The Impact of Process Genre Based Approach in students Written Competence

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Abstract

This work was an action research project developed with the intention of understanding the impact of Process Genre based Approach in sixth graders’ English writing competence at Alfred Binet school. The information for this project was collected through journals, student’s writings, and cartographies; and the analysis of all this gathered information showed students had difficulties to write in English. After the implementation of the approach mentioned before, it was found three outcomes: 1. The approach fostered student’s positive attitude in English classes; 2. Student’s opinion about writing changed favorably; and 3. Students writing improved considerably in their last writings of the project.

Keywords: Writing competence, Process-Genre Based approach, difficulties in writing.
Degree Requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the Bachelor of Education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English-French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín, Colombia.
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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the context</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Objective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Objectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Plan</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Actions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings and Interpretations</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

The path that I traced in the university divided my life in two parts: Before and after this career. All these year of studying helped me not only to learn what teaching is about, but also to define my own identity, to confirm that teaching languages is what I really want to do. This work is the final step of a process of seven years, in which I returned to the school, somehow, everything that the university taught me along all this time. The purpose of my life is to continue doing the same, to be able to apply my teaching knowledge to any kind of audience with which I have to work with in my cross for student’s lives.
Description of the context

Juan Manuel Santos, current president of Colombian government, has defined various strategies to improve the educative system of Colombia. Among those strategies, there is one concerning the field of English teaching and learning: “The Colombia Bilingue program”. Given the importance of English as universal language, “the Ministry of Education has established this program within its policy as an strategy to improve quality of teaching English, allowing better levels of performance in this language” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 6).

This program is founded under the communicative approach, defined as “the ability to use the knowledge of the language in different situations, both inside and outside of life school”. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 12). According to the ministry of education, the communicative approach involves three competences (linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic) which are a fundamental aspects of English learning, in order to obtain the communicative abilities that children are expected to develop during their English learning process (p.12).

I developed my practicum in the Alfred Binet school, a private school located in Miraflores- Buenos Aires. This school has around 300 students and 17 teacher, 3 of them are English teachers. The Alfred Binet School is focused on bilingualism, and it is engaged with the National Government purpose in terms of English teaching, and one of its pedagogical focuses is the bilingualism (English – Spanish) of its students (Alfred Binet School, 2015). The school has created a program called “English by levels” which have as
PROCESS-GENRE APPROACH IN WRITING COMPETENCE

integrating axis the communicative dimension, starting from the initiation in the learning of English as a foreign language. These aspects are based both on the characteristics, skills and competences acquired by the students as well as those that must be developed during their school process and that allow them to obtain an integral development of English learning.

My experience as a teacher in this school gave me the opportunity to be immersed in an educational environment which has English as a priority. Here, I could notice that students have a good level of spoken English, but it is not the same with written skill. This is the reason why I will carry out my practicum here with the intention to understand the impact of Process Genre based Approach in sixth graders’ English writing competence at Alfred Binet school.
**Statement of the Problem**

After observing during a month my own experience as a teacher of a sixth grade group, and analyzing the journals and evidences taken from the observations and English classes, I found a relevant issue in every English class: Students have difficulties to write correctly. Having this information in mind, I started to wonder if a difficulty is an starting point to carry out an action research. This took me to look for information about the starting point of a project, and I found Altrichter, Posh and Somekh (1993) who said that a difficulty is one of the possible starting points in action research, taking “difficulty” as something that you want to improve, solve or compensate in terms of teaching. (p. 35).

The Alfred Binet School is focused on promoting English through the communicative approach, and the English teachers in this school take the communicative competences as the ability to communicate in an oral way, because they implement most all the time activities related to speaking and listening, setting aside the rest of skills. I conclude this after many month planning meetings with my colleagues. Writing in students has been taken apart in the last years, not only in the classrooms, but also in daily life, Graham Stanley said in his book “Language learning with technology” (2003), writing is the skill most affected by the rise of internet. That is why teachers in the last decades have seen the necessity to implement new tools in order to become students more used to writing. (p. 121).

Alfred Binet students receive English classes since they are in kindergarten, that is why they have developed the ability to listen and speak very well, I know this because of
my experience in the school, but how are they in English writing competence? In order to answer this question, I revised the information taken from the journals, and I found these segments which reflect some issues related to English writing:

“When teacher checked students work, she found some writing errors, so she decided to write on the board the appropriate spelling of the most common words.” (Research journal 1, February 13th, 2017)

“After this, teacher wrote on the board some words that students misspelled in the sentences.” (Research journal 3, March 6th, 2017).

“Some students finished very fast, so the teacher revised their job and asked them to correct misspelled words.” (Research journal 13th, March 6th, 2017)

Although these segments showed me an indication of writing problems in my students, there was not enough information inside the journals that illustrates me about which specific problems in writing they are having. So, I decided to start collecting students writing productions to verify what the journals showed me and analyze what kind of difficulties they are having in writing.
Student 1

The hero favorite
The favorite hero

Once upon a time a kid who wanted to be a person
special, but he did not have powers for being a hero.
He wanted to prove his heroism, so he
bought magic vegetables to help his
magics, when he came for his home, he
ate the vegetables. The next day, he grew up more,
his tried flew for had powers.

Did he fly?

Or a ripos alien the universe for
right and he won't?

Student 2

I and my pet dragon
My dragon and me

A month ago, I and my dragon
wanted much our dreams the which
was fly, we ask to mom and
she said not, my dragon and
I were sad, minutes later, we were
watching t.v. and I have an
idea, let's go to play both and
later on, they two stand happy.

Verb tense error

Sentence structure error

Verb tense error

Semantics error

Sentence structure error

Word choice error

Verb tense error

Semantics error
I found 3 affected areas in English writing based on Liu (2008) classification of errors: Morphological, semantics, and syntactic errors (p.70). This analysis illustrates me about the aspects in which my students are having difficulties and gives me information related to how my students are in the writing competence and the issues we need to work on along all the project.
Errors and mistakes

There are some concepts that provide the foundations for this paper. First of all, I mention what “errors” and “mistakes” are, starting from Garrido & Rosado (2012) differentiation of these notions, where “mistakes” are lapses caused by mental gaps or psychological limitations, and errors correspond to lack of knowledge or missing background (p. 287)

Then, I took a look to the most common errors made in language writing learning for ESL learners. As Liu (2008) points out, there are three kinds of errors:

- Morphological errors: Errors related to verb tenses and forms. For example: *They doesn’t know (They don’t know).*

- Semantic errors: Errors related to word choice, omitted or unnecessary words. For example: *She lives in a country where she hates (She lives in a country which she hates).*

- Syntactic errors: Errors related to sentences limits, word order or ungrammatical constructions. For example: *The car red (The red car).* (p.70)

Competence in Writing

Competence in writing is another important concept to cover, defined by Cooper (1981) as “the skill in organizing and expressing ideas, information and feelings” (p.98). Having this definition and the purpose of this project in mind, it is appropriate to give the
meaning of the approach implemented through this project.

**Approach**

According to Nordin & Mohammad (2006), the process/genre-based is an approach that combines the main components of the process approach and the genre-based approach. From the process approach it takes the planning, drafting, conferencing, editing and peer review steps, and from the genre-based approach it shares some characteristics like the purpose, audience and context (p. 82).

Thus, the process genre-based approach proposes 5 main steps that must be included in each writing process (Nordin & Mohammad, 2006, p. 80):

1. **Situation**: Brainstorming, topic, context and audience.
2. **Purpose**: Exhort good behavior, expose an issue, describe a subject of interest.
3. **Planning**: Outline.
4. **Drafting**: Write and receive feedback form teacher.
5. **Publishing**: Rewrite, share and receive feedback from classmates.

**Student’s perception**

Another concept that is relevant to define in order to understand what it was found in the data analysis of this work, is the category that was called “students perception”. This category was used to cover all codes related to students’ opinions about everything that includes the actions students and teacher carried out for the development of the project.
PROCESS-GENRE APPROACH IN WRITING COMPETENCE

Research Question

How Process Genre Based Approach impacts competence in English writing of sixth graders students at Alfred Binet school?

General Objective

To understand the impact of Process Genre based Approach in sixth graders’ English writing competence at Alfred Binet school.

Specific Objectives

- To describe students` competence in English writing.
- To implement a writing plan founded on the steps of Process-Genre Based Approach.
- To evaluate the students` competence in English writing after having implemented the plan.
Action Plan

I have defined my action plan in three main stages according to the objectives of my research project. In the first stage, I would carry out three actions: First of all, I would spend 2 months observing my group in order to identify the issues in which I would take any action, collecting all the information in a journal, which Burns (2009) defines as:

A tool in Action Research as it allows you to record the events and happenings in your location, your reflections, beliefs and teaching philosophies, your ideas and insights about your practice, and your personal histories as a teacher researcher (p. 89).

Once I have observed my class, I should move to the second action: the implementation of a portfolio or, as Burns (2009) defines it, a “dossier of students’ work from one individual, a group, or all of your students over a period of time” (p.92); with my students writings evidences as another instrument to gather and analyze information. Before moving to the next stage, I would develop a focus group with my students, having the intention of knowing what they would like to write about.

In the second stage, I would plan how to develop the 5 steps of the Process Genre Based Approach in order to create short stories, and gather all the information in my journal:

1. Situation: In this step, I would provide to my students some ideas about interesting writing topics, taking into account the information collected in the focus group. The intention is to give my students useful tools to chose the topic and the context of
their writings.

2. Purpose: According to the approach, every writing process must have a purpose. In order to accomplish this, I would explain and suggest some purposes in writing for my students’ writings.

3. Planning. Having the information established before, my students would create an outline where they define the form of their writing, including the characters, the place, the time, the main events, among others aspects of their stories.

4. Drafting: At this point, my students would start to write their stories, then I would revise them and provide them feedback.

5. Publishing: As a final step, the students would rewrite the stories applying the feedback, share the stories with their classmate and receive feedback from them.

In the final stage of my action plan, I would collect my students’ final productions and save them in my teacher's portfolio, thus I would analyze their writing and describe the impact of the Process Based Approach implementation in my students’ writing competence.
Development of Actions

Along the development of this action research, some actions were carried out in order to obtain the information required to accomplish the main purpose of this project.

First, English classes were observed during 2 months, writing and analyzing in the journal everything that happened in this classes. This data collection method showed there was a frequent issue related to student’s difficulties at the moment of writing in English, but this information provided by the journal was not enough, so it was taken the decision of keeping students writings and analyze them in the light of what the journal had reflected.

After the observations, the journal, and the analysis of students’ writings, it was decided to implement the Process genre-based approach with the intention to observe how this method affects the competence in writing of students. For this reason, students writing productions continued being kept, but this time, they were focused on the 5 steps of the approach implemented.

The first step of this approach is called “the situation”. In this step, teacher explained to students what this was about, it was played a video in which this step was illustrated through drawings, and teacher showed them an example of the situation of a famous short story. Then, students created the situation of their own story, where according to the journal, they were having difficulties with the imperative tense:

“The only difficulty I could notice in this activity was related to the purpose: they had to write a sentence in infinitive they don’t know that tense yet. I
explained it in a general way, I did not do it for all the group together, but one by one.” (Research journal, July 10th, 2017)

The second step is the “purpose”, in which students had to write the intention of their stories, taking into account that it had to be clear and accomplish one of the objectives of this step: exhort good behavior, expose an issue, or describe a subject of interest. Three examples of purposes were provided to students, taking as example the purpose of the most common and known short stories. After this, students wrote the purpose of their stories, they had the same problem of the situation, because they did these steps the same class.

The third step of process genre-based approach is the planning or outline. It was explicated the meaning and the purpose of an outline, standing out how helpful this step was for the next step, and it was designed with students, the outline of Little Red Riding Hood on the board. Next to this, they started to plan the outline of their stories. In this step, students showed difficulties with the use of linking words:

“I could identify as well that my students don’t know so much linking words, even when most of them are in advanced levels of English, so I decided to develop a workshop next class about linking words before starting to write the first draft.” (Research journal, September 18th, 2017)

Before implementing the next step, it was carried out another data collection method in which it could be gathered information about students’ feelings, thoughts and
perceptions of their writing process in English class. This method was the cartography, described by García, González, Quiroz & Velásquez (2003) as “They are drawings of what space, place and time mean for people who inhabit them” (p. 76). This method was developed in two parts: The first part was in groups, students got together according to the genre of their stories, and created a mind map where they expressed the answers to some questions about their opinions. The second part was the socialization, the teacher asked the questions again, but this time in a conversation, and students answered exposing their mind maps.

The fourth step is the draft or the first writing. This time, teacher was there supporting students and solving doubts, they started to write using as starting point the situation, the purpose and the outline they created before. The most frequent inconvenient students had in this step were related to the conjugation of some irregular verbs in past and the use of pronouns:

“Some students write some verbs in present when they had to be in past, I think they don’t get used to write in past yet.” (Research journal, October 18, 2017)

“Some of them wrote the pronoun “I” and they were not included on the stories. I cannot be sure about the reason why they made that mistake, but I think that is because they felt identified with the characters.” (Research journal, October 18, 2017).

The fifth and last step was the rewriting and publishing of the story, where students
received feedback from teacher, corrected their own writings, and published them on the language mural of the school.

As last action of this research work, it was carried out another cartography with the intention of knowing students’ opinions, thoughts, and feelings about the project and their own process of writing. This data collection method brought a lot of information about students’ perception that was analyzed later with the rest of data.
Findings and Interpretations

After a process of gathering, analyzing, coding, and classifying data taken from journals, students writings, and cartographies; 2 main sections were found in this work: Student's class characteristics and Student’s writing performance.

Student’s class characteristics section gathers all the codes related to what happened with students in class, here it is included categories such as student’s perceptions, students interesting, and student’s class performance. In student’s perceptions, it was classified aspects like student’s negative and positive opinions about the process of writing and the project implemented. Student’s interesting category reflects what students prefer at the moment of reading or writing a story, here it was found different kinds of genre like action, fantasy, mystery, horror, police, and adventure. Student’s class performance, the last category of this section, is about all the actions or behaviors students showed during the observations, such as engagement, creativity, beliefs, initiative, participation, attitude, and previous knowledge.

The information of the student’s class characteristics category was taken from the journals and 2 cartographies, one developed at the beginning of the project, and the other one at the end. From the journals, there are some codes that stood out in the observations made at the beginning of the project, and some others more relevant in those observations made at the end: In the first observations, there were found frequently codes related to lack of vocabulary, misbehavior, and lack of participation; in the last observations, they came
out different codes such as student’s engagement, student’s focus, and students’ creativity. Taken this information in mind, it is appropriate to say that in the last journals there were found more positive aspects than in the first ones.

This was what came out from the cartographies: The most frequent codes founded in the first cartography were: negative opinions about writing (6), and positive opinions about reading (3). On the other hand, the second cartography reflected 2 main codes: Positive opinions about writing (13), and positive opinion about the project (11). According to the data mentioned before, we can say that in the last cartography there were more positive opinions about writing than in the first one.

For the analysis of student’s use of language, they were collected some students’ writings taken along the implementation of the approach. For this analysis, it was taken into account the first and the last draft of their stories. In the first draft, they were found around 15 errors per student, from which 66.6% were semantic errors, 25% were morphological errors, and 8.3% were syntactic errors. In the last draft, there were about 8 errors per student, from which 48% were semantic errors, 26% were morphological errors, and 26% were syntactic errors. These numbers show that semantic errors were the most frequent errors in both drafts, and there were more errors in the first draft than in the last one.
Conclusions

- This project helped to foster a positive student’s attitude in English classes. After the project, students showed more willingness to be part of the activities proposed by the teacher, which allowed to students the possibility to know their own abilities and put them in practice.

- Student's opinion about writing in English have changed favorably after the implementation of the project. At the end of the project, students expressed a more positive point of view about the process of writing, and the project itself.

- Student’s English writing improved considerably in their final step of the approach. The project gave to students the possibility to write easily, that is why they could reflect a better implementation of morphological, semantic, and syntactic knowledge in the last version of their writings.
Reflections

The teaching practicum in foreign languages enriched my professional development in three main aspects: 1. I learnt the importance of knowing how my students learn, this allowed me as teacher to prepare suitably the classes according to their learning processes, 2. I had the opportunity to work with special educational needs students, this experience provided me tools that I had to create in order to be able to give to this kind of students, the best opportunity of learning, and 3. I reinforced my desire to be a teacher, to be part of the change our society needs through people education.
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PROCESS-GENRE APPROACH IN WRITING COMPETENCE


