The Development of Writing Skills in Fourth Grade Students Through the Use of Storytelling

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The Development of Writing Skills in Fourth Grade Students Through the Use of Storytelling

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF WRITING SKILLS IN FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS THROUGH THE USE OF STORYTELLING

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ABSTRACT

The present document reports the findings of a qualitative case study. Our study sought to analyze the nature of the relationship between storytelling and writing development. The participants in our study were six fourth graders, aged between eight and eleven years old who attended a private school in Dosquebradas, Risaralda. Findings in our study suggest that there was a gradual development of the students’ interlanguage writing system. Specifically, we observed that this evolution occurred due to the linguistic input the students receive from the stories, the use of code-switching and communicative strategies.

Key words: Writing, Storytelling, Communicative Strategies and Motivation.

RESUMEN

Este documento presenta los resultados de un estudio cualitativo. Nuestro proyecto busca analizar la naturaleza de la relación existente entre las historias narradas y el desarrollo de la escritura. Los participantes de nuestro estudio fueron seis estudiantes de grado cuarto que se encontraban entre los 8 y los 11 años de edad. Mientras este estudio se llevó a cabo los participantes pertenecían a un colegio privado en Dosquebradas, Rda. Los resultados adquiridos sugieren que hay un desarrollo gradual en la interlengua del sistema de escritura en los estudiantes. Nosotras pudimos demostrar que esta evolución ocurrió debido a los elementos que reciben los estudiantes de las historias, el uso de ambas lenguas (lengua materna y extranjera) en un mismo escrito y el uso de estrategias comunicativas.

Palabras Claves: Escritura, Narración de historias, estrategias comunicativas y motivación.
INTRODUCTION

The present project highlights the importance of encouraging the writing skill in children in a foreign language context using storytelling as a tool due to the fact it improves the students’ target language vocabulary. These stories contain different vocabulary which they can learn or practice since they are based on topics that are familiar to them and it presents new vocabulary using these topics. In addition, these stories provide learners the opportunity to participate by expressing themselves, giving their ideas about the content or sharing between them their own opinions.

The findings of our study showed how storytelling can serve as a tool to improve students’ writing and help them to find ways to create their own stories. Additionally this study explains how each lesson was planned by the researchers taking into account the stories’ content, the language level of the students and the activities the students had to accomplish in each session.

At the end of the study there are some recommendations that researchers should take into account if they want to investigate about this topic.
We firstly want to thank God for giving us perseverance, and patience for developing this project.

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1. PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

This project intends to promote creativity and also the writing skill in fourth graders, using storytelling as a tool for developing and improving these processes.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The realities of the 21st century require that people be proficient in a foreign language in order to interact effectively with people from other cultures. As Crystal (1998) claims, “There has never been a time when so many people wished to travel to so many places. There has never been such a strain placed on the conventional resources of translating and interpreting. Never has the need for more widespread bilingualism been greater, to ease the burden placed on the professional few. And never has there been a more urgent need for a global language” (P.14). For this reason learning a foreign language is vital for people all around the world from different cultures, economies, educational levels to interact in this new era where the necessity of learning a Universal language is very notorious.

Nowadays, due to the fact that the new technologies have increased; people have been looking for different ways to communicate with each other. For example, social networks like Facebook and Twitter permit people of different countries to talk almost as if they were face to face. A doctor in China can instantly consult experts in the U.K. or the
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United States about medical problems but he/she must be able to read and understand in English. Students routinely use internet to consult information about foreign universities and to study virtual careers, but in order to do this they must almost always be proficient in a foreign language. In most cases, they must be able to read and write English well.

In 2004 the Colombian National Ministry of Education (MEN) embarked on “Proyecto Colombia Bilingue”, a project whose aim is that Colombia will be bilingual by the end of 2019. In order to achieve this, Colombia has begun to require the inclusion of English as a foreign language in the curriculum of all primary and secondary schools. This means that students in Colombian schools must acquire the ability to use English for communicative purposes. They must acquire pragmatic, linguistic and sociolinguistic competences. (MEN, 2004).

It is important to keep in mind that fostering the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are necessary for being proficient in a foreign language. Nevertheless, the main focus of this project is on the writing skill. As Neuman, Copple and Bredekamp (1998) suggest “Learning to read and write is critical to a child’s success in school and later in life. One of the best predictors of whether a child will function competently in school and go on to contribute actively in our increasingly literate society is the level to which the child progresses in reading and writing. Although reading and writing abilities continue to develop throughout the life span, the early childhood years—from birth through age eight—are the most important period for literacy development” (p.1).

Furthermore, writing is challenging because of the mental processes this ability involves. As Elander, Harrington, Norton, Robinson & Reddy’s (2006) point out, writing
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demands critical thinking, use of language, structuring and arguments. Thus, fostering the writing skill is not easy for English foreign language students, and it is even more complex when they do not master the English language very well.

One strategy in order to encourage learners to write is the implementation of storytelling in the classroom. This tool has a great influence over writing since through storytelling learners build up writing skills and creativity. As Robinson (2002) argues “Storytelling is magical and storytelling is a very effective instructional strategy for introducing new material, re-teaching, or review. Students can get involved and can even participate in class stories. Storytelling definitely has a place in education today” (p.1).

Using storytelling as a strategy brings a lot of benefits to the process of developing writing in children because it is a very effective and positive tool in which learners feel motivated and comfortable. Robinson (2002) affirms “Storytelling is an excellent teaching strategy because stories ignite student interest, help students create vivid mental images and stories activate the thinking process. Stories form a framework for connecting events and concepts. This helps students better understand and later recall information” (p.1).

When students hear a story or read a book they create in their mind their own facts, places, characters and scenarios. Storytelling gives the students the opportunity to imagine and create different issues of their interest. The autonomy to create stories gives children the motivation to write since they are writing about the things they are interested in and this is a positive starting point to develop the writing process.

In schools the students need to learn how to write and this skill is a challenging one to develop because some teachers do not find successful ways to motivate learners to compose their own writing. For this reason this project focuses on implementing
storytelling in order to see how these stories encourage the students to write and at the same time improve their English language.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Principal Question

1. How can the use of storytelling impact the writing process in fourth graders in an English foreign language context?

Sub-Questions

2. What kinds of strategies do the students use to improve their writing?

3. How can storytelling be used to promote writing?
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4. OBJECTIVES

4.1 General objective

Describe the positive or negative impact that storytelling has over the writing process, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using this kind of material with fourth graders.

4.2 Specific Objectives

- Encourage learners to write in English (almost a few words), using storytelling as a tool.
- Use stories to implicitly provide basic grammatical structures (Subject+verb+Complement).
- Introduce new lexical items and while practicing familiar vocabulary.
5. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to have a better understanding of the research The Development of writing using storytelling as a tool, it is necessary to gain insight into different terms that are relevant to our research study. The most important issues related to our study and which are going to be presented in this chapter are: Writing, differences between writing and speaking; storytelling; language transfer (interlanguage, avoidance, chunking); communicative strategies (code-switching, drawing and dictionaries); and finally, motivation.

5.1 WRITING

To begin, it is important to consider definitions about writing and its importance as a skill not only in the classroom but also for real life interaction, not only for adults but also for children. Writing has varied definitions, all of them presenting similar concepts. For example, Ruiz (2003) states that writing is seen as a dynamic process which involves: thoughts, language and interaction. Some other authors like Goodman (1996) and Clavijo (2001) share this idea and define writing as a dynamic and creative process in which the writers have the opportunity to interact and to express their own ideas and perceptions about the reality and the world. Writing is also defined by Hudelson (1988) “as the creation of original text using individual’s intellectual and linguistic resources, rather than copying
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someone else’s text, using a prepared list of words to create sentences or stories, filling in the blanks, or practicing handwriting” (p.1). Another definition is made by Crystal (2003) who states that writing is not only a mechanical task but also an exploration in the use of language, a creative process, and an act of discovery; in other words, it is a way to plan and produce language that anybody can read.

5.1.1 Writing purposes

According to Crystal (2003), writing is used for a wide range of purposes—to express feelings, tell stories, report events, complete forms, keep reports- and a variety of audiences. For example, some audiences children are used to writing for are: first of all, themselves in the use of diaries, notes and first drafts; they may also address their friends writing a letter, their teachers through writing tests, homework or notes; another possibility is an unknown audience when they produce public work as stories for a journal, etc.

In addition, people use writing as a way of communication, given that nowadays the mass media and different technologies have become mainstream among peoples. For example, the use of computers (e.g., emails, facebook, twitter, chats, etc.) and cell phones (i.e. text messages) demands writing. According to Olshtain (2001) writing is a way to communicate different messages to different close or distant people, known or unknown readers. In our time this communication has an important role because all people are surrounded by technological advances like writing mails and chatting. Another important aspect is that through writing, learners are able to plan and rethink the communication process.
5.1.2 Complexity in writing

It has been generally agreed that writing is a rather difficult skill to foster in foreign language learning. Even for many teachers, this is a very challenging ability to develop and on occasions, disregarded. Some authors (Calkins, 1994; Atwell, 1990; Murray, 1987; Graves, 1983) in Ellington, 1998 “have found that not only is writing a difficult task for students but that teachers need as much guidance in learning how to teach writing as the students need in order to learn how to write” (p.1). In this way Nunan (1989) argues that learning to write in a fluent and coherent way is the most difficult skill for any language learner in any language: first, second or foreign. Other authors like Bell and Burnaby (1984) agree that writing is a very complex cognitive skill since the writer needs to foster a number of variables like: content, vocabulary, sentence structure, coherence, avoidance, interlanguage.

Clavijo, (2001) argues that parents, teachers and peers can join a collaborative effort to help learners develop writing skills because writing is a social practice.

5.1.3 Writing across languages

Another important aspect related with the writing process in a foreign language is its similitude with the process of writing in the first language. Some studies have revealed that from early childhood, children try to understand their first written language. According to Hudelson (1988) “Children make predictions about how written language works and create
texts based on these predictions” (p.1). This author also establishes some of the advantages of children writing in their first language and using this knowledge in the second or foreign one. First, they extrapolate information about the purposes of writing; second, native writing provides linguistic and nonlinguistic resources like: structures and punctuation. The learners can apply knowledge from their first language context to foreign contexts. In this respect Rodari (1999; in Ruiz 2004) states that Children use language to create a linguistic system with syntactic and grammatical rules of their mother language (p. 131). ¹

5.1.4 Writing in the classroom

For introducing the writing skill, and to motivate the learners to write, the teacher needs to show the students the real purposes writing has in a real life context. According to Harmer (2009), there are various reasons to encourage the learners to write. One of these reasons is a “real life one”: for example writing things like emails, letters and reports. Hudelson (1998) also affirms that children write when the writing activities are meaningful to them; it means that teachers need to promote writing focusing more on the content than on the form, and they need to encourage learners to write providing reasons that are important and real to the writer. Similarly, Ruiz (2004) points out the idea that it is significant for children to be engaged in meaningful literacy activities since they give them the chance to write about their own experiences with the world around them. What is more, Harmer (2009) argues that it is important to show the students that writing is not only

¹ “El niño usa el lenguaje construyendo su sistema linguistico segundo la sintaxis y la gramatica de su lengua materna”.
useful for the classroom activities but that it also presents opportunities to achieve almost instant success. Some new writing programs encourage teachers to provide a variety of real audiences and functions which the students can work with as it is a way to show the children that their writing has a “genuine purpose.”

Crystal (2003) puts forward the argument that students should be given the chance to talk about their writing. Writing is, therefore, seen as a way to allow students to practice and work with the language they have been studying and to also communicate through writing (Harmer, 2009).

5.2 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WRITING AND SPEAKING

Crystal (2003) says that “writing has been seen as a medium of literature, and, thus, a source of standards of linguistic excellence. It was felt that writing provided language with permanence and authority.” (p.180) Unlike writing, speaking has been the less systematic and rule-governed. However there is no sense in the view that one medium of communication is better than the other one, due to “The functions of speech and writing are usually said to complement each other” (Crystal, 2003, p.180) and the speaking skill as well as the writing one are particularly important to fulfill a set of communicative needs. We will now establish some of the differences that, according to scholars, exist between writing and speaking.

Crystal (2003) differentiates between writing and speaking in the following manner:

- The first difference relies on form, since speech uses phonics and writing graphics.
A difference related with communication is that speaking is dynamic; it means that it allows an interaction in which both participants are present; on the other hand, writing is static and permanent in which the recipient is distant from the producer.

The permanence of writing allows repetitive reading and close analysis; this permanence makes it ideal to record special events, issues and communicative ideas. In contrast, the rapidity of speech does not allow analyzing, preplanning and promotes repetition and rephrasing.

White (1981, Nunan 1989) shares this last idea saying that writing moves across time. This is the reason why any message can be transmitted from one place to another. Written language can be stored, and we can go back to it at any time; this is different from the spoken language.

Crystal (2003) continues:

- People develop speech naturally; however writing needs to be taught.

White (1981; in Nunan 1989) agrees by stating that “Writing is not a natural activity. All physically and mentally normal people learn to speak a language. Yet all people have to be taught how to write” (p.36)

Harmer (2009) states that in contrast with spontaneous conversations, writing gives the writer more “thinking time”, which means the writer has more time for “language processing” (p. 112)
5.3 STORYTELLING

Storytelling is described by Hathorn (2005) as a way of expressing any story through written items, art or speaking. Equally, McClean (2007) shares the idea that storytelling could be expressed in different ways through pictures, verbal or in a written form.

Grainger (1997) states that storytelling provides learners the opportunity to improve their linguistic competence in order to know more about the language as a system. Neuman (1998) and Doake (1998) state that by using stories in the classroom, children improve their literacy process, since these stories give students the opportunity to understand new language patterns, to acquire new vocabulary items and to make sense of their worlds. Similarly, Neuman (1998) points out that these stories contribute with the writing process since children have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and thinking. They acquire new vocabulary and structures to know how to construct stories, and to learn new language items. Besides, through stories, students are able to know and to interact with the target language using syntax and new vocabulary that stories provide (Cooper, 1993; Hudelson, 1996; Short, 1999).

Stories have another role in the classroom. According to Fredericks (1997), stories help students to focus their attention. Storytelling has been viewed by many educators as an important tool that helps to build literacy and to motivate imagination paths. When children listen to stories, they can imagine and visualize them. This process in Fredericks’ words is the “basis of imagination”. Another important aspect is that through these stories, the students can increase their vocabulary. The author also explains that when children listen to
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stories again and again, students can understand meanings and content. Also, when students have already heard a story, they are ready to discuss what they understood and compare it with their own experiences. Fredericks (1997) argues that “Stories are essential to the development of literacy; they are a powerful and indispensable tool to teach literacy and critical thinking” (p.3).

5.3.1 Promoting writing through stories

As already presented, writing is a complex skill to develop since it involves many patterns of language such as structures, vocabulary, grammar, etc. Dyson (1989) agrees with Vigotsky when he argues that: “Writing is a complex social tool that functions in varied ways in our society” (p. 3). For this reason, developing the writing skill demands support, reinforcement and strong input from the teachers, parents and even from classmates (Ruiz, 2003). Harmer (2009) explains how the role of the teacher during this process is to find ways to motivate the learners to write. He says that there are many activities that can involve the students into the course of writing; for example, the use of music and pictures, newspapers and magazines, brochures and guides, collaborative writing, stories, etc.

The main focus of our study was the use of stories in order to encourage learners to write. For developing the writing skill, stories have a relevant role, since through stories students are encouraged to be autonomous (because the students are able to write freely about their own ideas, and can develop issues of their own interest), creativity and the
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opportunity to explore the foreign language. As Fredericks (1997) explains, “storytelling can promote writing skills by encouraging young people to write their own stories, impressions of stories that they have heard or even a play based upon a familiar tale” (p.2). Similarly, Neuman (1998) and Doake (1988) state that by using stories in class, students are given the opportunity to understand the way writing works, learn new language patterns, create sense, and give meaning to reality. The authors also state that stories allow students to reinforce knowledge, to practice thinking and to expand their culture.

Braylan and Bereterbide (2008) express that the contact with authentic stories gives the learners the opportunity to get familiar with new concepts and practice previous knowledge. In other words, the uses of literature in the classroom settings provide different benefits, owing to the fact children are not only able to learn new vocabulary and structures but are also able to practice topics they have seen before. Other authors like Baghban (1984), Doake (1988), Teale (1984), and Wright (1997) also agree that reading stories give students the chance to enjoy and at the same time to be familiar with vocabulary, structures and patterns from the new language. Additionally, students can take language or ideas from the stories the teacher reads to them in order to create their own stories (Ruiz, 2004).

Through storytelling, children can create images in their minds about what they listen to or read. It provides them freedom to think and imagine what they want. Pearce (1974) asserts that what inspire the appropriate development in the brain are the constant exposure of children to readings and the activation of mental images. All things considered, the authors above agree that telling stories to students brings benefits as they use language for communication and derive linguistic structures from them.
In the second or foreign language classroom, storytelling also has benefits for students. First of all, they can develop writing skills, social skills, and originality (Wright, Bacigalupa, Black, & Burton, 2008). Therefore, stories encourage children to be creative and learn new language elements which help them to learn and achieve the target language. Kee (2010) says that “storytelling provides children the chance to write and enact out the story. By doing so, it will help them to improve their English” (p.1).

On the other hand, Ellis and Brewster (1991) state that through stories children have the opportunity to increase their language interest by being part of the stories at the point of identifying themselves with the characters of the story and interpret illustrations that are meaningful to them to understand content. Continuing with the same idea: Campbell (2001) says that stories in the language classroom provide the learners with the opportunity to relate their own personal experiences with the content in stories.

5.4 MOTIVATION

The learners’ attitudes are crucial when they are learning any kind of topic as most of the success in learning depends on the students’ interest and motivation. In this case when children are learning a foreign language, it is very important to know that learning is not only based on student’s positive attitude but also on how the teachers encourage students to be part of the learning process. For example, teachers can provide different kinds of materials (such as: big books, power point presentations, sequences of images, etc), a variety of activities or making them feel comfortable during lessons. Harmer (2009)
explains the important role of the teacher in the classroom in order to maintain the students’ high motivation. The way to do it, according to him, is by implementing activities where the students take part, because if they feel involved, they could excite their curiosity and participate. When doing so, students will be interested in the subject. Additionally, this author suggests that the teacher needs to do some things in order to ensure the success in the class, keeping in mind some important stages in order to have an organize lesson: Engage, study and activate. Harmer’s (2009) ESA can be applied to what we did in our study.

Engage: Raising initial motivation among learners.

Study: Sustaining learners’ motivation to focus on input and learn from it.

Activate: Allowing students to use their own motivation to do language related tasks such as rewriting the story they just heard.

5.4.1 Storytelling and motivation

As Vera (2003) says, stories are the key to engage and motivate children to write since stories are attractive for children if they are used appropriately. However, it is important to know that although storytelling is a useful resource, the teacher needs to vary not only the stories but also activities and tasks. Consequently, it is relevant to bear in mind that students, especially children, need to have a variety of activities during the lessons, since their attention span is short and they can get bored through repetitive and mechanical tasks. In this way Lightbown and Spada (2004) affirm that students depend on certain
routines established by the teacher; nevertheless, when the routines are the same all the time, students get tired and bored and their attention and motivation start decreasing.

Ur (1991) highlights the characteristics of motivated students. We will now present all 7 and paraphrase what the author says about each one of them.

1. **A positive task orientation**: Students positively address tasks no matter if they seem complex.
2. **Ego-involvement**: Students do tasks to gain self-confidence and feel fine about themselves.
3. **Need for achievement**: Students strongly want to get what they set out to achieve.
4. **High aspirations**: Students want better grades and do well in tasks.
5. **Goal orientation**: Students are focused on tasks and go directly for their aims.
6. **Perseverance**: Motivated students keep trying even when there are problems.
7. **Tolerance to ambiguity**: Lack of understanding is not an issue for motivated learners.

5.5 **LANGUAGE TRANSFER**

Our own examination of materials used in Colombian schools (filling in the blanks exercises, complete sentences changing words, for example: verbs from present to past) suggests that it is difficult to see in a foreign language classroom a natural acquisition of the writing skill, since the teaching methods are still based on traditional foreign language teaching; this means making children copy and complete mechanical exercises and not
composing writings that allow them to express their ideas or communicate with others.

Braylan and Bereterbide (2008) suggest “Para que el proceso de escritura se presente de
manera natural, es necesario aplicar un enfoque donde los niños puedan expresar sus ideas,
donde la necesidad de comunicarse o expresarse sea la prioridad. Esto dará lugar, entre
otras cosas, a la comparación, la meta cognición, y el conflicto socio cognitivo, siempre con
un propósito claro y relevante” (p.59).

On the other hand the writing foreign language learning is not very different from first
language writing, since children use the writing systems they have learnt in their mother
tongue as well as in the foreign language. As Cook and Bassetti (2005) affirm, children are
not learning only a foreign language but also a foreign language writing system. For that
reason children tend to use the same structures in their mother tongue as well as during the
foreign language learning. Consequently, in a study conducted by Braylan and Bereterbide
(2008) it is shown that children, at the beginning of the process, were in the same syllabic
and pre-syllabic stage in Spanish as well as in English.

Besides, children tend to use their mother tongue when they are learning a foreign
language; for example, they write down words in the same way they hear them. In other
words, they relate writing with what they hear or in an author’s words “Españolizando el
Inglés” (p.61) TRANSLATION: “they make English fit the spanish system” (Braylan and
Bereterbide, 2008). Likewise, children use all kinds of methods in order to communicate
what they want to express or when they want to transmit a message. Goodman (1996)
affirms that children invent spellings of words, punctuation and even words to express their
ideas.
The idea of using the mother tongue as a support for children to write in a foreign language has been discussed by many authors. One of these methods is transfer since “learners adopt a number of strategies in order to help acquire the target language” (Selinker, 1993, in Chinese University of Hong Kong 1998. p.66). This process of transfer has been seen as a positive starting point to learn a foreign language. In fact, Mason (1993) has considered that “without some language transfer, there would be no second language learning; the mother tongue is a major resource for language learning” (p.1). This process can also occur in two different forms since learners are not always aware of the mistakes they make or the certain rules a language has. Schmidt (1988) asserts that the process of transfer can be conscious when children produce speech or texts in the foreign language because they have not learned or have forgotten the proper use of language. Transfer can be unconscious when they may not realize that there are some rules and structures of the target language that are different from the native one.

In this sense, the mother tongue is an important resource to learn another language. Krashen (1993) argues that using the mother tongue when learning a foreign language was, at one time, conceived as a mistake but it is now recognized that all learners use their mother tongue as a resource, especially at early stages and this is a necessary process. In fact, Jim Cummins (2001), who has written extensively about the importance of the mother tongue in Second Language learning and literacy development, states:

“Children who come to school with a solid foundation in their mother tongue develop stronger literacy abilities in the school language. When parents and other caregivers are able to spend time with their children and tell stories or discuss issues with them in a way that develops their mother tongue vocabulary and concepts,
children come to school well-prepared to learn the school language and succeed educationally. Children’s knowledge and skills transfer across languages from the mother tongue they have learned in the home to the school language” (PP.118-119).

5.5.1 Interlanguage

Other authors have referred to the way in which learners use a foreign language as interlanguage. These authors consider interlanguage as a third language with its own particular structures and vocabulary. Nemser, Pitt Corder and Selinker (1992; in Block 2003) affirm that,

“The idea of interlanguage is founded upon the assumption that an L2 learner, at any particular moment in his learning sequence, is using a language system which is neither the L1, nor the L2. It is a third language, with its own grammar, its own lexicon and so on. The rules used by the learner are to be found in neither his own mother tongue, nor in the Target Language” (p.17).

In the same way some other authors consider the interlanguage as a point between the native and the target language, which learners use to build up grammar and structures. Corder, Nemser, Selinker (1972; in Cook, Wei 2009) say that the L1 is the starting point that learners use to extract “materials to be gradually blended with materials taken from the target language” (p.137). This creates something that is neither the L1 nor the foreign language.

When learners use the foreign language, they try to avoid wrong usage of the language with certain structures or words. However, it has been difficult to know when this
avoidance is occurring; in other words, “the learner must show evidence that he knows of the structure that he is avoiding, and it must also be so that a normal speaker of the target language would have used the structure in that situation”. (Kellerman, 1992, in Mason 1993, p.1)

Kellerman (1992, in Mason) distinguishes different types of avoidance: one in which learners know when there is a problem and are familiar with the correct form and the other one when learners know the form but do not use it in certain situations because they may feel they can make a mistake.

There is a phenomenon when the students are learning a foreign language; this phenomenon is chunking that is useful for the students in order to memorize any language pattern. Cherry (2011) says “chunking is often a useful tool when memorizing large amounts of information. By separating disparate individual elements into larger blocks, information becomes easier to retain and recall” (p.1) The reason why chunking is important in language learning is because students can learn language faster and proficiently through chunks. This phenomenon also helps the students to perform the language better in real contexts as well as in exams. Some examples of chunking that are use from stories are: once upon a time… they live happily ever after, these chunks are not learned independently (Kryszewska, 2003).
5.6 COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES
(CODE-SWITCHING, DRAWING AND DICTIONARIES)

During the process of writing the writers found their own ways in order to solve linguistic problems, these ways are known as communication strategies. According to Faucette (2001), “It seems evident that no individual’s linguistic repertoire or control of language is perfect. Both non-native and native speakers of a given language sometimes struggle to find the appropriate expression or grammatical construction when attempting to communicate their meaning. The ways in which an individual manages to compensate for this gap between what she wishes to communicate and her immediately available linguistic resources are known as: communication strategies” (p.1). Some of these communication strategies used by the students rely on the use of dictionaries, the use of the first language (code-switching) and most of all children use drawings in order to represent their writings.

The dictionary according to Crystal (2003) is an educational instrument used by the people in order to look up new words. Bilash, Gregoret & Loewen (1999) suggest that “Dictionaries are the instruments of lifelong learning; it is to them that we turn to revive our second language skills and to enhance our native vocabulary” (p.4). For children who have always their curiosity alert, it is a strategy they can use in order to consult new words and incorporate them into their own writings (Fredericks, 1997).

Another important communicative strategy is the use of L1 in writings, better known as the use of code-switching. This communicative strategy has been seen as a deficit in one of the two languages. However, according to Escamilla (2007), the use of two languages is used as a communicative strategy. For example, when children are writing
stories and do not know the meaning of a word in the target language they use both languages or even create their own orthography (Ruiz, 2003). Some authors argue that “simultaneous bilinguals, those children who acquire and/or are exposed to two languages from the time they are born do not strictly separate two languages; rather, they use two languages strategically in oral and written communication, and that code-switching is an important aspect of this bilingual development” (Baker, 2001; Genesse, 2002; Kenner, 2004; Zentella, 1997, p.4).

Children use another strategy in order to express what they want to communicate, which is the use of drawings. Maehr (1991) asserts that some children express their writing through drawings and others consider drawing as an illustrative form; they even use it as actual writing. Drawing has been found to help thinking and writing. According to Olson (1992), when students cannot think of a topic or are not able to write an event, they can stimulate their mind by making a series of drawings, from which learners can take certain ideas in order to complete their own stories or to write anything they want.

5.6.1 Drawings as a pedagogical tool

Following are some ideas that authors have in relation to drawings in the classroom. Drawings should be used at first just before writing and not at the end (Fulwiler and Petersen, 1981). Authors agree that the use of drawings and writing are a strong combination and an effective strategy for some students (Olson, 1992). Hubbard and Ernst (1996) report that: “many successful classes and workshops of educator-researchers use
drawing as a complementary tool of writing. Their research contributors found that writing helps drawing and drawing helps learning” (P.31).

5.7 RESEARCHES RELATED TO STORYTELLING AND WRITING

A research related to storytelling is the one carried by Ciro, Corrales and López (2009) in Dosquebradas, Risaralda, Colombia. In their research titled “Teaching vocabulary by using illustrated stories in third graders”, they intended to teach vocabulary (related to the stories proposed by the teacher, for example, animals) to children through illustrated stories. After collecting the data using field notes, observation and surveys, the researchers found that the students use knowledge of the L1 to support learning of new vocabulary. For example when the words in the L2 are semantically and phonologically similar to the words in the L2, the students are more likely to learn them. The authors also maintain that “they [students] contextualize them [new words], relating words with real situations of their daily life and their social setting” (p. 30).

Ciro et al (2009) also found that the students paid more attention to the illustrations that the teacher showed them, than to what the teacher actually said. However, the students were able to understand the story by merely seeing the illustrations. Finally, the researchers concluded that teachers must select the stories they are going to use in the EFL classroom by considering students preferences and likes, which will influence student’s motivation to
learn as well. If we, as teachers, are planning to use stories to teach young students, we must be aware of including illustrations, flashcards and posters so learner “develop their imagination, raise their perception, and develop their linguistic competences” Ciro et al, 2009, p. 20).

Ruiz (2003) developed a project called “Kidwatching and the development of children as writers”, through which it was intended to understand and analyze children’s development as writers. First, Ruiz presented the students a story, then, she proposed oral activities to check what the students had understood, as well as drawing activities. According to Ruiz (2003) the oral activities before the writing tasks “allowed them to become more confident in using written English in their messages, stories, and hyper-stories” (p.54). After triangulating the data collected from interviews, observations, and second graders’ writing samples, Ruiz found that during the construction of written texts, the children’s self-experience is an essential factor. Code-switching is also an element used by the learners in this study when they were participating in writing activities, proving once again that the native language seems to be important during the development of learning a foreign language.

Another study related to storytelling is the one conducted by Porras (2010) called “Teaching English through stories”. This study was carried in our context (Colombia) in a public elementary school, and “the purpose of the project was to implement a proposal with innovative language teaching methodologies in order to make the language learning process fun and meaningful for children” (p. 99). According to the findings, when teachers take into account preferences of the students, learners can see learning as an enjoyable activity and
then are able to get involved easily in the process. The first step taken by the researchers was to analyze the students’ needs through direct observation, a survey and a diagnostic test. Once the researchers had the required information, they designed the course syllabus and the stories they were going to use in the classes (in which they implemented different teaching methods). In order to make the stories more appealing to the students, the researchers created big illustrated books that could encourage them.

After analyzing the data, it was found that the stories the researchers created based on students’ likes and preferences were motivating for the children, because they considered them meaningful and interesting. Besides, as the students could recognize some vocabulary and characters from the stories, (which means that the previous knowledge was activated) it was possible for them to carry out a reading activity. Another positive aspect related to the use of the stories was that a variety of activities that also motivated the students could be done, for example: games, puzzles, and songs, all with learning purposes.
6. RESEARCH DESIGN

6.1 Type of Study

This project incorporated elements of qualitative, descriptive and interpretive research as well as case study. Besides, this research project was based on the characteristics of the qualitative research, since its main focus was to observe the attitude, motivation, and the responses that children had towards writing and storytelling. Ereaut (2007) argues that this type of research is employed for analyzing people’s attitude, behavior, motivation, preferences, culture, etc.

This study focused on developing and understanding the writing process in children through the use of storytelling. For this reason we were interested in the outcomes children showed at the end of the process. As Merriam (1998) explains, the main interest of qualitative researchers is their interaction with their social worlds and in this way “understanding the meaning people have constructed” (p.13).

With respect to data gathering, we acted principally as complete participants and observers, planning activities with storytelling in order to study the children’s writing development. Since qualitative research involves the implementation of a conscious instrument for interpreting and analyzing data, the human researcher is the best tool for
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gathering this information, since qualitative research involves the use of interviews, observation and analysis (Merriam, 1998).

This project also followed the principles of case study because it required intensive descriptions and analysis of single or small units (Smith, 1978). Therefore, the principal interest of this project was to discover the influence either positive or negative that storytelling had over writing in an English foreign language context. As Merriam (1998) explains the main focus of case study research is in the process, the context, and in discovery. Consequently, the idea was to observe a small group of fourth graders and make an intensive description and analysis of their attitudes and the impact storytelling had over the writing process. Brown (1988) affirms that the case study is a kind of research that is centered on the study of one or a few individuals.

This project was richly descriptive since it was based on the analysis and interpretation of the data and the process, using words for describing the variables of the phenomenon and the different situations that probably was presented in the process (Key, 1997).

This investigation made an interpretive analysis about the benefits, the impact storytelling had on the students’ writing. “Interpretive methods of research start from the position that our knowledge of reality, including the domain of human action, is a social construction by human actors and that this applies equally to researchers” (Walsham, 1993). In the same way Neuman (1997) states that interpretive study allows for interpreting and paraphrasing the points of view expressed by the participants. Moreover, interpretive research also gives the researcher the opportunity to present his/her own analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Neuman & Walsham, 1995)
7. METHODOLOGY

7.1 Context

This research project was conducted in a school in Dosquebradas called Technology School. This is a private co-ed school that prepares students to work in food processing and agro-business management. This school has two different schedules: one in the morning that is high school and one in the afternoon that is elementary. The morning schedule has grades from sixth to eleventh, two groups for each grade (twelve groups) and in the afternoon grades from preschool to fifth grade are taught one group per grade, (Thirteen groups). The average of students per group was from 25 to 30 students. Approximately there were 403 students in the whole institution at the moment this project was conducted.

The school had a total of twenty-two teachers in both schedules. The population in this school belonged to the middle-high status (Status Three). The resources this school provided were: a library, computers classroom, two laboratories: (the foods’ and the chemistry one), two courts and one children’s park.
7.2 Setting

The students attended English classes from preschool to eleventh grade. The learners were exposed to English from preschool to third grade one hour per week, from fourth to fifth grade two hours per week, and in the morning schedule from sixth to eleventh grade three hours per week. The school had two English teachers, both with “Licenciado” titles, but from preschool to third grade the students attended English with their group director. The rest of the grades attended English with English teachers.

The standards and the objectives the English teachers followed were the ones established by the Minister of Education in Colombia, which are specified in the text “El reto”. The objectives were those previously designed by the school and the institution but they were confidential and only educators from the school had access to that information.

This is the classroom sketch:
7.3 Participants

This project follows the principles of the purposeful sampling that according to Merriam (1998) “it reflects the average person, situation or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (p.62). The type of sampling selected for it was the maximum variation because we intended to select a group that had similar characteristics, like age, background and English level. Merriam (1998) explains that “maximum variation sampling would involve identifying and seeking out those who represent the widest possible range of the characteristics of interest for the study” (p.63).

This study was focused on a group of fourth graders (there were 25 students in the group) from Dosquebradas- Risaralda. From this group of fourth graders we selected randomly six students (three boys and three girls between eight and ten years old) in order to observe and analyze the development of their writing skills using storytelling as a tool. The participants were at level A1 (as defined by the Common European Framework).
7.4 Role of the researcher

As teachers-researchers our role was to be complete observers and also participants as observers. The complete observer according to Gold (1958) is one who does not form part of the social setting in any way. The complete observer observes each detail in the classroom setting; for example: the students’ behavior, attitudes, motivation and responses. Also the complete observer does not have any contact with the participants and there is no interaction between them (Smith, Mark K. 1997).

The other role the researchers had during this study was to be participants as observers. According to Mac and Ghaill (1996) participant observers can collect data while interacting in the daily life of the people they are observing. Also participants as observers can take advantage of the different situations and perspectives of the participants, and find meaning in them.

In our project each researcher had different methods for gathering data. The complete observer collected data taking notes about each detail, situation, or important issue that could occur during the activity. The participant as observer had to present the activity, interact with the participants and collect data working with the sample, using all the instruments required for the class such as: books, images, etc. Additionally, the participant as observer had to complete a journal, explaining the more relevant events presented in the session as well as her personal feelings, ideas, thoughts and opinions.
7.5 Ethical considerations

The study was titled “The development of writing through storytelling in fourth graders”. It was focused on the influence that storytelling had over the writing process. For the data collection, it involved field notes, the student’s writing and photos from the lessons (approximately 10 hours). The participant as observer, the In-service teacher and the students were photographed as they talked and interacted during the activities. The in-service teacher and the student’s name were removed from the study.

As part of an ethical approach to this study we assured that:

- Individual children were not indentified or named.
- The students were not assessed, tested or graded.
- The name of the school was not revealed.
7.6 Data collection sources

7.6.1 Observations

As this project was based on the principles of the qualitative approach, we used methods like observations, journal, interviews, and analysis of the activities presented by the students. The first method used by the researcher was observation. The complete observer made twelve general observations in which the principal aim was to observe the students’ behavior, attitudes, etc. taking into account the whole group (the 25 students) and the participant as an observer. Besides this, the complete observer had to complete six specific observations of the six participants from this research project.

7.6.2 Journal

The participant as observer completed a journal. A journal is defined by Hills (1992) as a way of recording a child’s behavior in detail after the situation occurs. In this journal the participant as observer noted the most important issues presented in the class and also her personal thoughts. The main objective of the observations was to analyze the attitudes students had towards writing, their proficiency, and the influence storytelling had.
7.6.3 Interviews

Two interview sessions were made, one at the beginning, and the other at the end of the process (each one was about two minutes). The aim of these interviews was to understand the different points of view children had towards storytelling and writing. Interviews gave us the opportunity to see the different participants’ points of view and their thoughts and feeling about the topic. Note: The interviews were conducted in Spanish, in order to facilitate communication.

McNamara (1999) considers that interviews are very useful for knowing the experiences and the concerns of the participants. Also the interviewer has the opportunity to get in depth information about certain topics. The interviewer can get the participant’s personal points of view and better know their preferences. The type of interview we implemented is the Standardized open-ended in which the participants have the freedom to better express their ideas and opinions since they do not have multiple choices or have to select “yes” or “no”. This type of interview encourages objectivity and avoids biases. We asked the same questions to all of the participants. This kind of interview allowed for faster interviews and made it easier to compare and analyze them (Valenzuela and Shrivastava, 2008).
7.6.4 Document Collection

As the participants of this study had to accomplish different writing tasks, the researchers made a document collection. This method was implemented in each session. We implemented this method with the aim to obtain the students productions and to see the writing proficiency they reached. As Mertens (1998) suggests, the researcher is not able to accompany each one of the participants and attend all the events at the same time. Document collection allows the researcher to acquire data that is very difficult to obtain just by doing observations.

7.7 Length of the project

This research project was developed during five months starting on March 11th 2011 and finishing on May 27th 2011. We met the students one hour per week during these eight weeks.

7.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis of this investigation was based on the principles of grounded theory. We used codes and categories to analyze the collected information. As Charmaz (2006) proposes, grounded theory consists of coding the collecting data and stopping in
each important detail naming and analyzing them. Additionally, we used the pawing method that consists of underlining each important detail with different color pens. It was useful since we could go easily to the important facts and information. Bernard (2000) refers to the pawing method as “the ocular scan method.” It consists of using different colors to make it easier to the eye to separate or organize the information.

We started the data analysis with observations. First of all we analyzed the general observation where we observed how all the students respond to the activities, the level of motivation the students presented towards each activity, the impact each story had in each session, and the way the participant as observer presented the activity and interacted with the students. Then we moved to the specific observations (about the six participants of this study) in order to see their process in the class, the attitudes they had toward each story, the way each one of them demonstrated if they really understood the story.

We collected the productions of the students in order to see their English writing development, the coherence in their own stories and finally the use of vocabulary and structures. Additionally, as we used a journal we analyzed it looking for the most relevant issues presented during the lessons.

The two interviews that were made included some important questions in order to know the perspectives of the students toward storytelling and writing. Through these interviews we pretended to look for answers that help us to solve the research questions of this project.
After gathering the information, the names of the participants, the comments used from the different observations and the comments from the researchers’ journal, were named by codes. The participants’ names are coded in the following way: Lemon Student (L), Peach Student (P), Pineapple Student (PI), Apple Student (A), Pear Student (PE), and Strawberry Student (S). The code for the general observation is (GO\textsuperscript{1,2,3…}). The specific observation codes were made according to the participant that is described. For example: Specific Observation #1 from Lemon Student (SO\textsuperscript{1,2…}LS). The journal’s code is: Journal from March 15\textsuperscript{th} (June, July, etc.) (JM15). The comments from the outlier were coding following the next structure: Outlier comment\textsuperscript{3,2,4…} and finally both interviews are coded using the next structure: Interview # 1 or 2 question 1,2,3…. And lemon student answer: (I\textsuperscript{1,2}Q\textsuperscript{1,2,3…}LS).

Consequently, during this study we collected different kind of data which was analyzed following a specific relevant order. It means classifying the information taking into account the level of importance of each data.
8. INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

This section aims to provide a brief and clear explanation of how the teacher-researchers planned, designed and implemented eight different classes in order to find out if the use of storytelling might impact children’s writing development. The researchers used materials such as big books, power point presentations, sequence of images, comic and oral reflections. The steps used in each class were: presentation of the topic (the story), practice (checking comprehension) and production.

In order to introduce the first session it was important to find out what the students had learnt before. Then based on the information collected we used a big book named *The Hungry Lion*; its content was about daily routines, colors and animals. The activity started by presenting the big book and asking the students what they thought the book was going to be about according to the title and the illustrations from the cover. The researcher read the book aloud paragraph by paragraph, asking questions about each event in order to check comprehension and keep the students focus on the story; at the same we showed the pictures in the book to familiarize the students with the content. When we finished reading the story, we presented two alternative endings and the students had to choose one to complete their own writing activity.

In the second session the topic was introduced using a power point presentation with a video beam to present the story called: *The Bad Day Of The Prince*. The story was presented from the middle to the end. The students did not know anything about the
beginning of the story. Once again the learners were exposed to previous topics they already knew such as colors, proper names as prince, princess, the time and the numbers. During this session the students had to create the beginning of the story inventing proper names and using different adjectives in order to describe places and characters.

The story in the third session was an incomplete story. There were some blanks which the students had to complete with adjectives. The researcher started by reading the story aloud, asking questions about it to check comprehension and kept the students engaged with the story. Then the learners started filling in the blanks. It is important to say that the unknown vocabulary from the story was illustrated at the end of it.

The fourth session was introduced using two stories represented by sequences of images (one was about a fireman and the other one about bees). These images had some sentences to guide the learners with the order and the events presented. The researcher started introducing the images by reading the sentences and resolving questions about them. The students had the freedom to choose one of the sequences and based on those images the students had to write a complete story. When the learners finished the stories they shared what they wrote in front of the class.

For the fifth session the researchers designed a story using a comic. The story was about a brave dog, an angry cat and a rude rat. The researcher read the comic and asked questions in order to check comprehension. After reading the comic and responding to different problems and questions related to it, the children had to complete the comic because it only contained the first part. There were empty squares so they could write and draw what they preferred according to the situation presented in the first part of the story.
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When they finished they shared what they did by showing what they wrote to their classmates, their teacher and the researcher.

During the sixth session the researcher started reading a big book called: *The Elephant Child*. The researcher asked questions in order to check comprehension and solved doubts about the content of the book. It was quite long and it was important to remind different aspects from the story, interacting with the students sharing ideas and opinions. At the end of the story the learners were organized in pairs in order to write a summary.

During the seventh session, the learners had the opportunity to interact in groups and create a story based on images. To do this the researcher pasted on the board one image and read a short story about it. The researcher pasted on the board four more pictures. Then the students were organized in groups of five and one image was given to each group. Based on this image the students had to write a story taking as a model the story presented at the beginning of the class.

In the last session the researcher started writing on the board the words: place, animal, fruit, family, game and sport. Then the researcher checked if students were familiar with these words, asking some questions. Secondly, the teacher asked the learners to be silent and with their eyes closed in order to be focused on the things they were about to listen. Next the researcher started telling things like: imagine you are with your family, your favorite animal, your favorite place, eating your favorite fruit, playing your favorite game, and doing your favorite sport. This exercise was made to construct a story based on
the students’ real life experiences. At the end of this storytelling the learners opened their eyes and started writing what they imagined.

To sum up, during these eight sessions the lesson plans were developed taking into account the students’ level, age and background. Moreover writing was made gradually during these sessions. (To see the lesson plan format go to the appendix 13.3).
9. FINDINGS

9.1 Students used elements from the stories in their writing tasks

Throughout our process of investigation, storytelling through this process served as a tool to prompt learners to write. It presented them with many elements that they needed in order to write in English (for example: vocabulary, structures, illustrations, etc.) and these stories provided them with ideas that stimulated their imaginations.

The different stories presented during the sessions were the students’ base to start writing. After they listened to, or read the story they had to perform a writing activity like writing a beginning, middle, end or summary. The stories offered students: vocabulary they were familiar with in order to reinforce it, as well as unknown vocabulary in order to increase their lexis and give them more tools with which to write. The stories were written by the researchers using simple sentences with basic structures: subject + verb + complement. In this way, students could become familiar with simple structures they could use in their own written productions. When we examined students’ writing we observed that the participants had incorporated vocabulary, grammatical structures and thematic ideas from the input. The participants took from the stories complete sentences or phrases that were easy to remember (a phenomenon known as “chunking”). This can be seen in the following scanned sample.
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In the first image there is a part of one of the stories presented in one of the sessions, and in the second one there is a written task from one of the participants. We can see in these two samples how the participant used some of the same vocabulary elements even though he did not use the same words used in the story. For example: phrases in the original story like “They ate a lot of bananas from the green tree” and “All the others [elephants] have gone to the festival and I am alone” are echoed by “los otros elefants go al festival”, “the elephant se quedo alone”, “go al green tree” etc. in the student’s task.
The underlined part in the second image shows how the participant understood the principal idea of the story, since he describes the situation presented about the festival and how the elephant was alone; he transfers vocabulary but mixes it with Spanish words.

This evidence suggests that the stories were useful in that the participants used what they listened to or read – vocabulary items, phrases, and ideas – in order to complete their own stories. Cherry (2011) says “Chunking is often a useful tool when memorizing large amounts of information. By separating disparate individual elements into larger blocks, information becomes easier to retain and recall” (p.1)

9.2 Students Found their Own Writing Strategies

The lack of vocabulary and structures did not impede the participants from writing since they found their own strategies such as the use of dictionaries, notebooks, drawings and code-switching in order to accomplish their writing tasks.

9.2.1 Students Used Dictionaries and Notebooks

The stories offered the students: new vocabulary items, structures, phrases and even ideas. However, they used other materials and strategies during this process. For example the students took the initiative to ask for the meanings of unknown words and sometimes to look up the words themselves. But it is important to note that these unknown words were
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not limited to words they encountered in the stories; was their own idea to look up new words in order to complete their writing tasks. The students brought their dictionaries into the classroom without anyone asking them to do so. In fact, the dictionary was not the only resource they used in order to accomplish the tasks; their English notebooks had a special role during this process too. With their notebooks they could look up topics they encountered in their English classes like: daily routines, colors, adjectives, etc, since, these topics were used by the researchers in the stories presented in the sessions. As the students were familiar with these topics, they used structures and vocabulary from these topics in their writing tasks.

The following samples from our journal illustrate this:

JMR18=... The students asked for the translation of some words in English in order to write them in the writing activities. Additionally, some of the students brought their dictionaries and asked us if they could use them. We allowed them to use them, so they looked up in the dictionary unknown words.

GO7= Some of the students ask for the teacher's help, for example one student asks to the teacher the translation of ‘’los’’ when the teacher says ‘’the’’ immediately the student confirms ‘’a si ven que era t-h-e (spelling)’’[...] Furthermore they try to write everything in English also using what they have in their English notebooks and giving comments like “Profe yo quiero escribir todo en Inglés, no importa que sea cortico?” or “Profe puedo usar esto que tengo aquí en el cuaderno en la historia?”.

This can also be seen in the following outlier comment:
Outliercomment: Students were looking up in the dictionary the unknown words in order to build up the story.

This evidence shows how the students found by themselves ways to improve their English stories; for example using the dictionary to look up unknown words and add them into their own written productions. It is pertinent to note that the participants already knew how to use the dictionary and only asked if they were allowed to use them. The fact that they already knew how to use the dictionary gave them some autonomy because they did not always have to ask the teacher the translation or the meaning of new words. In fact, they not only used the dictionary but also what they had on their English notebooks; for example: linguistic patterns, vocabulary, and sentences. According to Fredericks (1997) Children who listen to stories are exposed to a variety of new words; these new words encourage children’s curiosity about the meanings of words and a desire to use these new words in their own stories.

9.2.2 Students Used Drawing as a Writing Strategy

Another strategy that we encountered was that students asked if they were allowed to draw when they were in a writing activity. We saw these drawings as an important phenomenon since through these images the participants expressed the things they were not able to write in English. It is important to note that these drawings were something that we did not plan, but we allowed the students to do it. We saw it as a possibility that could help
them to think in English since they could conceptualize the idea and express what they wanted to write. This can be seen in the following scanned sample where the student wrote only few words and represented part of the story through drawings. The original story presented a situation in which the lion had to choose between eating a zebra or make it its friend. As can be seen, the student illustrates the perception the lion had of the zebra; it shows how the lion imagined the animal as a steak, and the student did not use words to express this idea.

When the students did not want to write either in English or in Spanish they used drawings as a representation of what they had in their minds. Some of the students expressed comments like: “Profe yo no se escribir eso en Inglés, mejor puedo dibujar?”

Another important aspect about drawing was that the students preferred to draw first and then write. This could be a way to illustrate first what they had in their minds and then start developing the story. For example the following scanned samples show the relation of
the drawings and the content in some students’ written productions. In the first picture the content is about a soccer game, in which the student had an apple and the apple had a worm, and the student eats the worm. The drawing illustrates this situation.

The following samples from the observations and the interview illustrate this:

GO₁=the students only want to draw at the beginning of the activity. Some students finish on time while others were interested in drawing and left their writings.

Q₂AS=“¿Que preferías durante las actividades, dibujar o escribir? Puess al principio yo no sabia inglés y mejor dibujaba, pero en el cuento del elefante me gusto mucho escribir palabras en inglés”

SO₁PS= he wants to draw the characters of the story. “Teacher voy a dibujar a los actores del cuento, porque no quiero escribir.”

This evidence shows how drawing became a strategy for the students; since it was a representation of what they were not able to write in English. In some sessions some
learners asked if it was permissible to draw a lot and to write few words, since they said they could not write everything in English and they did not want to use so many Spanish words. Maehr (1991) asserts that some children express their ideas through drawings and others use drawing to complement or illustrate what they have written. However, they still use it as actual writing.

9.2.3 Students Used Code-Switching as a Writing Strategy

A third strategy used by the students in their writing was English-Spanish code-switching. At the beginning of the writing process it was challenging for the students to write in English since their vocabulary and structures were limited. So, the students asked if they could use Spanish words because they did not know how to write a complete text in English and we allowed them to do this.

It is relevant to say that this code-switching appeared from the first session where the students used few words in English and the rest in Spanish, but not during the whole process since during the last sessions some of the students expressed that they really wanted to accomplish all their writings only using English, was with this idea that they completed their writings only in the target language.

The next situation is an example from one of the sessions in which one of the participants asked if he could write only what he knew in English and the rest in Spanish. It happened in the activity in which the students had to do a beginning for the story. The
student expressed he did not want to continue writing since he did not know more English words, only the ones that he already wrote. The student asked for the opportunity to continue writing mixing Spanish and English. It was not a problem for us but it was seen as an advantage for the students. Since, they were able to complete their writing activities, even in English, Spanish or both. Besides the students did not stop writing, on the contrary they continued writing until during the lessons they succeeded in writing everything in English.

The following scanned samples show how a student started writing only few words in English and in the process he started using more and more English words and structures. In the first scanned image the learner used his mother tongue and the foreign language at the same time in order to express what he wanted and completed the activities proposed. Despite the fact that the student mixed two languages the structures were clear; for example: “…de prince…” “…y le dice that si son frien…”. On the other hand, in the last classes the student tried to use as many English words as possible even though he did not use the correct spelling of some of these words. This can be seen in the second scanned image where the student wrote things like: “…my game play soccer am friends y nuver fight…” This process showed the progress the students had made during the study.
We think that the opportunity to use code switching enable the students to write uninterruptedlly with a minimum of linguistic obstacles. This confidence gave the students the freedom to continue writing and little by little they added more and more English vocabulary and structures. During the last sessions it was not necessary for them to continue using both languages since they found ways (the dictionary, the stories, etc) to improve their vocabulary and complete their writing only using English.

Other important aspect to take into consideration is that although the students wrote in two different languages, their productions were coherent, with clear and detailed ideas which they expressed using two different languages. For example when they used English articles with Spanish words (“The bombero…” “El elephant…” ) or vice versa. Or when they mentioned plural or singular things in both languages. In addition the connection of each detail and event was highlighted during the stories since they never left any detail out
of it and as a result they always tried to create texts well structured. The learners used punctuation to highlight, separate or conclude different ideas.

As it can be seen in the previous scanned sample the learners were able to write their stories coherently and with clear ideas in spite of the fact that they used two languages. The word order and the punctuation were coherent and gave a clear sense of what the students meant; for example “a fireman”, “in flames” “the manguera” “Mi imagination” show a clear and coherent way to express their ideas using both languages and
also show how the students recognized some structures in English like the use of an indefinite and definite article. According to Muysken (2000) many studies have shown that many bilinguals will produce mixed sentences in oral and writing scenarios, and the most interesting thing of this fact is that these sentences are produced with great ease, coherence and fluidity.

9.3 Reading and Listening to Stories Motivated Students to Write

Some of the storytelling activities used during this study seemed to engage the students since they paid attention to each detail of the story by asking questions about the content and the vocabulary or by giving ideas and opinions about the story (for example: “Profe yo quiero escribir algo como eso, como digo?”) and sharing with their classmates what they understood from the story and the stories created by them based on the storytelling activity. However, some stories made the students feel un-engaged owing to the advanced language level they had, it means stories with topics and words the students had not seen before. In these activities they did not participate as in other activities. They did not answer questions or give opinions and they were not focused on the writing activity since they were doing different things like talking among themselves about soap operas and cartoons or simply looking at the researcher with a confused face and saying things like: “Yo no entiendo, que hay que hacer…” “…Y yo como se donde va cual palabra” etc.
Additionally, we noticed that when we were finishing our study, like in the sixth session (we were doing our project during 8 sessions) some comments like “Otra vez lo mismo” or “Que pereza escribir” (expressed with a lazy tone) showed that the students were getting tired.

The following sample from the lesson plan illustrates this:

LP₇= This activity had advantages and disadvantages since they were working in groups they were disorganized and misbehaved. The students talk, play and scream during the organization of the groups. The students wasted time to accomplish the activity since they started doing other things and were not focused on the specific activity. For example they talked about other things, looked notebooks about other subjects, etc. On the other hand some learners helped each other “Ole como se dice ellos?” “Pues THEY, T-H-E-Y” , interacted a lot talking about their own stories’ content “Sobre que esta escribiendo?” “Mire lo que yo puse” and learned vocabulary from one another by sharing ideas about what they should write and what kind of words should be used to express the idea they wanted to transmit.

This can also be seen in the following outlier comment:

Outlier comment₅= “It was a very good idea to use a comic since it combined what they like to do drawing, painting, writing... they showed a lot of interest and excitement participating by giving ideas, opinions, comments about the content of the story, etc. Additionally it is a good idea, to use something different since the students were bored
doing the same things. In addition it engaged them to use their dictionaries and notebooks to look for words they wanted to use on their comics”.

Even though the researcher read the story and explained things about the content by asking questions about it, the students were lost with the story and did not know what to do, many of them said things like: “qué hay que hacer?” “está muy difícil” “como así que adjetivos, eso que es”.

The learners showed lack of engagement and disinterest only toward certain activities. The reasons could be: the language level or the overuse of this tool since the participants always had to write. But it is important to highlight that the stories were presented in different ways; moreover the writing activities were not the same. For example: in some sessions the participants had to write a beginning, middle, end, summary or even a complete story. They also had the opportunity to work alone or in groups. However, they started getting tired of doing the same things (write) over and over again. Some comments from them were a proof of that: “Profe otra vez lo mismo”, “Hagamos algo diferente esta vez que no sea escribir”.

According to Harmer (2009) it is important to vary the students’ role even if the activity is the same. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that the best activity can be successful the first time; however, the overuse of this activity becomes monotonous. The value of an activity resides in its freshness. We took this into consideration by introducing variations during the activities and the stories. For example we introduced a sequence of images with short sentences and asked the students to complete them in groups. Nevertheless, the students continued asking why they had to write all the time. For us it
was a challenge since when the students had this attitude they did not write in the same way as if they were motivated to do it. For us this suggests that students saw writing as a repetitive activity. Even though, we do not have an explanation for this comments expressed by the students since we took them into consideration; we changed the activities and the stories each session and they continued expressing their disinterest toward the writing activities.
10. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

We would like to share some reflections that are the results of our experience with the use of storytelling to promote writing in fourth grade students that would be useful for teachers.

It is essential for teachers to keep in mind the importance of planning lessons based on the students’ language levels; in order to reinforce topics and introduce new vocabulary and structures. Naturally students need to understand the input they receive in order to use this input as their inspiration when they are composing their own writing. Also it is advisable to give to students the freedom to write in the way they prefer (that is without forcing them to write only in the target language) because sometimes the freedom to code switch makes it easier for students to start expressing their ideas.

Teachers can allow the use of different elements in the classroom to help the students to write. For example the use of dictionaries and notebooks provides the learners structures and vocabulary they can include in their own writing activities. The teacher also needs to be encouraging with the students’ feelings and encourage them to develop their own ideas and opinions. According to Ruiz (2003) “teachers need to be supportive and respectful of children’s’ ideas as readers and writers” (p.56).

Additionally, some strategies the teachers can take into account are: to keep variety in the lessons by providing different stories with different activities, presenting these in a dynamic and coherent way and giving the students the opportunity to write freely; that is to
say without restriction on their stories’ content or in the way they write. Also it is important to give learners the chance to share different ideas and opinions about the stories they write.

On the other hand it is crucial to use storytelling appropriately in order to encourage writing, because overuse of this tool can discourage the students from writing. Since when the children do the same activities over and over again they get tired or bored and will not perform the task correctly.

10.1 Research Implications

Further research in this area could focus on students writing process development. In order to do this, researchers should be prepared to generous amount of time through the process of carrying out our study; we observed the importance of time limitations. It was difficult for us to interpret writing processes in just a few weeks. because if the time is limited it is not possible to perceive the whole writing improvement the students show. Besides, researchers who want to study the development of students´ writing processes should videotape the sessions because using only observations and describing methods makes it difficult to cover everything that happens in the classroom and important details can be lost.
11. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

During the process of this research we found some limitations that need to be addressed because of their influence on the findings.

Such difficulties were mainly related to the observations made during each session. Since they were not very descriptive as we needed in order to support our findings, for this reason we had to reread our observations and journals many times in order to remember some important details and events that occurred during the process. Furthermore, the interviews did not provide us with enough information and we were forced to reconsider one of the research questions.

Another important limitation was that the time we allowed for analyzing the students’ writing processes was not enough.
12. CONCLUSIONS

Our experience with fourth grade language learners showed that storytelling can be a tool to encourage writing since it provided them with the freedom to create and imagine alternative endings, beginnings or parts from stories and even complete stories of their own interest. This was evidenced in the way they actively participated during the sessions and their performance during the activities. Moreover, the students demonstrated commitment with the tasks presented in the sessions by showing interest towards writing since they started writing a few words in English and finished writing all their productions in the foreign language.

Additionally, we observed development in the syntactic structure that the students apply in the second language; they went from isolated words to simple structures of the target language; in other words, students during the process increased the use of simple structures of the target language in their stories. As a consequence, at the end of the process their major interest was to write as many English words as possible.

The students implemented and adapted writing structures that they were exposed to – for example: the use of simple structures like subject+verb+complement – into their own writing. Also strategies like the use of dictionaries, the use of L1 and the use of drawings helped them to develop their stories and improve their writing. Students’ motivation fluctuated, so that produced more writing in some tasks than in others.
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We found stories available or effective way to encourage learners to write and we hope that more Colombian language teachers would explore about the use of stories in their language classes.
13. APPENDIX

13.1 Interview #1

PURPOSE

The main objective of this interview is to know what the students think about the process of writing. Besides, in order to see the student’s preferences and thoughts about the stories.

Note: the interview was made in Spanish, in order to give comfortableness and not to block the student’s answers.

Questions

1. ¿Cuál es tu nombre?
2. ¿Cuántos años tienes
3. ¿Te gustan los cuentos? ¿Por qué?
4. ¿Prefieres que tu profesor te lea los cuentos o prefieres leerlos tu mismo? ¿Por qué?
5. ¿Qué tipo de cuentos prefieres, de comics, de amor, de terror, de acción, de risa?
6. ¿Qué has aprendido en inglés?
7. ¿Te gusta escribir? ¿Por qué?
8. ¿Sobre qué cosas te gusta escribir, sobre ti mismo, tus amigos, tu escuela, tu familia, cuentos?
13.2 Interview #2

PURPOSE

The main objective of this interview is to see the students’ perspectives about the writing process they have just lived. All of this in terms of feelings, motivation, preferences and taste for writing.

Note: the interview was made in Spanish, in order to give comfortableness and not to block the student’s answers.

Questions

1. ¿Cuáles fueron los cuentos que más te gustaron durante todo el proceso?
2. ¿Sientes que estos cuentos te ayudaron aprender y a escribir más palabras en inglés? ¿por qué?
3. ¿Cómo es ahora tu gusto por escribir en inglés? ¿Por qué? (te gusta, no te gusta, te es indiferente)
4. ¿Cómo te sentiste durante las actividades?
5. ¿Qué prefieres durante las actividades, dibujar o escribir?
6. ¿Prácticas escribir en inglés fuera del salón? ¿Qué cosas te gusta escribir?
7. ¿Has hecho algún curso de inglés fuera del colegio?
The Development of Writing Skills in Fourth Grade Students Through the Use of Storytelling

13.3 Lesson Plan May 6th

**Lesson Plan**

Date: Friday May 6th 2011

Teacher:

Participant as observer: Stephany Loaiza Pulgarin.

Complete Observer: Lorena Álvarez Henao.

Hour: 1 hour.

Class Profile:

- Basic learners from 4th grade

Aim: At the end of the lesson learners will be able make a summary of the story using English vocabulary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic Competence</th>
<th>Pragmatic Competence</th>
<th>Sociolinguistic Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary: Use of the vocabulary they previously learned in their English classes.</td>
<td>To use English vocabulary for making a summary of the story.</td>
<td>To interact with a partner sharing ideas of what the story was about.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Materials: Big Book.

Anticipated Problems:

1. Ss do not understand the story.
2. While some Ss participate in the activity other are disinterested.

Anticipated Solutions:

1. To take the images as an advantage for introduce the unknown words.
2. Giving the chance to all the Ss to participate, giving ideas, opinion, advices or helps.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10’</td>
<td>Warm up</td>
<td>The T reads the story to the children.</td>
<td>To engage Ss with the activity.</td>
<td>T/S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# The Development of Writing Skills in Fourth Grade Students Through the Use of Storytelling

## 10’ Study
- **The Ss share with the rest of the class what they understood about the story, asks for unknown words, etc.**
- **To check if the Ss really understood the vocabulary and the meaning of the whole story.**
- **T/S**

## 20’ Active
- **With a partner the Ss have to create a summary of the story.**
- **Ss have the opportunity to use more English words.**
- **S/S**

## 20’ Presentation
- **The Ss share with the rest of the class what they write.**
- **To know what the Ss write, and to give them the opportunity of sharing opinions, ideas, and creations.**

### EVALUATION:
This type of activities are pleasant and useful for the children; they enjoy a lot big books. Because of the content and the illustrations they understand easily and use a lot of things from this book.

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Also</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10’</td>
<td>Warming up</td>
<td>The T reads the story to the children.</td>
<td>To engage Ss with the activity</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
13.4 Journal

May 6th, 2011

When we arrived there we were excited to know what would lie in store. We ran so quickly at the front where the kids were nestled. I showed them the story of The Three Little Pigs. They were fascinated. Guess who was the third? Was it the wolf or the house of straw? We had many guesses. One was 39.

Then I started reading and based on the look of their faces, they also tried to guess what the characters did. After the reading, the kids were highly interested in the story. We discussed at the same time what they thought were not so participative. We came up with good ideas. We knew they knew at the moment what they had to write. A summary of the story, they were not. They were not able to read it like they see in the story. In spite of that, they wanted to write interesting things. They wanted to write.

The 43 kids, show a great development of the language. They were able to write an entire English story. ADVANCE.
The Development of Writing Skills in Fourth Grade Students Through the Use of Storytelling

13.5 Specific Observation Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Juan Pablo</th>
<th>Juan Diego</th>
<th>Sebastián</th>
<th>Manuela</th>
<th>Sara</th>
<th>Vanessa</th>
</tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
13.6 General Observation Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Initial each entry made

Circle of Inclusion, University of Kansas, Dept. of Special Education, 3001 Dole, Lawrence, KS 66045 (913)864-0685
New Address as of June, 2000: 521 JRPearson, 1122 W. Campus Rd. Lawrence, KS 66045-3101 (785)864-0685
13.7 Outlier Observation Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/17/05/11</td>
<td>Students were engaged in the story. They participated actively and they showed interest along the class. Students were looking up in the dictionary, the unknown words in order to build up the story. It is noticed that students prefer to work in pairs, more than working alone. They love sharing opinions with their pairs in order to know how to write the story because I can notice they talk about the ideas related to the tail and then they start writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LIM Grant

* Initial each entry made

Circle of Inclusion, University of Kansas, Dept. of Special Education, 3001 Dole, Lawrence, KS 66045 (913)864-0685
New Address as of June, 2000: 521 JHPerson, 1122W, Campus Rd. Lawrence, KS 66045-3101 (785)864-0685
13.8 School’s mission and vision

**Mission:**

“Somos una institución educativa de carácter privado, con los niveles de preescolar, básica primaria y secundaria y media técnica en tecnología de alimentos. Ofrecemos a la comunidad de la región una formación integral (holista) cimentada en nuestros valores institucionales, la filosofía humanista, la ciencia, el arte, y la tecnología de alimentos.

Hacemos la diferencia en la calidad de ambientes para el aprendizaje, donde se propicia el desarrollo personal, con un equipo idóneo, comprometido con la experiencia educativa y la responsabilidad social.

Formamos niños y jóvenes con liderazgo para asumir retos personales familiares y del entorno en lo laboral, empresarial y/o académico con proyección al mundo”

**Vision:**

“Ser una institución que brinde a sus estudiantes una educación integral – Holista- de excelente calidad, donde se formen personas críticas, éticas, creativas, competentes y consecuentes con la transformación de su entorno, con espíritu científico, investigativo, humanista, empresarial, coherente y acorde con el desarrollo de si mismos, de su comunidad, su región, su país y el mundo”
14. REFERENCES


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- Key, J. (1997). Research Design in Occupational Education’, Oklahoma State University, [http://www.okstate.edu/ag/agedcm4h/academic/aged5980a/5980/newpage110.htm](http://www.okstate.edu/ag/agedcm4h/academic/aged5980a/5980/newpage110.htm)


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