



Guided Writing as a Method to Fostering Writing in Early Childhood

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Contribution

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The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2011 points out that "fifty-four percent of eighth-graders and 52 percent of twelfth-graders performed at the Basic level in writing in 2011". In this report, the Basic level denotes "partial mastery of the prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade" (IES, 2012:2). In the same line, the interest of the European Union on this issue has been shown, among others, in the document entitled *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (2001). This makes us reflect on the educational challenges of the XXI century, especially regarding the teaching of written language. Despite these evidences, it is noteworthy that international assessments (PISA 2012, PIRLS 2011) do not incorporate writing as a subject of evaluation.

In the Spanish context, the assessment of writing have revealed that students in primary and secondary education are not able to meet the skills that are necessary to communicate with others according to the demands of the current society and shows that the education system is not providing an effective response in order to improve independent writing from 2006 to today (<http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/education/agaeve/web/agaeve/reports-and-studies-publications>).

Currently the instruction of written expression in education has many shortcomings (Garcia et al, 2010; Torrance, Fidalgo & García, 2007). The incorporation to Spanish curriculum of the key competence **communication in the mother tongue** has failed to achieve significant changes in teaching habits and students' learning (Carmena & al., 2002, Tolchinsky & Simó, 2001). In the same line, the schooling policy of all the children from 3 to 5 years and an early literacy have not increased efficiency in writing skills, in comparison to other OECD countries.

The role teachers play in the teaching and learning process of writing is fundamental to improve writing skills (Graham &

Harris, 2005). Hence, new strategies are explored and assessed to verify its effectiveness (Roth & Guinee, 2011). In order to develop a writing for communication effectively in the school, we have adopted the model of guided writing that has been shown in several recent studies that exerts a statistically significant influence on the development of independent writing. A guided writing occurred when teachers give students a writing assignment and direct them to use a particular format, genre or topic.

The proposal of guided writing is based on the idea that children at early years are able to build their knowledge of writing as a cultural object included in their social environment (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1979; Teberosky, 1992; Tolschinsky, 1993). Thus, writing is one of the curriculum's elements in early childhood education, giving a new value to the pre-writing stage of development and transforming the methodology in the classroom (Alonso-Cortés et al, 2012; Rios Fernandez & Gallardo, 2012; Sanchez & Alonso-Cortés, 2012; Tolchinsky, Bigas & Barragan, 2010).

This research was aimed to answer the following question: Does guided writing improve communication skills? In line with this issue, our goal is to determine to what extent the use of an guided teaching method at an early years brings on the development of communication skills of children through an guided writing.

Method

This research was conducted with two groups of 5-years old students using a posttest only control group design. In the experimental group the method was a teaching guided writing method (n = 25) while teachers in the control group did not use a particular method (n = 25). Teachers in the experimental group were trained in the method of guided writing during 4 months and their teaching skills were evaluated to ensure a proper application of that method. Both groups, the experimental and comparison, writing prompts of each child were taken during a semester, classroom observations were made and video recordings were taped. The writing samples were scored using a modified version of the 6 +1 Traits of Writing Rubric for the Primary Grades (Culham, 2005). The analysis of the differences between the two groups (guided writing and control group) was performed using the Student t test. The observed effect size was estimated through d of Cohen.

Expected Outcomes

The research results indicate that students who followed the guided teaching method show a richer freelance writing and elaborate than their peers in the comparison group. Storytelling, describing situations of everyday life or writing a recipe have a clearer improvement in the experimental group than in the control in the superstructure, the macrostructure and the textual microstructure. Thus, children who followed the guided teaching method previously recreated what they wanted to write, they used a wider syntax and a vocabulary or took into account a possible reader of their story. The narrative structure was also more consistent between students who learned to write by themselves, so that their stories had a beginning, middle and end. Meanwhile the stories of students in the comparison group had incomplete stories that lacked the introduction, the body or conclusion. At the syntactic level, the sentences used by the students in the experimental group had a varied structure and incorporated more appropriated words. By contrast, the sentences written by the comparison group sometimes repeated the same syntactic structure or wrote with anacolutha (correctly matched gender and number, subject and predicate, etc.) and grammatical categories used incorrectly. Finally, the control group used a smaller and more redundant vocabulary.

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