PROCESS OF TEXTUAL PRODUCTION IN A VIRTUAL WRITING WORKSHOP FOR FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS

Artículos de investigación científica y tecnológica

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Proceso de producción textual en un taller de escritura virtual para estudiantes de quinto grado

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Abstract: The objective of this article is to characterize how to invigorate the production process of expository texts in a writing workshop aimed at fifth graders in the elementary level following the virtual modality. The article applied a qualitative methodological approach, which allowed to understand the social reality based on the participants' rationale and feelings; and the design was based on virtual ethnography, since it focused on studying the culture of a virtual educational community, analyzing the context and the discourses that took place among the members, bearing in mind that their connections were mediated by technology. In order to provide clarity on the components of the study, the study proposed several moments, as follows: first, design and formulation of the proposal; in the second, participants, informants and data sources were defined, along with their techniques; in the third, fieldwork was carried out to interpret the identified problem; in the fourth, the final report including the analysis of the results, conclusions and recommendations was produced. Results show the analysis and interpretation of some strategies implemented by the teacher throughout the workshop, the computer tools used, activities conducted, communication between classmates and students-teacher, production of a type of text (expository), taking into account everything the process entails and thus improve their communicative competence.

Keywords: Virtual education, writing workshop, textual typologies, expository text, computing tools.

Resumen: El objetivo del presente artículo es el de caracterizar cómo se dinamiza el proceso de producción de textos expositivos en un taller de escritura para estudiantes de quinto grado de Básica primaria de la modalidad virtual. Se utilizó un enfoque metodológico cualitativo, ya que permitió comprender mejor la realidad social a partir de la lógica y el sentir de los participantes; y el diseño estuvo basado en la etnografía virtual, puesto que se centró en estudiar la cultura de una comunidad educativa virtual, analizar el contexto y los discursos que se produjeron entre los miembros, observando que sus vínculos estuvieron mediados por la tecnología. Se plantearon varios momentos, los cuales dieron claridad sobre los componentes del estudio. Los momentos fueron diseño y formulación de la propuesta; en el segundo, se definieron los participantes, informantes y las fuentes de datos con sus técnicas; en el tercero, se llevó a cabo el trabajo de campo para interpretar la problemática identificada; en el cuarto, la construcción del informe final que incluye análisis de los resultados, conclusiones y recomendaciones. Los resultados muestran el análisis e interpretación de algunas estrategias implementadas por la maestra durante el desarrollo del taller, las herramientas informáticas usadas, las actividades realizadas, la comunicación entre compañeros y estudiantes – docente, la producción de un tipo de texto (expositivo), teniendo en cuenta todo el proceso que se requiere para lograr hacerlo y así mejorar su competencia comunicativa.

INTRODUCTION

Developing reading and writing skills is a common objective for many teacher researchers because students still face shortcomings in textual production, minimum or null quality of text and lack of liking to coherently convey their ideas; moreover, when students use web-based technological elements and programs, they limit themselves to expressing their emotions, feelings, thoughts and actions with a few words, abbreviations and emoticons, without providing a clear intention to the messages (Abril Lancheros, 2018). Only few take advantage of technology and use it to learn and put a lot of effort into virtual learning; students usually produce written work with isolated statements and without understanding the text as a set of meanings with structural rules: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic (Botelho, Marietto, Ferreira, & Pimentel, 2016).

Thus, this study was developed with the aim of characterizing the production process of expository texts in a writing workshop for fifth graders following the virtual modality (Botelho *et al.*, 2016) who were enrolled in a private educational institution in the municipality of Bucaramanga. The idea came from a problem identified in the development of the communicative competence, focusing on the specific skill of writing with coherence and sense.

The methodology is based on a qualitative approach with a virtual ethnographic design. Conducting the research from a qualitative point of view enables to better understand the sociocultural reality and commonalities of many people and human groups in terms of production and appropriation of the social and cultural reality in which their existence unfolds (Hsu & Lin, 2017). The virtual ethnography design was selected because it focuses on studying the culture of a virtual educational community, analyzing its members' context and discourse, taking into account that their technology-based connection has other forms of expression.

Subsequently the study's general objective is to characterize how the production process of expository texts is invigorated in a writing workshop aimed at fifth graders in the elementary level following the virtual modality (Arias-Velandia, Rincon-Baez, & Cruz-Pulido, 2018). In turn, the following are the specific objectives: to identify which strategies are used to invigorate the production of expository texts produced by students; to characterize virtual writing workshops to support the textual production process; to establish how collaborative processes take place in the virtual writing process; to acknowledge which computing resources (Muñoz Vargas, Rodríguez Pichardo, & Monroy Íñiguez, 2015) encourage the development of writing skills; and to describe how students feel in the writing process while producing expository texts.

The techniques applied included participant observation, documentary analysis, online or web-based surveys and semi-structured interviews. These allowed to collect information to demonstrate that the writing workshop conducted by the teacher benefited the students' writing process, communication among them and the teacher (since relationships were always good and no conflict came up); this was due to the implementation of different computing resources, which reinforce students' learning, and in this particular case, textual production, especially when it involves a topic of their particular interest.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the research's objectives and questions, this study followed a qualitative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2002) with a virtual ethnographic design. Conducting a study with said approach allows to better understand the social reality as the result of a historical construction process based on the rationale and feelings of the protagonists, from their particular traits and with an internal viewpoint. The virtual ethnographic design was selected because it focuses on studying the culture of a virtual educational community, analyzing the context and discourse of its members, taking into account that their connection is mediated by technology and that they have other forms of expression, i.e., focusing on the cyberculture and cyberspace in which participants engage, which acknowledges the Internet as "a space in which social interactions occur and are assumed as valid" (Alvarez, 2009).

The research process entailed several moments, following the suggestions by Mosquera-Villegas (2008): the field of study was selected, the research questions were proposed and the research proposal was substantiated thanks to the organization of the theoretical framework and to a review of technical literature; the group that was the object of the study was defined and the informants and data sources were selected, as well as the strategies of information collection and storage.

A total of eleven fifth graders of elementary participated, they filled a survey and received permanent observations while taking part in the writing workshop; also, each parent and the school principal completed a survey, as part of the students' training process. Essential information was collected in the field work, it helped interpret the identified problem in connection with the process of textual production in a virtual writing workshop. The process of collection, analysis and interpretation was continuous and took place in the development of the project and the writing workshop, particularly.

The research techniques used for information collection were participant observation, documentary analysis, online or web-based surveys and semi-structured interviews. Results' analysis and interpretation considered each one of the proposed information collection techniques. As per the students' surveys, taking part in the workshop helped them write better and well, helped them produce different types of texts, read well and understand the text, getting familiar

with more computing programs, new tools, and overall, to acquire more knowledge to apply in life. In terms of how useful it is to use computing resources to write, students believe that they are easy and quick to use based on its practicality, they add dynamism and fun and lead to more creative and better writing.

The tools which pupils found more helpful for writing were Word and Google Docs. The first because said processor allowed them to write the text with enhanced performance in the activities; the second was preferred due to the process, because the interface allowed them to write and see the classmates and teacher's reviews, keeping in mind that a peer evaluated the text in certain moments and assessed the work or the version's progress, which helped them correct immediately and improve their writing.

Likewise, other tools such as Mindomo gave them the possibility to summarize, to do concept maps in order to guide their expository text; Piktochart and Easel.ly were used for infographics of their text with ideas or images deriving from each topic. Pixton was used for graphic expression (Chipere, 2017) and they enjoyed it and used it a lot because they could draw cartoons and have fun while doing it. Powton was a new tool for them, it introduced ways of making presentations.

The activities that favored writing the most were those that allowed students to write and rewrite the expository text, making versions of it, but mostly, having the possibility to write about their favorite topic and seeing that it could be attractive for others too. Moreover, writing in different computing programs and individually and collectively participating in video chats was highly appreciated, this activity allowed them to listen to explanations and other classmates' work.

Teacher communication throughout the workshop was fluent, the best, excellent, they sustained great relationships from the beginning of the workshop; communication was also good among classmates, they interacted respectfully, never used bad words, participated and shared everything, respected their turn to speak and listen, and interacted in other spaces to work with others in order to help assess the ongoing expository text and to improve it.

In terms of parents' surveys, results showed that their children's motivation was evidently reflected and identified when they participated in the writing workshop, they noticed the interest and emotion deriving from becoming familiar with new strategies and tools to present their homework and deal with their favorite topics, as well as from the new resources introduced and the possibility of learning how to use them

Parents noticed their children wanted to improve their written production or the way in which they write and produce texts (Peña-Garcia, 2019), correct mistakes, extend information, not just by hand but using a computer, since they used that tool more. Their children had the possibility of writing with better spelling, initially they paid too much attention to punctuation signs and neglected spelling, and now they were more aware of both and made an effort to correct mistakes, apply

grammar rules and be more dedicated when writing (Garavito Campillo & Gonzalez Martinez, 2017).

Also, the school principal manifested that the writing workshop benefited the development of student's communicative competence because they learned to speak, read, write and understand at a better level. In terms of the writing process, students could write by hand and using a computer typing their words or the text they had worked on, this also developed fine motor skills and visual digital skills; they followed spelling rules, thus producing a text that was clear and easy to understand, plus creative as well, since they expressed their ideas with colors, images and illustrations.

Students writing also managed to make more sense, and they are expected to do it hereinafter, not just in the workshop, as a result of acquired learning. The possibility of generating collaborative learning is noteworthy, the teacher applied several strategies in which students needed to work together or with some classmates, what they learned would give them opportunities to write in other spaces and with better quality, in publishing, when filling a questionnaire, netiquette, on a massive and instant online post, or in a chat via WhatsApp. In brief, virtuality accelerates communications and it can be shared within seconds.

Likewise, it was evinced that the didactics were more real and invigorating due to the integration of 3D images (Kumar & Daniel, 2016) and students-teacher interaction, instant experimentation developed flexibility elements or paths to know-how; although it is desirable for tutors to make their own videos explaining topics at hand.

On the other hand, constant observation of video chats enables to analyze the participation of each student with the teacher's guidance and the developed activities. In videoconferences, the teacher's organization of the activities proposed was clear, she initially set up a Skype group and added all of the workshop's participants, this is where they had their sessions, the teacher previously shared a link via Zoom and students joined and participated (Castro-Martinez, 2019).

Also, students interest was reflected in their punctuality, they joined the session and said hello and the teacher welcomed them, this happened in writing and orally; the teacher was dedicated and kind, as the students joined, she verified who was present and/or absent, taking into account that some faced connectivity difficulties caused by the Internet or computer, she checked that the camera, microphone and speakers were working in order to sustain the interactions.

On the other hand, throughout the workshop, the teacher conducted several forums using the Moodle platform, she always welcomed students nicely and in order to foster participation, she explained the activity in writing and proceeded with the ways of participating. As the teacher activated the students, they contributed in different order, whoever entered the forum wrote or shared the work produced, then the others had the possibility of reading and the teacher assessed each with a

personalized comment on their contribution. She was the only one that provided feedback to each student's participation.

The proposed forums focused on something different, but most were connected with other activities developed in the workshop, e.g., the ongoing expository text. The dynamic and type of participation identified in the forums was question-answer and general, since most of the time, the teacher proposed a specific activity and the students answered the questions or worked; the general participation consisted in drafting paragraphs of a determined text and properly locating punctuation signs to make sense of the idea expressed. Although participation was present, students did not comment on the classmates' contributions.

The results connected with the students' expository texts show that throughout the workshop, each student had the opportunity to select a topic of interest to elaborate several versions of the expository text, until the final better version was ready. In terms of adaptation, the communicative purpose is hardly evinced in the first and second drafts, but on the fourth and fifth they were able to present facts better and manifested their opinion in the development of the ideas.

However, coherence of the texts improved with better construction of the paragraphs of introduction, development and conclusion, which provided structure to the content of the text. In the first and second versions of the text, students failed to introduce the topic or seldom proposed ideas that addressed the main topic; as they were able to work on it and received the input of the teacher and a classmate, they showed more clarity in terms of the topic exposed and its importance, all of which translates into the third and last versions of the finished text.

Regarding the analyzed development paragraphs, the first draft shows disarticulation between the introduction and the development of ideas, most of the times students wrote a text with inconsistencies between sentences, but the last draft included more types of paragraphs, e.g., cause and effect, classification, exemplification and comparison. Conclusions in the first versions of the expository texts were almost nonexistent, or they wrote a paragraph with different ideas about the topic; however, the last version exhibited increased interest and the conclusion extended for a paragraph instead of a line, and gave closure to the topic, emphasizing its overall importance.

Still, cohesion in the first and second draft is minimum, students expressed several ideas that failed to relate to each other, although some did, they used punctuation that somehow favored the process; in the third and fourth draft they incorporated more connectors and references to facilitate topics and subtopics' understanding and development, fluency of ideas and adequate use of punctuation decreased the amount of mistakes present in the beginning.

In terms of paragraph development, it was clear that the first version lacked clarity of ideas and the subtopics were not easily understood: most students wrote a single paragraph. The last draft had an adequate explanation of the subtopics addressed. Regarding correction and morphosyntax, the first draft had sentences that were organized but

presented difficulties in the conjugation of some verbs, in the third and fourth versions they made progress and wrote better sentences using adequate words and well conjugated verbs.

Concerning vocabulary and semantics, the most noticeable change took place between the first and last draft of the text, initially, students used limited vocabulary and many repeated terms, in the last version they resorted to more adequate words and to synonyms. Analyzing the use of spelling rules in the different versions of the students' expository texts, their level was identified as fair, very few texts had more than twelve mistakes, and most did not have even ten mistakes; the most likely explanation is that the text processors Word and Google Docs identified and autocorrected most of the spelling mistakes, so students were able to correct them.

The analyzed results lead to infer that at the beginning, students had many difficulties writing an expository text because they were unaware of the structure, organization of ideas, introduction of facts and manifestation of their opinion. Also, although they applied some spelling rules and punctuation signs, they lacked knowledge and mastery to apply them with awareness instead of expecting the word processor to underline the mistakes and corrections needed.

As the text drafts progressed, there was more understanding of the importance of clearly communicating the intention of the text in an organized way, so as to make sense to themselves (the authors) and to the audience and readers. Similarly, students' motivation to write grew, not just because they were given the opportunity to write about what they liked, but because they explored and used different computing programs in the workshop, this strengthened their learning construction processes, developed the writing skill, individual, group and collective work with more dynamism and heightened interaction.

RESULTS

Based on the research question: How to invigorate the process of producing expository texts in a writing workshop aimed at fifth graders in the virtual modality? It is possible to state that a workshop of this kind, in which participation and development of activities occurs entirely online, entails great impact because it benefits the students' writing competence with the aid of diverse computing tools, this drives greater motivation and possibilities in each student's writing process.

ICT (San Martin & Garcia, 2016) are embedded in current generations, especially among children and youngsters, who have managed to become a part of the digital age, which allows for different ways of learning. In the institution which is the object of this study students learn everything online and using a device (computer, tablet) to access the material and the work; in the workshop, the teacher applied several pedagogical, didactic and practical strategies that involved different resources, some based on web 2.0 (Garcia-Perez, Santos-Delgado, & Buzon-Garcia, 2016) to invigorate the creation of certain

type of texts depending on the communicative intention and desired structure.

Web 2.0 allows users to be more than recipients of information, they can produce their own content or material. Students were not limited to searching about a specific topic, they had the chance to produce their own expository text about a variety of topics of interest that were published in the school's blog, expanding communication with the comments received by different members of the educational community and other people (El Mhouti, Nasseh, Erradi, & Vasquez, 2017).

During the workshop, there were different interaction spaces between students, teacher and parents using different media such as forums, the platform, Skype, e-mail, and cellphones (calls), which were synchronous or asynchronous, and crucially benefited the relationships to make progress in the workshop and to create an enjoyable and harmonious environment. This is why language plays a key role, both in virtual education and in face-to-face education, because "communication implies the need of a language and vice versa; language was created for communication, it's a tool of humans. Language is a structural system of arbitrary symbols that helps members of a social group interact" (Ossa, 2002, p.23).

The way of communication among the workshop's participants was always cordial and respectful, this fact avoided the generation of conflict and negative discussions. Students used pertinent language to communicate what was necessary, even to ask or clarify doubts amidst the socialization of activities; there was never abuse or vulgarity by participants. For instance, they expressed that the communication with the teacher was "very good, nice, the best, excellent", and with classmates as well, because they "always participated and shared", "in the chats we always respected each one's turn to speak".

Thanks to the new trend in virtual didactics, it is not necessary for teachers and students to be in the same place at the same time. This opens the door to more flexible education, be it simultaneous or not since the environment is mediated by diverse online tools and there is a top range of resources that facilitate learning. While the challenge is extensive, this research demonstrates that it is possible to conduct processes to develop learning skills using technology.

To achieve this, it was key that the teacher used more than one computing resource to promote writing skills, which had to be practical, fun and easy to use. Students used them on their own, with a classmate, the teacher or everyone (collectively), depending on the tools, possibilities and main goal or approach of the activities, intended to have an impact on their writing process.

Therefore, as stated by Alvarez and Chaverra, it is possible to "widen and enrich our vision of the writing processes experimenting with the use of other media or tools and exploring new ways of generating texts that do not directly imply the production of markings on a piece of paper" (Porras, 2006, p.15). Currently, students prefer to write using a text processor or other program available; therefore, teachers must

tap that interest to favor textual production, test and verify the success required to improve writing levels and awareness while doing it.

CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the development of the workshop, active participation was clear in each activity proposed by the teacher, for individual, group and collective work; students exhibited enthusiasm, the best attitude, companionship and respect between themselves, including the teacher. The degree of responsibility and interest rose as they progressed and were reminded that their expository text would be published, that other members of the educational community and others could read their work.

Similarly, it is important to highlight students' high motivation to produce a text about their favorite topic. The teacher took students' interests into consideration, and for them it was nicer to express ideas in writing, inquiring and going deeper into the selected topic, organizing their ideas better, expressing their intentions and being read by others, and engaging all of their prior knowledge on the selected topic, since their minds were certainly not blank.

On the other hand, the exploration and use of different technological tools stand out, e.g., Pixton, Piktochart, Mindomo, Google Docs, among others, which invigorated the processes of textual production. Although students frequently know about and use interactive learning resources, they expressed that many were not familiar with these, they were new and most of all, they facilitated the writing process based on their graphic elements or components that enabled students to write and rewrite, abbreviate information, share and work with others.

One of the programs that supported collaborative writing the most was Google Docs (Chiappe & Lee, 2017) it is very similar to Word and students knew the basics, they had the possibility to share the work with the teacher and a classmate, who assessed the text; based on the text, they sent pertinent observations via comments, notes, corrections, general and specific revisions of the full text in connection with composition of ideas, writing, spelling, punctuation and others, to correct detected mistakes and improve the overall text.

It is also worth mentioning that synchronous and asynchronous meetings, such as chats and forums, allowed students to strengthen communication between them and what they had learn in the workshop. This type of activities showed students how to constructively appreciate each one's participation and take the teachers observations into account, knowing they had the possibility of socializing their work, learn and share among them made them try hard to be present and prepared for the meeting with their camera, microphone and headphones to have adequate interaction.

On the other hand, it was evinced that both students and parents identified improvements in the development of writing skills, since they noticed their children wrote better, were careful with spelling and punctuation, corrected their mistakes, were more aware of the aspects

that needed improvement and of the processes pertaining the production of a good text, therefore they dedicated enough time to produce several versions of their text until they were finally ready with a text of better quality and sense. In the end, they managed to be more skillful when organizing and structuring an expository text.

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