shed light on the processes of autonomous writing and how collaborative work can enhance students’ learning. For the researcher and the teacher, engaging in a study within the action research paradigm represented adopting a collaborative-work schema aiming to advance in the understanding and improvement of the commonly-observed classroom reality.

Research Question and Objectives

As mentioned earlier, this study originated from undocumented pedagogical interventions and teacher's observations on students' writing. Thus, the line of inquiry has to do with the extent to which a specific characteristic of writing can be shaped through a constant peer feedback process. The researcher chose blogs as the medium because they allow for free publication of texts as well as interaction among the members of the blog community. Blogs also enable a writer to incorporate other types of elements into the text, such as colors, pictures and hypertext, among many other options. The researcher believed that as students advanced in their EFL along with this project, they would acquire several tools to enrich a composition,—including peer feedback—which could render the writing process more effective. Based on these premises, the question in this project was:

To what extent does peer feedback on blogs written outside the classroom shape students' writing of informal, personal narrative texts with specific regards to coherence?

This question, in turn, had a general objective to guide the inquiry, the data collection and the corresponding analysis. The general objective was:

To identify the relationship, if any, between intra-group peer feedback and the development of coherence in writing through the use of Blogger as a tool to write outside the classroom.

Finally, one specific objective was set for this study. It kept direct relationship with the general objective and aimed at narrowing down its scope:

To document the effects, if any, that peer feedback on blog entries has on students' writing of informal, personal narrative texts outside the classroom.

Setting

The present study was developed at a public university setting. The participants were five students enrolled in a five-year teacher education program at Universidad Industrial de Santander called *Licenciatura en Inglés*. The program objectives are framed within the teaching mission of the Academic Unit where it belongs, which in its latest reform document reads (personal translation): “[The School of Languages] seeks, through an intellectual, critical and propositive exercise, to form well-trained teachers in the areas of knowledge required to take part in meaning-construction processes, communication skills, aesthetic judgment, optimal control of the mother tongue and of foreign languages in service of future generations” (Escuela de Idiomas - Universidad Industrial de Santander, 2009, p. 7). This mission provided the study with a context and purpose, as the alumni’s good language control is essential to achieve the mission of the Academic Unit. In turn, the teacher education program in mention has among its purposes to (personal translation) “educate teachers with an advanced communicative competence in English” (Escuela de Idiomas - Universidad Industrial de Santander, 2009, p. 19); among the characteristics of the training profile is educating teachers that are “competent in the use of the English language, competence understood as the grammatical, textual, pragmatic and sociolinguistic mastery of the language” (Escuela de Idiomas - Universidad Industrial de Santander, 2009, p. 23).

The participants were enrolled in a course called Advanced English, which is the last of four English levels aimed at enabling the future teacher to be proficient in the use of the English language. The following is the aim extracted from the course syllabus as stated by Escuela de Idiomas UIS (2009) in their latest curricular reform called *Plan de Reforma Académica de Licenciatura en Inglés*:

At this level, students will develop competence in understanding a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and in recognizing implicit meaning. They will be able to express themselves fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. They will be able to use the language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes as well as to produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices. (p. 126)

The English course consisted of 160 hours distributed in sixteen weeks (teen hours a week) during which students received input and practice on the four language skills, as well as instruction on grammar points. The core instructional material was Cunningham and Moore's *Cutting Edge Advanced*. The book proposes a task-based based approach, yet the teacher is allowed to decide whether to follow it or another method, or to adapt the lessons from a principled approach to language teaching.

Participants

The participants were teachers in training from 18 to 20 years of age. Their expected level of English was CEFR B2 to B2+, although some of them might have been at a slightly lower level. The course that they were enrolled in aimed to take them from B2+ to C1, so their

linguistic needs showed their relative mastery of the target language, being able to understand and talk about social and academic topics of relevance, using basic and complex structures, yet with slight limitations. Their communication strategies allowed them to communicate effectively in the target language, to some extent making use of repair strategies to prevent communication from breaking down. Compared to their aural and oral skills, their writing development was slightly behind, especially with regards to text content and organization. This was one of the reasons why initiatives were undertaken to help them develop better writing skills.

Researcher Role

The researcher and the class teacher were not the same in this study; however, it is important to highlight that, being a former full-time teacher of the program in which participants were enrolled, the researcher was closely related to the context of this study. As to daily pedagogical practice, a teacher was in charge of conducting the lessons, and she provided consent for carrying out this study in her class. Thus, the researcher's role was that of an outsider-observer, whereas pedagogical responsibility in day-to-day classes was taken by the course teacher. The teacher, as well, issued her assessment of students' blog entries, and that assessment was used as data to answer this study's research question. Data were collected 100% online from each student's blog and from the other data collection instruments, not requiring face-to-face interaction among any participant (students, teacher, or researcher) for the purposes of this study. The students, however, were known to the researcher from past courses in the teacher education program, and had developed a high mutual sense of teacher-student empathy. Finally, after being invited to participate, and informed of the objectives, nature, and ethical considerations of the present study, the students gave their written consent to participate freely and voluntarily.

Instruments and Procedures for Data Collection

The data for this study were collected in three ways: by collecting students' artifacts (blog entries) and assessing them from the perspective of the researcher and from the teacher, and by collecting students' learning logs.

Students' artifacts were independently assessed by the researcher and by the teacher in terms of their level of in-text coherence, and of how this level changed by means of peer feedback through the implementation of the study; the researcher and the teacher used the same rubric, yet they worked independently, to guarantee uniformity of criteria and to avoid bias (see Appendix 1). The rubric was used to assess each blog entry in terms of unity (relevance), clarity, and organization of ideas, as derived from Richards and Schmidt's (2002) definition of coherence. Moreover, following Nunan's (2007) premise that coherence can be a subjective perception, the rubric requested that both the teacher and the researcher provided qualitative information that supported their judgments. Because artifacts were created using blogs, the feedback comments received from peers were also assessed to analyze the extent to which they were affecting the development of coherence in writing as students produced subsequent texts. Artifacts, Freeman (1998, p. 95) says, are "student work," potentially useful in providing information on the students' learning, to be collected in the classroom or while teaching takes place. In this study, however, artifacts were not derived from teaching sessions but this did not deprive them of their potential to provide data on a student's learning. Finally, a double assessment approach was decided on because, while the researcher was immersed in the implementation of the study and knew the strategies and training that students had undergone, the teacher's view would be useful in determining the quality of students' artifacts in terms of

coherence and of the effects of peer feedback on students' subsequent writings. It follows from this that an *etic* perspective of the researcher and the teacher was incorporated into the study, although, to some extent, the teacher would provide *emic* insights as well, by being closely related to students' language development in the classroom.

With regards to learning logs, students were asked to reflect upon the process they undertook before, while, and after they wrote the blog entries (see Appendix 2). Freeman (1998) classifies learning logs or "learning journals" as an instrument to collect second-order data on students' thoughts and learning (p. 95). Learners' logs, then, were used to have students reflect on the coherence-development process that they went through. From the moment students started writing, incorporating their peers' feedback and producing another text that they considered more coherent, they were asked to reflect and report their experiences in writing, by answering researcher-designed questions. Thus, the usefulness of logs lay in their potential for obtaining data from an *emic* perspective, which was useful in establishing the perceived and actual relationship between peer feedback and coherence. Note: students were offered both a Spanish and English version of this instrument, to reduce the negative impact that problems associated with language competence could have on students' reflections.

In this study, three sources of data were used to allow for data triangulation and methodological triangulation as defined by Denzin and cited in Freeman (1998, p. 97), to ensure validity and to have a broader picture of students' progress: students' artifacts and their independent assessment by the researcher and the teacher. To give the study validity, the data collection instruments were chosen and designed to be accessible for the population, keeping in mind the data that they could reveal. They were designed according to the study's objectives, and, due to the procedural impossibility to pilot them, the researcher had them expert-check validated by experienced researchers both during the process of research design and upon

presentation in a research symposium. Finally, reliability was aimed at through the process of double assessment of the artifacts, together with the results of the learning logs. That is to say, should data from the researcher's assessment, from the teacher's assessment, and from the learners' logs exhibit consistency in quality or in time, the data analysis and interpretations would be deemed reliable.

The data were analyzed from a grounded approach. The grounded approach is defined by Nunan (1992) as “the practice of deriving theory from data rather than the other way round” (p. 57). Similarly, Freeman (1998) describes this approach as the procedure of obtaining information from data, and from it, generating theory (p. 100). Thus, no *a priori* categories or theory was used to analyze the data in this study. Burns supports this approach by arguing that “grounded research enables the researcher to adopt interpretations that are motivated by data derived from the actual social situation [...] rather than by theoretical constructs alone” (1999, p. 25). The data analysis implemented in this study was the four-stage process proposed by Freeman: naming, grouping, finding relationships, and displaying. Naming involves generating codes to label the data with which groups can be made to associate terms into categories. Finding relationships implies observing the structure that arises connecting the groups of codes, as well as identifying outliers: those pieces of data that do not fit into the whole picture. Finally, displaying represents setting out the patterns and relationships visible from the categories to make interpretations concrete and visible (Freeman, 1998, pp. 99-100). Other authors, such as Strauss and Corbin (1990) use a different terminology to define the steps of the grounded approach. Thus, naming and grouping could be equated to what Strauss and Corbin (1990) define as open coding, or the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data (p. 61). This process allows the researcher to assign codes arising from data conceptualization, or *in-vivo*, to be later grouped together as they pertain to the same phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, pp. 65-

69). Finding relationships, in turn, could be logically equated to what Strauss and Corbin (1990) define as axial coding, or “the set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (p. 96).

Ethical Considerations

The participants in this study volunteered to participate in the project. Those who chose to do so were asked to provide consent for the researcher to access their information and use their data. A consent letter was handed out for their consideration (see Appendix 3); they also received an oral explanation of the nature and objectives of the study, and of the implications of their participation. Confidentiality was guaranteed, following Burns’ (1999) statement about its importance: “confidentiality ensures that the identities of those involved in the research are not made public, thus reducing the likelihood that they may be judged negatively by colleagues or supervisors” (p. 71). However, it is important to clarify at this point that confidentiality was with regard to outsiders, as students, the teacher and the researcher knew exactly who the authors of the blogs were. In their consent letters and in the oral presentation of the study, students were informed of their right to limit the data they wanted to release for the researcher’s use, thus complying with the principle of negotiation. Burns (1999) defines it as the process through which researcher and participant determine the extent to which data are accessed, so giving the participant the right to issue a veto on the release of data (p. 71).

The teacher was also informed of the nature of this study and her consent was requested to provide the researcher with access to her group of students, sometimes probably during class time, and to request her qualitative assessment of students’ artifacts for analysis purposes (see Appendix 4).

Timeline

The timeline for this study was designed based on a projection of the participants' availability. It shows the phases proposed for this study. However, it was subjected to modifications due to time constraints and unforeseen events (see appendix 5).

This chapter has discussed the nature of this study and its implications in the classroom. The participating students have been identified and so has the setting in which the researcher conducted the study. Ethical considerations, in turn, have been identified and theoretically supported. Similarly, data collection instruments have been presented and supported from theoretical perspectives and from their potential for validity, and procedures for data collection were described and commented on their potential to provide reliability. The next chapter presents an account of the plan for the pedagogical intervention and of the actual implementation of the study.

Chapter 4

Pedagogical Intervention and Implementation

This section comprises a description of the pedagogical intervention implemented in this study. The intervention was intended to take place in a ten-week period, five hours a week, starting with the moment when the participants began to get acquainted with the necessary web tools for the project. Four stages were implemented, all of which were labeled with guiding questions for the participants' better comprehension of the stages of the project. Communication was maintained during the intervention process via asynchronous tools such as email or SMS, and synchronous tools such as online chat, video calls or telephone calls.

Stage 1 – Exploration

Guiding question: What are blogs?

This stage sought to get students acquainted with the concept, the form and the use of blogs by millions of people around the world. The researcher presented the students with some blogging services on the web such as Wordpress, Blogger, Xanga, and LiveJournal. This gave students a clear idea of what blogs are and what people typically post in a blog. Following that, students were each able to choose an external blogger to follow, in an attempt to observe the way in which the author posted entries and dealt with his or her community of readers; the blogging service to choose from was Blogger, accessible through free sign-up at www.blogger.com. This stage was to be completed in a two-week period, during which students were constantly

observing the writing behavior of the external blogger. Support and coaching were provided via online tools synchronously and asynchronously.

Stage 2 – Conceptual Development

Guiding questions: What is coherence? What is feedback? How do they make my texts better?

Development of two key conceptual elements for this study was sought in this stage: coherence and feedback. The researcher presented the students with the concept of coherence in an inductive manner, using sample narrative texts and guiding them towards the development of a clear understanding of the concept. Coherence was not dealt with as an abstraction, as it was much more practical to approach it from a real basis upon which students could come to their own conclusions; thus, three features that render a text coherent were presented, as concluded from the definitions by Richards and Schmidt (2002) and Nunan (2007): logical order, unity of ideas and clarity of sentences. Both coherent and incoherent authentic sample texts were presented to students for them to notice and develop awareness of such coherence-creating features.

Feedback, in turn, was presented to students as a process of interaction with the potential to allow for the improvement of performance. The researcher held awareness-raising sessions with the objective of helping the students understand the constructive nature of feedback; in this sense, they were expected to understand that feedback is not limited to praising, commenting on, or criticizing someone's work. Thus, the researcher introduced students to two important elements that constitute good feedback: the affective factor and the cognitive factor. It was expected that students would regard feedback as a motivational and cognitive tool for

improvement. In addition, it was expected that they would become aware that the extent to which these factors were taken into account while giving feedback could enhance or reduce somebody's receptiveness as well as determine their future incorporation of the contents of given suggestions.

The concepts of coherence and feedback were simplified and presented using concrete and practical examples and exercises. As to the former, students were asked to assess the sample narrative texts mentioned above in terms of the degree of coherence that they exhibited. For the latter, students gave mock feedback to the authors of the sample narratives, and, as a group with the researcher, assessed it on its appropriateness and its possible usefulness, should the author ever receive it. This stage was completed alongside the first stage, in daily one-hour, virtual, synchronous group sessions.

Stage 3 – Blog Creation and Maintenance

Guiding questions: How do I create and maintain my own blog? What will I write about in my blog?

This stage dealt with each student's initial steps on the blog, the selection of topics to write about, and the actual posting of the entries to be collected and first-cut analyzed by the researcher and the teacher. The researcher did this analysis in order to ensure the smooth flow of the pedagogical implementation and to apply changes if required. The entire stage was to be completed in four weeks, for a total amount of twenty hours.

Step 1 – One week

At this stage, students were asked to sign up for Blogger, to use it as the blogging service to post their entries. To do so they created, if they did not have one already, a free Google™

account that granted access to the complete Google portfolio, including Blogger. Having signed up, students created a personal profile and chose a display name to sign their entries; this could be their real name or a pseudonym. One daily hour was used, adding up to five hours in the week.

Step 2 – One week

Students started their blogging process by posting an introductory entry on their blog, in order for others to read and get to know each other a little more. At this stage, students explored the options and available tools to customize their blogs so that they reflected their personal traits and likes more closely; they could change colors, rearrange the layout and upload pictures, among other options. The researcher provided support and coaching on this process via synchronous or asynchronous virtual communication, upon request.

When the blog was customized, students chose their blogging topics. Each student could make their selection out of a pool worked out from the contents of the course book. In their classes, students were using *Cutting Edge Advanced*, a task-based book comprising 10 units. The topic pool contained eight topics, and each student was to pick six to post about, in any order. The topic pool was as follows:

- *Mixed emotions*: We've always been in that situation where we don't really know if we're happy or sad, excited or scared. What about you? Have you ever felt like this? Tell us.
- *Awkward situations*: Have you had this neighbor that's¹ difficult to deal with? Or a cousin that won't ask for permission to use your things? Write about a moment

¹ Note to the reader: Although the more formal, written form should be "who's," the original question was left as is, to keep formality low.

when you had to deal with an awkward / uncomfortable / disgusting situation and tell us what you did.

- *Learning experiences:* What have you learned in life that not many people have? Can you cook, do the accounts, knit or fix a car? Tell us about that learning experience: did you like it? Has it been helpful?
- *Money:* How have your experiences with money been? Are there any anecdotes that you would like to talk about? Your first purchase with your own money? The first salary you earned? The best or worst purchase ever? Those times when you felt rich / broke?
- *Living together:* How easy is it to live with other people? Have you had experiences where it's been difficult? How about a nice experience living with somebody else? Let us know about it.
- *Likes / Hates:* What did you use to like/hate before? Do you still feel so? For example: did you like school / a particular TV program? Why? Any reason in particular?
- *Honesty:* Do you have any particular experience about lying or telling the truth? Do you remember the first time you lied? What was it about? What about the consequences? We'll keep your secrets safe.
- *Time travel:* If you could travel back in time, what would you like to repeat or change? Why? What makes that experience good/bad?

This step took one daily hour, amounting to five hours in the week.

Step 3 – Two weeks

Students posted the first entry about one of their selected topics. At this point, students posted their narratives or anecdotes and others read them without making any kind of comments on each other's work. Then, the researcher collected the first entry as an artifact and first-cut analyzed it; the entry was also sent to the teacher for assessment. Next, students posted their second entry, after which peer feedback interaction started taking place. This phase took up to ten hours in the two weeks, depending on the swiftness of students' feedback and in the hope of not overwhelming them with extra work.

It was important to guarantee that feedback was useful and accurate. Useful feedback would be incorporated by its intended addressee if it showed areas of improvement and ways to improve. As well as that, feedback had to be accurate. It was to address text coherence rather than other features such as word order, word choice or mechanics, which were not very relevant to this study; however, students were reminded that very poor language control would indeed become an obstacle to coherence. Therefore, the researcher asked them to provide feedback taking into account a non-collectable checklist that both guided them through the process of effective feedback-giving and reminded them of the characteristics that render a text coherent (see Appendix 6). This was done to reduce subjectivity to an acceptable level, and to channel students' feedback-giving efforts into providing useful contributions rather than deviating it into malicious criticism.

Students were advised not to give feedback on a *quid pro quo* basis, so that they avoided giving priority feedback to the person or people that had commented on their work in the first place. Instead, they were encouraged to exchange feedback with all the members of the group in order to guarantee that every participant received feedback, rather than having it all concentrated on a single, popular entry.

The second entry was also collected and first-cut analyzed by the researcher and sent to the teacher for assessment. The objective of collecting two initial artifacts had to do with the need to obtain data on the students' writing skills at the beginning of the study. The second entry, as mentioned earlier, received peer feedback, which started the posting-feedback-posting sequence. In this sequence, feedback on an entry was to be incorporated by the author in the next one.

Stage 4 – Feedback incorporation and reflection process

Guiding questions: What can others tell me about my posted entries? How do I feel about it?

This stage sought to have students post their midway and final entries of the study, incorporating as much peer feedback as possible. As well as that, students were asked to engage in a reflection process in order to obtain data on the procedures followed to post each entry. The researcher first-cut analyzed these reflective instruments and the results of this analysis supported the changes made in the pedagogical intervention. An example of these changes was the researcher's asking the participating students to either rewrite or make longer their reflective instruments; otherwise, the learning logs would have rendered information that would not be usable for the purposes of this study. This entire stage was to take place in four weeks, adding up to a total of twenty hours.

Step 1 – Two weeks

Here students posted their third and fourth entries, which were expected to incorporate peer feedback from previous entries. The researcher collected these entries, carried out a first-cut analysis and issued his assessment taking into account the relationships that could be established

between the feedback received earlier and the students' current artifacts; the teacher proceeded in the same way. It is worth noting that the assessment rubric used included a section devoted specifically to feedback, and the judgments were made in qualitative terms. Starting at this stage, students were requested to keep a learning log where they reflected on the process they were undergoing to post their entries. Similarly, reflection was expected on the extent to which students felt peer feedback or indirect feedback to be useful in shaping their subsequent entries. This stage took up to fifteen hours, five hours a week, in which students were asked to post entries, give feedback and reflect on the process.

Step 2 – Two weeks

The last two entries were posted at this stage. Students posted their fifth and sixth entries and engaged in the same reflection process as they did in the previous step. Students did not receive feedback on the sixth entry as it was the last one. These two entries were collected as artifacts and first-cut analyzed by the researcher and assessed by the teacher in search of establishing possible connections between feedback on earlier posts and the product now shown. This stage required ten hours for students to post their entries and reflect on the process.

When the pedagogical intervention ended, six artifacts had been collected and double-assessed on their level of coherence and on the relationships between feedback and performance. The researcher, then, performed the data analysis on these assessments. Additionally, the students' learning logs were analyzed in search of data on self-assessment of work, on the procedures followed to post their entries, and on their perceptions of the blogging and feedback processes. Although the line of inquiry of this study did not include students' perceptions on the writing process, valuable explanatory insights arose from these reflections, especially when the degree of coherence in artifacts remained unchanged or unrelated to prior feedback.

Timeline

The following table shows the timeline of the stages of pedagogical intervention in this study.

Stages 1 and 2 - Exploration and Conceptual Development	
Timing	Weeks 1 and 2
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-blogging exploration (ongoing) • Following an external blogger (ongoing) • Raising awareness of the concepts of coherence and feedback (One daily hour) • Raising awareness of the coherence-constituting characteristic of a text, and evaluating a real-life blog entry in this respect (One daily hour) • Raising awareness of the elements that render feedback useful, and putting it to practice by creating “mock” feedback to be internally assessed by the group of students (One daily hour)
Stage 3 - Blog Creation and Maintenance	
Timing	Weeks 3 – 6
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signing up for Google and Blogger • Profile creation • Posting of introductory entry • Blog customization • Entry topic selection • Posting of first entry (uncommented on) • Researcher’s collection and first-cut analysis of first entry as an artifact, and assessment of it by researcher and teacher • Posting of second entry (commented on, yet unmodified) • Students’ reception of guidelines to give useful and accurate feedback • Start of feedback-giving process • Researcher’s collection and first-cut analysis of second entry as an artifact, and assessment of it by researcher and teacher
Stage 4 - Feedback Incorporation and Reflection Process	
Timing	Weeks 7 – 10
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posting of third and fourth entries, incorporating feedback on previous entries • Researcher’s collection and first-cut analysis of fourth and fifth entries as artifacts, and assessment of them by researcher and teacher • Start of students’ reflective process through learning logs • Researcher’s collection of learning logs • Last posting. Fifth and sixth entries • Researcher’s collection and first-cut analysis of fifth and sixth entries as artifacts, and assessment of them by researcher and teacher

Table 1 - Timeline of the Pedagogical Intervention

This chapter has presented the pedagogical intervention undergone in this study. The stages comprising the intervention and the specific activities in which the students, the teacher, and the researcher engaged were described. A brief rationale was also offered to provide support

for the choice of the stages and steps. The next chapter describes, in detail, the process and procedures of data management, data analysis and interpretation and the findings obtained, intertwined with the theoretical background of this study.

Chapter 5

Results and Data Analysis

This chapter presents the reader with a detailed account of the steps and processes followed related to data management and data analysis. As such, the reader can expect to find information as to how the data were collected and organized, as well as how they were analyzed and interpreted. This chapter also illustrates the findings that came after the data analysis and interpretation phase and how they relate to the theoretical underpinnings that support this research study.

Data Management

This research study was carried out with an approach similar to that of distance learning. The researcher did not have physical contact with any of the participants, who generated all the data using computer-based applications such as word processors, as well as Internet-based applications and tools such as cloud file sharing through Google Drive™ (see Appendix 7 - Resources); cloud file sharing is a way to share content (files, links) without using traditional electronic means like email, and which allows the creator of content to decide who to share it with and what permissions (viewing, editing, ownership) to grant to collaborators. This study collected data from artifacts assessed by the researcher and the teacher, and from learner's logs. The artifacts were published online by their authors, and are visible in their original context; however, for analysis purposes, their content was integrally copied and pasted into a text document (.docx), accompanied by a link to the original publication. A cloud directory (see

Appendix 8) was created in order to keep track of participants' publications, and also to reduce the risk of data loss. The rubrics were created and filled using a word-processing tool, and they were obtained from the teacher via email. The learner's logs were managed in a similar fashion, with participants either sending their reflections via email or cloud sharing them with the researcher. All files were kept in a computer, using an elaborate system of folders and codes, and were backed up for security reasons, in order to reduce the risk of data loss.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data were collected and first-cut analyzed almost simultaneously, as stated in the research design of this paper (See Chapter 3). The purpose of such procedure was to ensure the usefulness of the data collected, to get insights on the smooth development of its implementation or to apply changes as the study was being implemented. This is characteristic of the reflective nature of Action Research, "which results from cycling backwards and forwards from data collection to analysis to further data collection and so on as the need arises" (Burns, 1999, p. 154). Freeman (1998) also supports this approach of simultaneous data collection and analysis by considering them "mutually reinforcing activities" in the need to "balance doubting and becoming certain" (p. 86).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the grounded theory principles for data analysis and interpretation were followed. In order to do so, a piece of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was used. The software is MAXQDA, version 10 (see Appendix 7 - Resources), and was used in the stage of open coding, including the identification of relationships established between data conceptualizations (categorizing). MAXQDA allowed the researcher to label data using codes, which in turn could be defined using memos, and classified

using a scale of colors. Such codes were later revisited and even recoded, in order to make them more conceptual and more related to the phenomenon they described.

One of the most important features of MAXQDA for this study was the possibility of performing intercoder agreement assessments in order to work out correlations between the researcher's and the teacher's assessments. Despite the fact that the coding process was only performed by the researcher, the qualitative data found in the teacher's assessments could be coded using the same assessment scale proposed in the artifact assessment rubrics themselves, thus rendering such correlations possible. In fact, it is worth mentioning that the correlation assessments that were worked out ranged from 75% to 100% of researcher-teacher agreement as to the quality of the artifacts, and from 73% to 100% with regards to assessment of feedback and of its possible effects on writing. Not being quantitative, this study assessed correlational disagreements in qualitative terms rather than in percentage points. That is to say, whenever the teacher and the researcher differed in their assessment of an artifact or of the feedback contained in it, conclusions were reached taking into account both perspectives, using the qualitative data collected from each rubric. Since assessment was performed using a three-grade scale, it is also important to highlight that, whenever the teacher's and the researcher's assessments showed any sort of disagreement, this was not more than one grade (i.e. low to medium, or medium to high). Figures 1 and 2 exemplify the correlation assessments, with the teacher's assessment in the center column and the researcher's assessment on the right column.

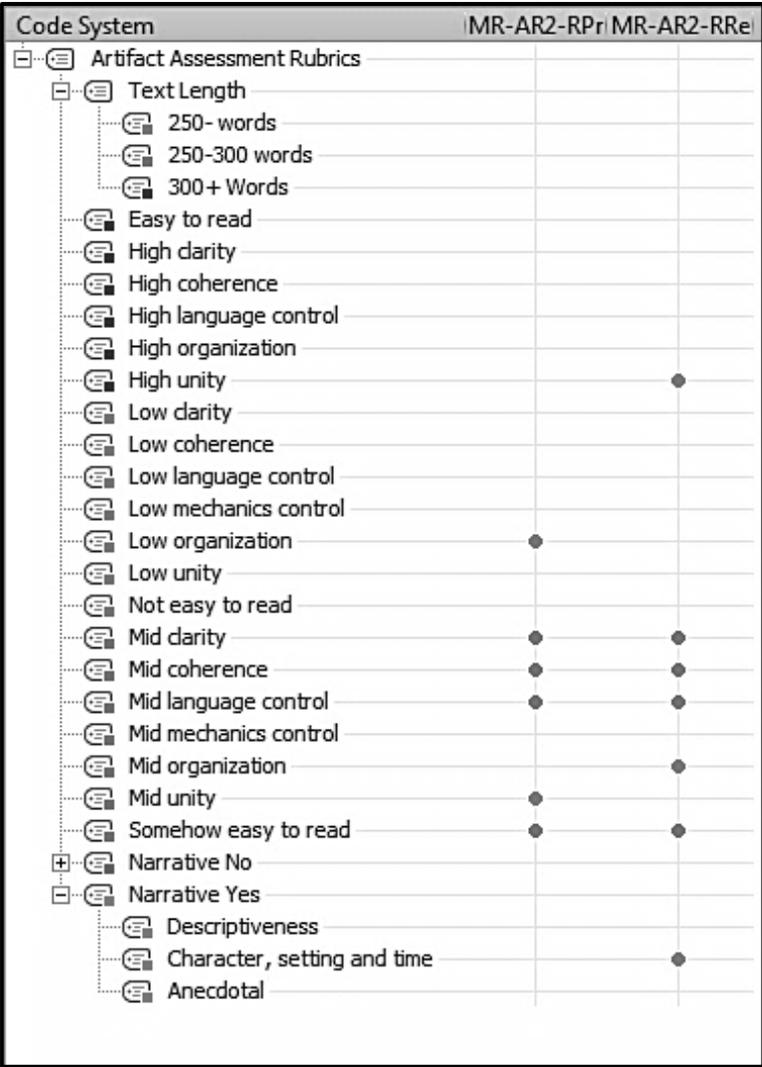


Figure 1 - Teacher-Researcher Assessment Correlation 84% in a participant’s Artifact 2 – (MR-AR2)

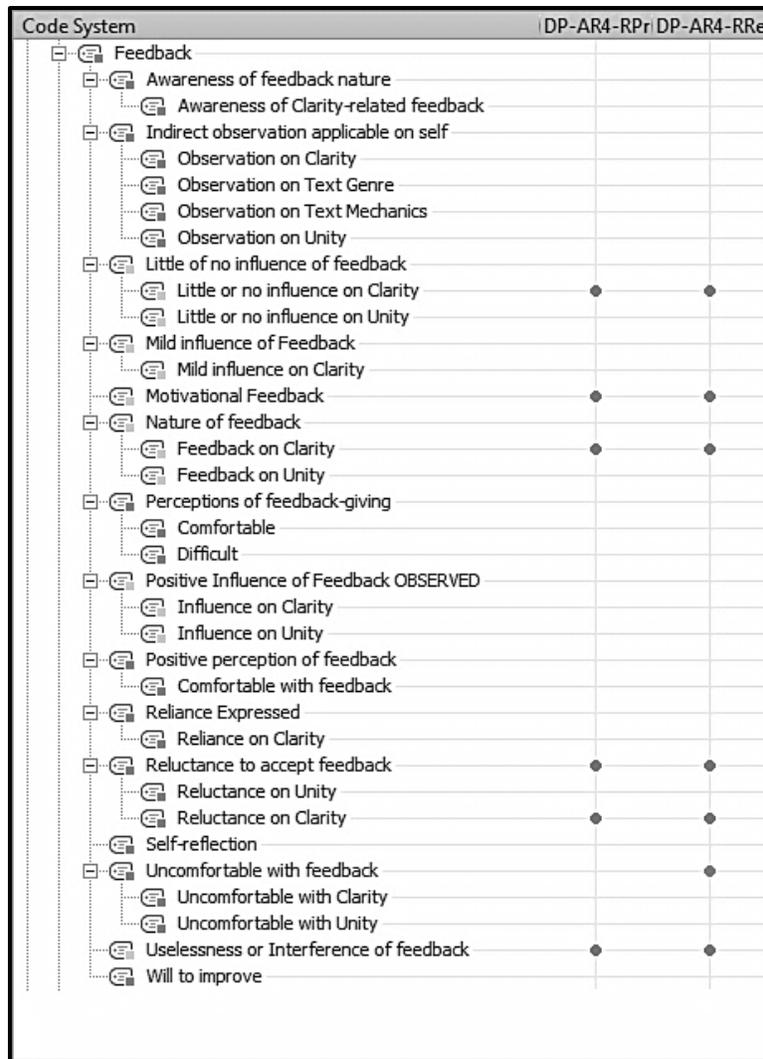


Figure 2 - Teacher-Researcher Feedback Assessment Correlation 84% in a participant’s Artifact 4 – (DP-AR4)

Having performed the intercoder agreement to determine the assessment correlations, the researcher went on to observe the evolution (or involution) of coherence in writing by comparing the assessment of an artifact with that of a prior one. In this process the researcher compared the assessments made of artifacts produced in the initial, mid and final stages of the study (see Figure 3).

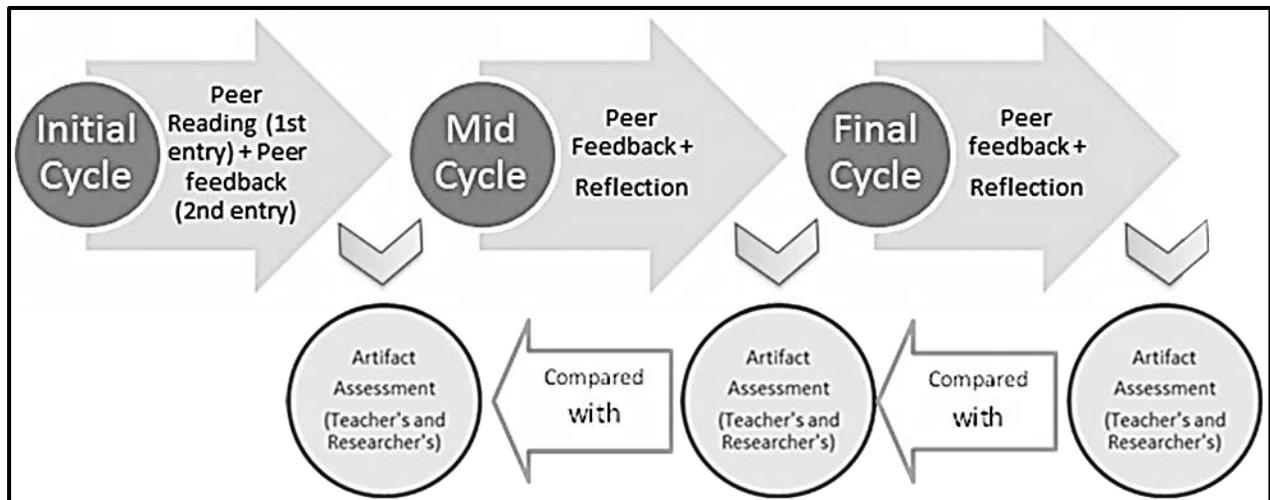


Figure 3 - Process of observation of the evolution of artifacts

Another benefit of using MAXQDA was the possibility of visualizing data analyses of different documents; for example, in this study, while in the process of axial coding, the tool MAXMAPS was used to visualize the data found in learners' logs, and to relate those categories to the ones found in the artifact assessment rubrics (see Figure 4 for a sample map). Similarly, specific documents could be activated together with codes, in order to generate a visual analysis, or to export a quote matrix (an Excel file) containing all the data with which categories were organized. The maps and the quote matrices were used in the process of axial coding in order to establish the relationships existing between the data obtained from the artifact assessment rubrics, and that from learners' logs (see Figure 4).

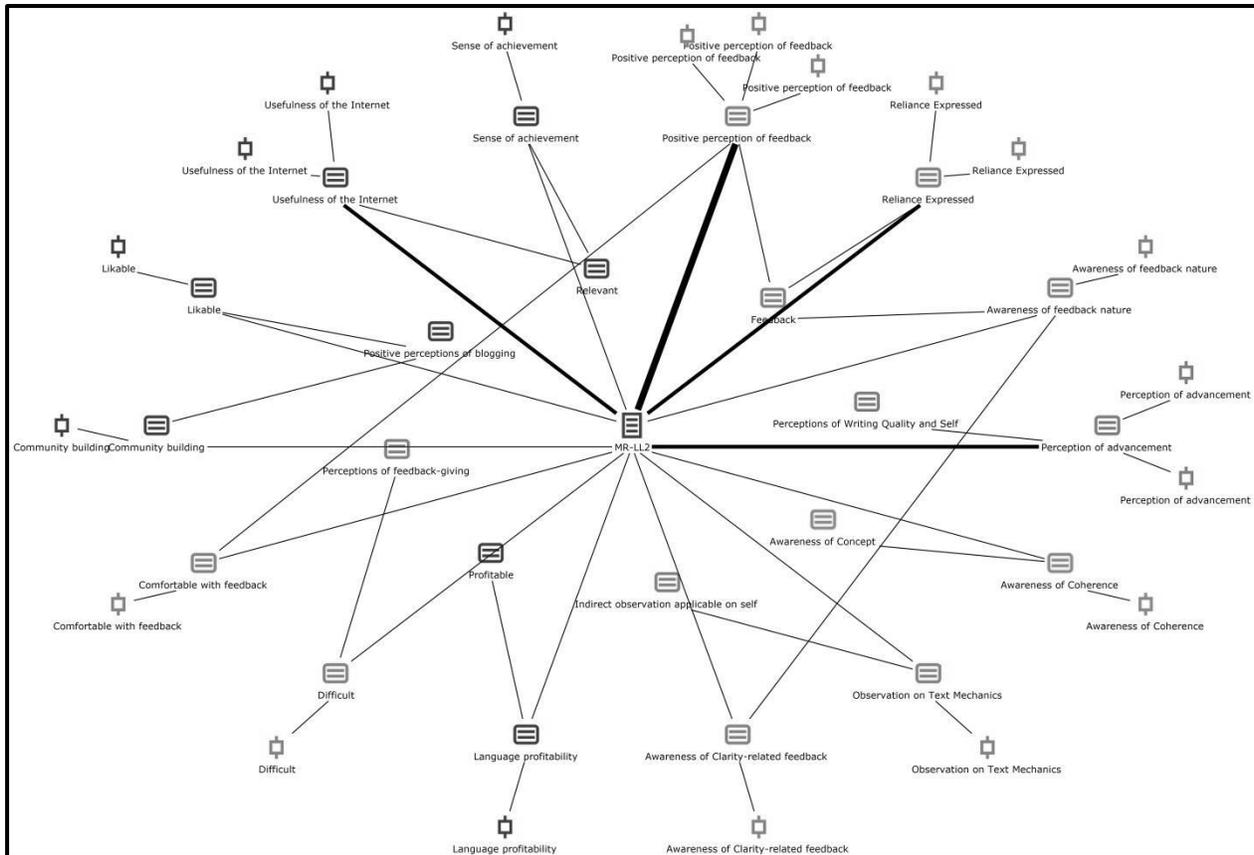


Figure 4 - Sample learner's log map (MR-LL2)

Findings

The data analysis performed in this study points toward an important affordance in informal writing attributable to the exchange of peer feedback through blogging. It was found that the exchange of peer feedback through blogs can act as a boosting factor on the improvement or maintenance of coherence in a text, specifically with regards to text unity and clarity.

This affordance of peer feedback through blogging was identified from the comparative, qualitative and descriptive assessments that the researcher and the teacher made, in their assessment rubrics, of the artifacts and of the feedback comments that each student had received. The initial performance of every student was different, some being assessed higher than others from a holistic view and in coherence-specific terms (unity, clarity, organization), which is why

no *single* level of performance can be described here. However, the findings reported here are based on the *change* patterns that the researcher observed in each student’s artifact, and which he could also identify across the entire group of participants. For illustration purposes, below are two sample graphs that show the evolution in a single student’s performance from one writing product to its immediately next one. The left column shows the coding system used with regard to the level of coherence observed in the assessed text; the center column represents the assessment made by the teacher, and the right column, that of the researcher.

Code System	EV-AR2-RPr	EV-AR2-RRe
Artifact Assessment Rubrics		
Text Length		
250- words		
250-300 words		
300+ Words		
Easy to read	●	●
High clarity		
High coherence		
High language control		●
High organization		
High unity	●	●
Low clarity	●	●
Low coherence		
Low language control		
Low mechanics control		
Low organization		
Low unity		
Not easy to read		
Mid clarity	●	
Mid coherence	●	●
Mid language control		
Mid mechanics control		
Mid organization	●	●
Mid unity		
Somehow easy to read		
Narrative No		
Reflective text	●	
No character, setting or time	●	●
Rather Argumentative text		●
Narrative Yes		
Descriptiveness		
Character, setting and time		
Anecdotal		

Figure 5 – Teacher-Researcher Assessment in a participant’s Artifact 2 (EV-AR2).

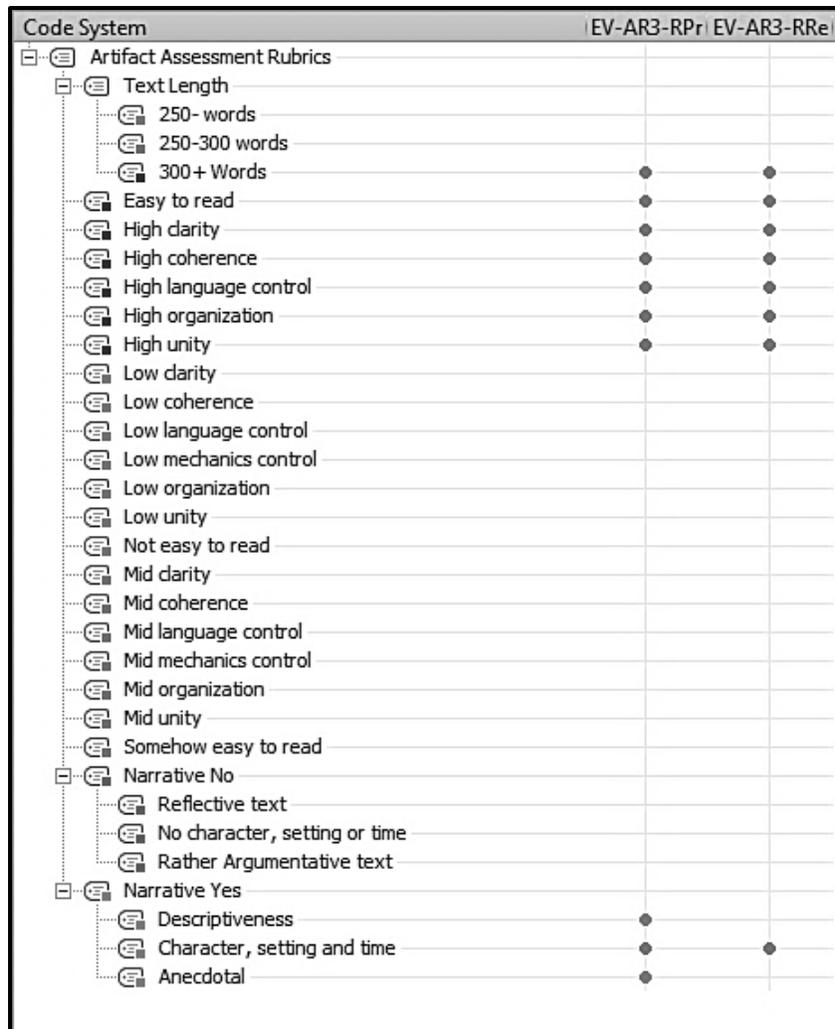


Figure 6 – Teacher-Researcher Assessment in a participant’s Artifact 3 (EV-AR3).

As stated above, the assessment of the artifacts was qualitative and descriptive, which required that the teacher and the researcher wrote a justification for their judgments. Below are sample quotes from the rubrics, which illustrate the descriptions of the teacher’s and the researcher’s assessments of students’ writing.

In her past publication, the author received two feedback comments that asked her to provide more information about the reaction of a character in her story (her boyfriend). Therefore, clarity was the point that she missed, and thus was identified by her readers. In the current story, clarity is virtually flawless, thus leading one to believe that the author took the feedback on board.

(Researcher's assessment – MR Artifact 3)

In the past post the author's peers had provided him with some cognitive-corrective feedback in regard with the connection of the events told in the sequence, therefore unity; feedback also related to clarity as the author was asked to expand his description of events in the passage. Feedback would appear to have had some effect in regard with unity; opposite to the author's previous entry this text maintains one single idea that links introduction, body and conclusion. Nevertheless feedback effect on clarity would seem of little impact as one of the key concepts in the plot remains rather confusing to the reader who is not acquainted with the world of waiting.

(Teacher's assessment – DP Artifact 3)

This study found that underlying conditions exist to the aforementioned affordance of peer feedback through blogging. These conditions fall within two potentials of feedback and blogging: to target the students' *cognitive* domain as well as their *affective* domain. Both of them have an inter-related role in helping a student do better, as learning will not take place in environments where one of them is evidently disregarded.

Targeting the student's cognitive domain

The participants in this study that managed to keep or maintain their levels of coherence in writing received feedback that was useful to them, and that signaled points to improve. In other words, feedback proved itself useful by providing clear, observable content that participants could see and use in later blog-writing tasks. This feature of feedback, however, cannot account for its positive effects by itself. In fact, students that managed to incorporate the feedback that they had received demonstrated awareness and understanding of the aims of such feedback, and

also were found to be aware and understanding of the concept of coherence, which was key in this study. Below are the findings related to the targeting of the students' cognitive domain:

Visibility and clarity of feedback content

This study found that the feedback that was exchanged needed to be observable and identifiable to the students. For feedback to be useful it certainly needs to provide enough information to enable the student to make any advancement. This can be framed within Vigil and Oller's (1976) model of feedback, in which "cognitive feedback [...] appears to be the point where corrective feedback is located, and where error correction takes place [...]" (as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 274). It is possible to consider the observable content nature of some of the feedback exchanged in this study as "cognitive feedback," as it was meaningful and filled with information that students could use. The sample comment below is an illustration of such feedback, given on a participant's story about time traveling.



(Extracted from DP Artifact 2)

This piece of feedback was described in the following terms by the researcher:

The author received cognitive-corrective feedback from his peers, as they pointed out issues that they considered were pertaining to clarity and unity.

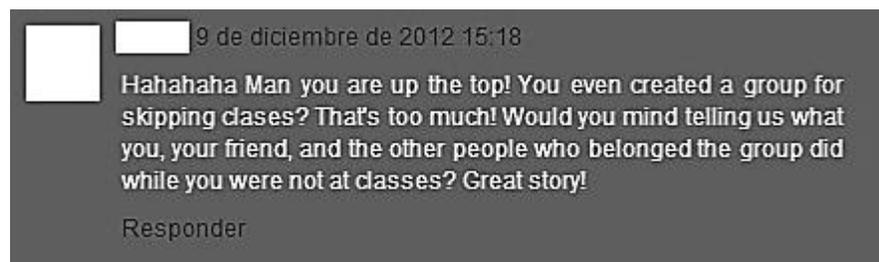
(Researcher's assessment – DP Artifact 3)

The teacher also wrote her assessment on the same feedback comment:

In the past post the author's peers had provided him with some cognitive-corrective feedback in regard with the connection of the events told in the sequence, therefore unity; feedback also related to clarity as the author was asked to expand his description of events in the passage.

(Teacher's assessment – DP Artifact 3)

Below is another sample comment illustrating the visibility and clarity of feedback content; it has been quoted from a participant's post that told a story about school days:



(Extracted from EV Artifact 5)

The corresponding assessments of that feedback comment, both by researcher and teacher support its evident orientation to enhancing clarity:

All the reader^s asked the author to be more descriptive about the activities that the author and his friends did whenever they skipped classes. Therefore, clarity was the issue that readers identified, not because the text fell short of it, but because it was so engaging that readers wanted to know a lot more about it.

(Researcher's assessment – EV Artifact 6)

In his last entry the author received cognitive-corrective feedback with regard to clarity. It was suggested that descriptiveness of the text was expanded.

(Teacher's assessment – EV Artifact 6)

Feedback, then, can be attributed to be potentially powerful on the condition that it contains information usable by its intended addressee. Above, the necessity for feedback to have a clear and visible content was discussed and exemplified, to demonstrate this study's findings on the importance of feedback's internal, yet visible characteristics that make it usable. Below, the need for students to understand and be aware of feedback's content is discussed.

Students' awareness of feedback content

The effectiveness of a feedback comment on written coherence does not depend only on its internal features. In fact, this study found that peer feedback through blogging can act as a boosting factor on the improvement or maintenance of coherence provided that its good construction is complemented with the addressee student's awareness and sensitivity to it. These findings relate to Brookhart's (2008) idea of *good* feedback, viewed from its potential to impact its addressee, as one that "contains information that a student can use, which means that the student has to be able to hear and understand it" (p. 2). Below are excerpts from learners' logs exhibiting their awareness:

I think what my friends had asked me through their feedback is to express better the end of every story.

(MR's Learning log 2)

Recuerdo mucho que mis compañeros siempre piden sobre información que no debe faltar en la historia, detalles que no queden como flotando, de manera que todas las preguntas posibles por hacer se respondan solas con el texto.

(MF's Learning log 4) (See Appendix 9.1 for an English translation)

It makes sense that a student can only derive learning from a tool that he/she can see and understand. It does not really matter how much useful content there is in a feedback comment; unless its intended addressee is able to see it and understand what it really means, little advancement is expected to happen.

Students' understanding and awareness of coherence

As the participants in this study received a certain amount of training in three features of coherence (unity, clarity and organization), they knew that the feedback they exchanged with peers would need to target at least one of them. It was found that, after the implementation of this study, some students developed a fairly-accurate level of awareness of the degree of coherence they had in their own blog posts. As can be seen in the data samples below, the participants were able to describe their level of satisfaction with their text coherence, and even mention the extent to which feedback had played a role in their writing development:

Al respecto del proceso de escritura, me parece que fue más cohesivo y coherente al final, a medida que íbamos mejorando las entradas con las sugerencias de nuestros compañeros. Traté en todas las publicaciones de seguir los consejos que el profesor nos dio sobre coherencia textual.

(EV's learning log 4) (See Appendix 9.2 for an English translation)

4- Al finalizar, leo la historia varias veces (3 aproximadamente) en voz alta y mentalmente para ver qué tan coherente es y en caso de que deba cambiarle, quitarle o añadirle algo.

(DP's learning log 1) (See Appendix 9.3 for an English translation)

My final story was a challenge because I realized I had to do better, I had to bring everything together, what my friends had told me about my previous stories, what to focus on better? what to leave a side? I believe my story was received by my friends-readers well, they could understand it and what they asked me through the process- to make a better end- I could pull it together.

(MR's learning log 4)

Thus, the interactive nature of a web 2.0 tool like the blog, along with the exchange of peer feedback can be accountable for students' greater understanding of the concept of coherence, as well as for their awareness of the quality of blog posts that their audience expected of them. These findings are in agreement with at least two of Boud's (2001) three proposed elements to be present in an after-event reflection process: *return to experience*, *attending to feelings* and *re-evaluation of experience*. In this study, findings reveal that participants showed evidence of the first and the last element, as they 1) were able to assess the level of coherence in their blog entry contrasted to the feedback that they received, and they 2) decided how to proceed in their next writing activity.

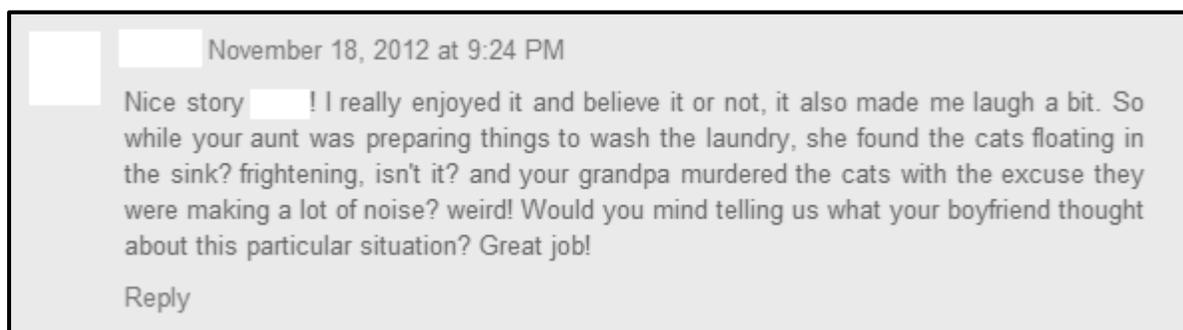
Targeting the student's affective domain

The combination peer feedback–blogging was found to have positive effects in maintaining or improving coherence, provided that such combination targeted and acted on each student's affective domain in at least three ways. That is to say, for peer feedback to act positively in a students' writing process, this study found, it must be written in friendly, respectful words to its addressee, creating **potential for motivation**. This study also found that students that exhibited taking advantage of the peer feedback that they had received admitted **comfort** with and **reliance** on it. Finally, and in line with the above, blogging was identified as a

powerful tool for **community building** that helped students maintain and develop the levels of written coherence in their blog posts.

Feedback's potential for motivation

Boosting effects of peer feedback's through blogging were observable provided that peer feedback was written in constructive language and that it addressed the student in polite, affection-targeting terms. The students that showed coherence maintenance or improvement acknowledged having been comfortable with the feedback from their peers, which, far from being merely a praiseful set of words, was based on a careful choice of terms that proved useful to them. An example of a feedback comment with motivational potential is presented below; it was given on a story about an embarrassing situation (the participant described how her grandfather had killed two cats):



(Extracted from MR Artifact 2)

In the next artifact assessment, the researcher described the feedback comments received on the blog post, in the following terms:

The feedback that the author received in her past story was introduced using friendly language aiming to show interest in the author's work. The author was addressed in polite, useful terms, which could have helped the author take up a positive attitude reflected in the quality of the current text.

(Researcher's assessment – MR Artifact 3)

The teacher, in turn, assessed feedback comments on the entry in similar terms:

The author did receive motivational feedback in every comment to her story. These praised the author's topic choice and approved of her judgment of the situation. It could be thought that the interest shown by her peers through these comments would encourage the writer to please them by adding the missing elements in the new passages she creates.

(Teacher's assessment – MR Artifact 3)

The researcher noted that students who had received feedback written in motivational terms often acknowledged being motivated or satisfied with their job, as can be seen in the excerpt below.

Blogging, surprised me this week, I felt comfortable to tale my story, that was quite personal, stay smart, give the information that wouldn't affect my emotions and I did a good job! I really enjoy it and I'm really grateful about how my friends receive it. I was able to pull everything together: coherence, personal experience, emotions and create a good story.

(MR's learning log 3)

Nonetheless, the researcher cannot categorically state that every piece of motivational feedback *will* render a student motivated. In other words, whereas potential for motivation exists in feedback that is carefully written, and while its usefulness in the maintenance of coherence was observed in this study, motivation in a student cannot be simplistically attributed to one single, extrinsic factor like feedback.

It is evident, thus, that when feedback is given in positive terms, targeting not only cognition but also affection, positive effects can be derived from it. Again, these findings agree with Vigil and Oller's (1976) model of feedback, which describes how "affective feedback should determine whether the speaker [here writer] should continue with his or her attempts to convey a message" (as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 274).

Students' comfort with, and reliance on, feedback

This study found that students that showed improvement or maintenance of coherence levels in their writing acknowledged being comfortable with the feedback they were receiving. This fits in well with this study's findings on feedback's potential for motivation, as it is expected that for any positive feedback effects to be visible, the student needs to feel at ease with the comments made on his/her work. Below are two excerpts from learners' logs, in which the student recognizes feeling comfortable with peers' commenting on her writing, and also acknowledges the importance of being careful while giving feedback herself:

The experience of posting my stories in order to someone else read them and also give them feedback has been incredible! I just love the fact I can learn through the Internet. And there's a lot my friends can help and contribute with my stories. I feel comfortable every time my friends give me feedback but it can't be quite a delight to give them feedback because you have to be very careful and not criticize their job.

(MR's learning log 2)

En cuanto al feedback, me parece una herramienta muy buena. Tuve la experiencia en mi primera historia de que aun cuando yo sentía cada una de las cosas que estaban pasando en la historia, en algunos momentos perdí de vista esos detalles para que mis compañeros pudieran vivirla al yo contarla y me gusto mucho que ellos por medio del feedback me hicieron dar cuenta.

(MR's learning log 1) (See Appendix 9.4 for an English translation)

Similarly, as comfort reflects a student's feeling at ease with the audience's reactions to a writing product, findings show that there needs to be a sense of trust, or **reliance**, for peer feedback to be considered useful. Students who recognized having used some, or all of the feedback received did so by acknowledging its reliability. A couple of excerpts from learners' logs can be used to illustrate this finding:

En el post sobre Viaje en el Tiempo, mi entrada parecía más una reflexión o exposición sobre recuerdos que una verdadera "historia", eso notaron mis compañeros y desde entonces en cada entrada trato de que sea más una anécdota sobre el tema que mi opinión sobre él.

(EV's learning log 3) (See Appendix 9.5 for an English translation)

Como ya lo había expresado anteriormente, para esta, mi quinta historia, tan sólo tuve en cuenta el comentario que mi compañera Mary hizo en la historia anterior. Al haber seguido su consejo, me di cuenta que dio resultado, puesto que todos los comentarios que recibí en la presente historia fueron positivos; además, en ninguno se me pidió aclaraciones de ningún tipo. Sin embargo, aún sigo teniendo en cuenta los comentarios de mis compañeros en mi blog y en sus blogs para que mis futuras historias sean aún mejor que esta.

(DP's learning log 3) (See Appendix 9.6 for an English translation)

Thus, in this study it is possible to establish a clear internal relationship between peer feedback's potential for motivation, the comfort it generates in students, and the sense of trust that it creates, which render feedback useful for the purposes it was intended. These findings also agree with those of Robertson (2011), who emphasizes the importance of social support by quoting a participant who claimed to have found learning logs (through blogs) useful, mainly because he could establish communication with peers that he considered could help him advance in his own project. It can be concluded from this that social support is an important affordance of feedback, provided that its potential user exhibits a sense of comfort and trust.

Community building

As students posted entries in their blogs, the affordance of blogging in generating a sense of community was identified. It was found out that the act of writing took place in a more dialogical way, different from that which traditionally takes place in the classroom. Engaging in the acts of blogging and feedback giving gave students the possibility to write for an audience whom they felt comfortable with, to portray their own selves in their writing, and to learn from and about their peers. This sense of community building was expressed by students as follows:

At the end of this Project I can say it has helped me a lot, I'm now more willing to tell stories, to express myself better and to take into account what others may say in order to improve my writing skills.

This project was a useful tool, Blogger for my and for people must by now seen as a tool for improving writing skills in my perspective. There are people willing to know you, read about you and your stories and to make a advice if there's something missing.

(MR's learning log 4)

Creo que como conclusión después de haber utilizado este medio para perfeccionar "writing" no cabe duda que es una manera estupenda de hacerlo, me sentí muy cómoda en cuanto al blog que es como si tuvieras una página personal en la cual las personas pasan y leen tus experiencias, de manera respetuosa y muy sencilla; cosa que me resulta totalmente asombrosa,

(MF's learning log 4) (See Appendix 9.7 for an English translation)

These findings also reveal that students approached writing as a way to communicate with and learn from an audience, rather than to address a task. These findings support those of Quintero (2008), who illustrates how blogging led students to engage as a community of writers where needs for communication and interaction were generated, while allowing learners to portray their own selves through their writings. Similarly, as students expressed the importance of receiving help from a community of peers, they acknowledged the social constructivist affordance of blogs and peer feedback. Again, Quintero's (2008) findings are closely related, as

her study revealed how feedback acted as a way of coaching and scaffolding rather than of judging one's work.

The present chapter has described the steps and processes in the management, analysis and interpretation of the data collected in this study. The findings in this study have been listed, described and illustrated as well as supported with samples of actual data. At the same time, this chapter interwove theoretical background with the findings, with the purpose of supporting them with accepted current theory.

In the following chapter, the reader will find the conclusions of this study, its limitations, some pedagogical implications of the findings, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 6

Conclusions, Pedagogical Implications, Limitations and Further Research

Conclusions

After having performed the analysis and the interpretation of data, the researcher could come to the following conclusions, related to answering this study's research question:

To what extent does peer-feedback on blogs written outside the classroom shape students' writing of informal, personal narrative texts with specific regards to coherence?

Category	Subcategories
Feedback and blogging as boosting factors on the enhancement or maintenance of written coherence.	Targeting students' cognitive domain through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visibility and clarity of feedback content • Students' awareness of feedback content • Students' understanding and awareness of coherence
	Targeting students' affective domain through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback's potential for motivation • Students' comfort with and reliance on feedback • Community building

Table 2 - Categories and Subcategories Obtained from the Data Analysis

As mentioned in chapter 5, peer feedback through blogging showed itself as a boosting factor on the improvement or maintenance of coherence, provided that some conditions are met within the students' cognitive and affective domains.

With regards to the students' cognitive domain, the study found that factors such as the visibility and clarity of the feedback content, the students' ability to notice and understand feedback, and the students' understanding and awareness of the very concept of coherence are considered to contribute to the enhancement or maintenance of coherence levels in a written text. Such factors do so, first, by revealing that feedback needs to contain information that learners can use as building material in their quest for better writing; second, by evidencing that, for peer feedback to be useful, students need to show sensitivity to it; otherwise, it will go unnoticed and its potential, however insightful, will never be exploited; and third, by establishing the necessity that students know where they are heading for in their writing quest, so that the information that lies in peer feedback is used accordingly.

As to the students' affective domain, the researcher identified three conditions to the enhancement or maintenance of coherence in text. The first one has to do with the potential for feedback to generate motivation through the language in which it is worded; that is, it is reasonable to expect that feedback that is written in friendly, affectionate terms, will be received more openly than will feedback which restricts itself to pointing out cognitive issues and is worded in rather distant and impersonal language. The second way suggests that, as long as feedback exhibits this motivational potential, it takes a good deal of students' comfort and reliance on feedback to make the change between its potential usefulness and its actual usefulness. It becomes evident, at this stage, that if students are at ease with the comments that peers make on their work, and at the same time consider their peers as reliable sources of information, progress can be made in learning. Lastly, it was found that a sense of community building plays an active role in the enhancement or maintenance of written coherence as students approach writing as a dialogical and bidirectional process, as they write having an audience in

mind, and as they have a space where to portray their own selves and where to learn from and about their peers.

In view of the above, peer feedback through blogging can be considered a potentially useful and empowering tool for the maintenance and enhancement of coherence levels in a text. This, however, will be unlikely if the conditions are not proper both in feedback itself and in the student. It cannot be considered conclusive, either, that real advancement will take place if *ideal* conditions are met, as there may be other (sometimes interfering) factors—such as the lack of language control and the interference of too-praiseful feedback with truly helpful feedback—that can also play a determining role in the development or maintenance of written coherence. Moreover, the cognitive and affective affordances of peer feedback through blogging by no means guarantee that a student can in fact transfer knowledge and awareness into noticeable changes in performance, since aspects such as one's real levels of competence and sense of self-efficacy cannot simply be left aside.

Pedagogical Implications

This study has shown useful insights into the importance and feasibility of incorporating more student-centered strategies towards the enhancement of learning processes. The findings support a key role of autonomy in writing through a model of community learning, which is becoming more and more needed in times where computer-assisted or web-assisted learning is commonplace. The participants in this study exhibited a greater degree of control than usual, revealing their awareness of where they are heading for in their learning and their choice whether to use the feedback received or not. In other words, students knew what they wanted to do and acted accordingly.

Moreover, the findings in this study support the journey through new paths in language assessment, advocating for a change in the traditional classroom paradigms. First, it is remarkable that feedback, being such an important part of language assessment, and traditionally being restricted to the teacher's figure of authority and reliability can now be "passed on" to students, with the voice and trustworthiness that the teacher embodies.

Finally, as the population of this study was students in a teacher education program, it is possible that they will incorporate innovative practices during their in-service years. That could hopefully be the most significant implication of this study, as its participants may implement changes in the traditional classroom paradigm, fostering not only assessment *of* learning, but also assessment *for* learning. Replicating and improving what has been done with them, teachers could possibly consolidate student-centeredness and learner autonomy in classrooms.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study was participation; this study had to be conducted twice, due to very low levels of participation by the population in the first implementation. The findings referred to in this document were worked out in the second intervention, where the population was committed and participated in a timely way. High though their commitment was, however, time constraints were evident and it was difficult, yet not impossible, for the researcher and for the students agree on a time to hold the sessions that would lead to the development of the concepts of coherence and feedback. These time constraints required that the researcher hold the synchronous conceptual development sessions more than once, even at unsocial hours, to accommodate the students' different schedules. Problems also arose as to the use of technology; since synchronous communication was required, Skype™ offered a good combination of free cost and communication efficiency, certainly not without crashing or consuming a fairly high

share of internet bandwidth, which slowed the pace of work in these sessions; audio, instead of video, needed to be used to help overcome this difficulty.

Finally, a limitation was found at the phase of axial coding. The researcher attempted to carry it out using the CAQDAS MAXQDA 10, but due to a lack of knowledge of the software, he decided to carry out the axial coding process with a word processor, but using the quote matrices and diagrams exported from MAXQDA.

Further research

Further research is needed to inquire more deeply into the affective factors that act in the process of writing, and that dictate students' performance to a given extent. This would help teachers and researchers to understand students' negative attitudes, and to help students bypass them to take better advantage of feedback.

In addition, studies with a similar methodology and design, though with different foci could be conducted. For instance, implementing a longer study where participants create more written products would offer more material to study, and would allow the assessment of coherence from the students' use of discrete items such as cohesive devices.

Finally, a new emphasis could be added to a similar study, to document and analyze students' pre-, while-, and post-writing actions throughout the blogging experience. This might help teachers understand students' strengths and weaknesses, therefore empowering them to guide learners towards a more effective realization of knowledge (competence) into performance.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Data Collection Instruments: Assessment of Artifacts

Appendix 2 – Data Collection Instruments: Learning Logs

Appendix 3 – Participant’s Consent Letter

Appendix 4 – Practitioner’s Consent Letter

Appendix 5 – Project Timeline

Appendix 6 – Giving Feedback: Assessment checklists for students

Appendix 7 – Resources used in the study

Appendix 8 – Screenshot of the cloud blogging directory

Appendix 9 – English translation of Spanish quotes

Appendix 1 – Data Collection Instruments: Assessment of Artifacts

Assessment of artifacts

The following checklists and rubrics will be used to assess the blog entries as students post them on Blogger™.

Narration

Answer the question yes or no, then make a brief comment on it.

Q: Is the entry a narrative text? **Yes** **No**

Why (not)?

A:

Coherence

Coherence is seen as “the relationships which link the meanings of utterances in a discourse or of the sentences in a text. [...] In written texts coherence refers to the way a text makes sense to the readers through the organization of its content, and the relevance and clarity of its concepts and ideas.” Nunan (2007, p. 205).

Based on this premise, assess the blog entry on the following grounds. Please comment on language problems that could facilitate or interfere with your assessment of the text. Use the following three-grade scale: **Satisfactory / In progress / Unsatisfactory**. Comment briefly.

1. The relative ease with which you went through the text and understood it;
2. **Unity**: The connection, in terms of content, between the title of the story, its introduction, its development of events, and its end;
3. **Clarity**: The completeness, or descriptiveness, of sentences and paragraphs, and how they add to the overall plot;
4. **Organization**: The order in which the events of the story appeared, and how it helped or hindered your comprehension.

Feedback

Comment on the extent to which you perceive feedback on earlier entries (one or two) has shaped the current post. Consider the following:

1. The amount of motivational feedback (i.e. praise with suggestions) given in a past post, and how it could have shaped or maintained the degree of coherence in the current post.
2. The amount of cognitive-corrective feedback (i.e. signaling points to improve) given in a past post, and how it could have shaped or maintained the degree of coherence in the current post.
3. The possible absence of useful feedback in a past post (i.e. feedback as mere praise or criticism), or of feedback at all, that could have shaped or maintained the degree of coherence in the current post.

Appendix 2 – Data Collection Instruments: Learning Logs

Dear student,

The following is a learning log. It will be used to evaluate the way you are learning and what strategies you might be using while posting your entries to Blogger™. The contents that you put here will not be used to penalize you or judge your methods good or bad, so you are invited to reflect on your own learning with confidence.

Please, after you post an entry in your blog, take some time to reflect on the following issues. Feel free to write, use graphs, pictures, diagrams or any other way to express your ideas.

- the steps that you followed to write your entry; how you organized your work
- your peers' comments; how much of their contributions you applied on your most recent entry;
- what aspects of your friends' entries (or the comments that they received) you observed and applied to your own work
- the quality of this entry (coherence) compared to your past entries and why
- the similarities and/or differences between writing this entry and your past ones (easier, more difficult, interesting, etc);
- how comfortable you felt about using the blog, compared to writing on paper
- how positive or negative you consider the use of Blogger™
- how comfortable you felt with people reading your most recent blog entry
- how comfortable you felt with people commenting your work

It is advised that you keep this log constant. It is also preferable to work on, but not necessarily finish, these reflections no longer than a day after you post your entry.

Post your reflections here. Use the back of the page if you need to.

Appendix 3 – Participant’s Consent Letter

LUGAR Y FECHA

Apreciado estudiante

Como es de su conocimiento, en esta asignatura se pretende llevar a cabo un estudio de investigación titulado “*Out of class blogging in an EFL course to develop informal writing skills*” como producto de investigación de la Maestría en Didáctica del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera de la Universidad de La Sabana, de la cual soy estudiante actualmente.

El objeto del estudio es indagar sobre la posible relación que existe entre la escritura coherente de textos narrativos informales con la ayuda de los blogs y el trabajo entre compañeros de curso a través de comentarios de retroalimentación. Se busca establecer, si las hay, posibles relaciones entre los comentarios escritos intercambiados entre estudiantes y la coherencia de un texto.

El estudio está programado para llevarse a cabo en un plazo aproximado de un mes y medio, donde se atravesarán las fases de intervención y análisis de datos. Cada semana usted producirá textos narrativos informales a través de un blog web personal, al cual tendrán acceso como visitantes los demás miembros del curso. Se espera que cada participante produzca sus propias entradas y participe con comentarios sobre la coherencia de las entradas de los demás miembros del grupo.

Los datos recolectados serán producto de la escritura en la herramienta de blog, y se analizarán en cuanto a su coherencia y a su relación entre el texto y la colaboración de sus compañeros a través de comentarios de realimentación. Así mismo, se recolectarán sus reflexiones sobre el proceso de escritura, sus percepciones sobre el mismo y sobre recibir comentarios de sus compañeros sobre sus entradas de blog. Se le asegura que ninguno de los datos recolectados se utilizarán para fines discriminatorios, difamatorios, ni para de ninguna forma juzgar la posición del autor en cuanto al contenido expresado en sus escritos. La identidad de los participantes será resguardada y en ningún momento será conocida por ningún individuo ajeno a este estudio. A los participantes se les garantizará la confidencialidad de sus productos escritos. No obstante, al final del estudio se hará una publicación de los resultados y es posible que se utilicen extractos o entradas completas de su blog para propósitos de divulgación de los resultados, sin que esto represente revelar su identidad.

Su valiosa participación será totalmente voluntaria y libre, de forma tal que en cualquier momento del estudio usted tendrá la libertad de desvincularse del mismo y de solicitar que sus datos y productos escritos sean retirados del proyecto. La decisión de aportar sus datos o sus escritos o de solicitar la no divulgación o uso de ciertas entradas queda a su absoluta discreción. De igual forma, ningún acto asociado a este estudio será considerado como material de evaluación dentro de la asignatura **Inglés Avanzado**.

Si está de acuerdo con participar en el mencionado estudio, por favor firme esta carta y devuélvala a su profesor en cuanto le sea posible.

Cordialmente

Oscar Mauricio Gómez Delgado
Investigador
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En constancia de que conozco y apruebo la información aquí contenida, y de que deseo ser un participante de este estudio, firmo la presente carta de consentimiento.

Nombre

Código

Fecha

Appendix 4 – Teacher’s Consent Letter

LUGAR Y FECHA

Apreciada Profesora

Reciba un cordial saludo. Como es de su conocimiento, soy estudiante de la Maestría en Didáctica del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera en la Universidad de La Sabana. Estoy desarrollando un proyecto de investigación titulado “Out of class blogging in an EFL course to develop informal writing skills” como producto de investigación de mi maestría.

El objeto del estudio es indagar sobre la posible relación que existe entre la escritura coherente de textos narrativos informales con la ayuda de los blogs y el trabajo entre compañeros de curso a través de comentarios de retroalimentación. Se busca establecer, si las hay, posibles relaciones entre los comentarios escritos intercambiados entre estudiantes y la coherencia de un texto.

El estudio está programado para llevarse a cabo en un plazo aproximado de un semestre, donde se atravesarán las fases de intervención y análisis de datos. Cada semana los participantes producirán textos narrativos informales a través de un blog web personal, al cual tendrán acceso como visitantes los demás miembros del curso. Se espera que cada participante produzca sus propias entradas y participe con comentarios sobre la coherencia de las entradas de los demás miembros del grupo.

Los datos recolectados serán producto de la escritura en la herramienta de blog, y se analizarán en cuanto a su coherencia y a su relación entre el texto y la colaboración de sus compañeros a través de comentarios de realimentación. Así mismo, se recolectarán las reflexiones de los participantes sobre el proceso de escritura, sus percepciones sobre el mismo y sobre recibir comentarios de sus compañeros sobre sus entradas de blog. A los participantes se asegura que ninguno de los datos recolectados se utilizarán para fines discriminatorios, difamatorios, ni para de ninguna forma juzgar la posición del autor en cuanto al contenido expresado en sus escritos. La identidad de los participantes será resguardada y en ningún momento será conocida por ningún individuo ajeno a este estudio. A los participantes se les garantizará la confidencialidad de sus productos escritos. No obstante, al final del estudio se hará una publicación de los resultados y es posible que se utilicen extractos o entradas completas de su blog para propósitos de divulgación de los resultados, sin que esto represente revelar su identidad.

Solicito su autorización para llevar a cabo el proyecto dentro del marco de la asignatura Inglés Avanzado, en el grupo que usted dirige. La participación de sus estudiantes será voluntaria y no interferirá con el normal desarrollo de sus clases ni con el cumplimiento de sus objetivos curriculares. Su aporte, profesora, consistirá en brindar algunos espacios para que el investigador presente el proyecto, dialogue con los estudiantes sobre los objetivos y alcances del mismo, y para resolver dudas. A partir de allí el estudiante podrá decidir si desea participar del proyecto. Sólo algunos de los mencionados espacios se requerirán de forma presencial, dado que la mayoría del trabajo con los estudiantes se realizará de forma virtual sincrónica y asincrónica fuera del horario de clases.

Su participación también se requerirá para el pilotaje de los instrumentos de recolección de datos que se utilizarán en el estudio. Durante este período el investigador deberá tener acceso a la población estudiantil, ya sea de forma presencial o virtual. Adicionalmente, se requerirá dialogar en ocasiones sobre el avance en los contenidos de la asignatura, para mantener la relación asignatura-proyecto. Finalmente, se requerirá su participación en la evaluación de textos escritos de los participantes en cuanto a su nivel de coherencia y de relación con comentarios previos de realimentación de pares. Esta evaluación será respetada en su integridad y se comparará con la del investigador durante la fase de análisis de datos, para obtener resultados a partir de las dos evaluaciones.

Su valiosa participación será totalmente voluntaria y libre. Igualmente, usted conserva su derecho de determinar hasta qué punto desea participar del proyecto, para lo cual sólo debe manifestar su intención, cualquiera que ésta sea. Su nombre será mencionado durante la fase de análisis de datos.

Es de aclarar que ningún acto asociado a este estudio será considerado como material de evaluación sumativa dentro de la asignatura **Inglés Avanzado**.

Si está de acuerdo con brindar su participación en el mencionado estudio, por favor firme esta carta y devuélvala al investigador en cuanto le sea posible.

Cordialmente

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En constancia de que conozco y apruebo la información aquí contenida, y de accedo a participar en este estudio, firmo la presente carta de consentimiento.

Nombre y firma

Cédula

Fecha

Appendix 5 – Timeline of the Study

Activity/Date	August, September, October, November				February, March, April, May				June, July, August, September, October, November				February, March, April, May			
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Step 1: Initiation																
Step 2: Preliminary Investigation																
Step 3: Literature review																
Step 4: Design of action plan and consent letters																
Step 5: Design of the Pedagogical Implementation																
Step 6: Design of Data Collection Instruments																
Step 7: Expert-check of the Data Collection Instruments																
Step 8: Implementation and data collection																
Step 9: Monitoring data collection																
Step 10: Analysis of data																
Step 11: Reflection & decision making																
Step 12: Sharing findings																

Appendix 6 – Giving Feedback: Assessment checklists for students

COHERENCIA

Utilice la siguiente lista para evaluar el texto de su compañero a la luz de las siguientes preguntas. A partir de ello, realice sus comentarios. (Esta lista es para su uso únicamente; no será recolectada)

Pregunta	Sí	Más o menos	No	¿Por qué? Comentarios
¿Le fue fácil leer y entender la historia? ²				
Unidad: ¿Considera que hay conexión entre el título del texto, su introducción, la secuencia de los eventos y la conclusión? ³				
Claridad: ¿Considera que la información en oraciones y párrafos permite la comprensión de la historia en general? ⁴				
Organización: ¿El orden en que se presentan los eventos es claro? ¿Le facilita entender el sentido del texto? ⁵				

COMENTARIOS DE RETROALIMENTACIÓN

Tenga en mente los siguientes aspectos cuando escriba comentarios sobre las entradas de blog de sus compañeros:

- Use lenguaje positivo. Verbos como *“correct, change, y miss”* no aportan mucho y pueden desmotivar al escritor.
- Evalúe el texto en términos de lo que se hizo y no en lo que se debió hacer. Si considera que falta algo, haga preguntas al lector de modo que se manifieste su interés por conocer la historia más a fondo, más que por corregirla. Déjele saber su interés por conocer ese tipo de detalles en futuras entradas del blog.
- Si el lenguaje le es difícil de entender, pídale clarificación a su escritor de forma cordial. Use preguntas como *“What do you mean by...?”* o *“I can’t understand when you say that...; can you explain?”*
- Ofrezca soluciones. Si tiene ideas para darle al autor del texto, cuénteselas de forma amable. Empiece sus oraciones con *“You could include...”, “Your text will be nicer if you...”, “I would like to know about...”*
- Felicite al autor, o pídale clarificación si es necesario. En todo caso, hágale saber por qué lo felicita y por qué le pide más información y en dónde.

² Refiere a cuántas veces leyó y cuánta dificultad tuvo usted para entenderla.

³ Refiere a que todo dentro del texto apunte a la misma dirección; no hay “ideas sueltas”.

⁴ Refiere a cuánto aporta cada oración o párrafo al texto global, a si usted siente que “falta algo” o que “algo no se entiende o no cuadra”. ¿El texto es claro?

⁵ Refiere a la facilidad de entender el texto a partir del orden en que se presentan los eventos. ¿Tiene que volver a leer para entender de qué se está hablando o “qué va después de qué”?

Appendix 7 – Resources used in the study

MAXQDA™ 10



A piece of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), MAXQDA™ 10 offers several tools to analyze data from a qualitative approach, as well as offering some functionality in quantitative analysis of data. MAXQDA™ has several built-in features such as MAXMAPS™ that help visualize memos, codes, and the relationships among codes; it also has add-ons such as MAXDICTIO™ that allow the language researcher to analyze language from a lexical approach. In this study the researcher used the Student License, which can be purchased by students at a low cost from the program’s webpage: <http://www.maxqda.com/>.

Skype™



An instant-messaging service, Skype™ combines synchronous communication via chat and voice with other functionality such as file sharing. In this study, the researcher and students used the free license, which allowed the researcher to hold audio calls with the participants. Sometimes Skype can be difficult to set up and audio can turn a bit “robotic.” For group video calls it is necessary to purchase the Premium version, from the program’s webpage <http://www.skype.com>.

Google Drive™

Google Drive™ is an online storage service which offers up to 5 GB of storage in its free version. It allows the creation, editing, sharing and management of documents, presentations, spreadsheets, forms and drawings, and now incorporates the possibility to link third-party applications to its functionality. In this study, Google Drive™ was used by students to express their will to participate, to let everyone in the study know the URL to their blogs, to sign up for online synchronous interaction with the researcher, and (by some students) to share their learning logs with the researcher. Google Drive™ is accessible with a Google™ Account. See the tool at <http://drive.google.com>.

Appendix 8 – Screenshot of the cloud blogging directory

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Timestamp	What's your name?	What's your Gmail email address?	What's your blog's name?	What's your blog's URL?	Did you create, or do you already have a nickname for you in the blog?	If your answer to the previous question was "yes," please write your nickname here.	If you have a nickname in the blog, would you prefer to use it, or to keep your real name?	Which are the six topics that you will write about?	If there is another topic that you would like to write about, please write it here. If not, leave blank.	
2	11/6/2012 23:13:21			blogging coherence	http://yeimialejandra	No		Use my real name.	Mixed emotions, Awkward situations, Learning experiences, Likes / Hates, Honesty, Time travel		
3	11/7/2012 23:10:27			RESEARCH TIME!!	researchtimealeja	No		Use my real name.	Mixed emotions, Awkward situations, Learning experiences, Living together, Honesty, Time travel		
4	11/8/2012 22:13:13			WHAT IF...?	http://www.iwannar	Yes	MEFF	Use my nickname or my real name. It does not matter to me.	Mixed emotions, Awkward situations, Learning experiences, Living together, Likes / Hates, Time travel	PLACES TO VISIT	

Appendix 9 – English translation of Spanish quotes

Appendix 9.1

“I distinctly remember that my friends always ask for information that shouldn’t be missing in the story, details that are not ‘left hanging’, so that every possible question is answered throughout the text.”

Appendix 9.2

“With regards to the writing process, it seems to me that it was more coherent and cohesive at the end, as we were improving our entries with the suggestions from our peers. In all publications I tried to follow the teacher’s advice about text coherence.”

Appendix 9.3

“When I finish [writing], I read the story aloud and mentally several times (approximately 3) to see how coherent it is, and in case I must change, take away or add something.”

Appendix 9.4

“About feedback, it seems a very good tool to me. I had the experience, in my first story, that even when I felt each of the things that were happening in the story, sometimes I lost sight of those details so that my peers could live it as I told it, and it liked it very much that they made me notice it through feedback.”

Appendix 9.5

“In my post about Time Travel, my entry looked more like a reflection or presentation of memories than a real ‘story’; that’s what my classmates noticed and, since then, I try to make every entry more an anecdote on the topic than my opinion of it.”

Appendix 9.6

“As I had said before, for this, my fifth story, I only took into account the comment that my classmate Mary made on my past story. Having followed her advice, I realized that it paid off, because all the comments that I received in this story were positive; besides, nowhere was I asked for clarification of any kind. However, I am still taking into account my classmates’ comments on my blog and in theirs, so that my future stories are even better than this one.”

Appendix 9.7

“I think that, as a conclusion after having used this medium [blogs] to perfect ‘writing’, it is undoubtedly a great way to do it; I felt very comfortable with the blog, which is as if you had a personal page where people come by and read your experiences, in a respectful and very easy way, which I find totally amazing.”