

Authentic Tasks to Enhance Descriptive Paragraph Writing In A1 Students at a University

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By

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This research report is the result of my own work and includes nothing that was done in collaboration with others.

Yeny Judith Malaver Rojas

Signature:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Yeny Judith Malaver Rojas', is centered below the 'Signature:' label. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'Y' and a long, sweeping underline.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This was a long journey I decided to do by myself. Some of you stayed there waiting for me, others simply left, and others came with me all the way. I must thank to all of you.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes how writing was selected from a number of issues affecting teaching methodology in the Department of Languages and Cultures at ULS. The staff of teachers continuously found poor writing performance among the students in Level One. During former semesters, I observed various groups in this level, and confronted data in their proficiency tests every term in the four basic communicative skills. As registered in the Excel Charts in Appendix A, in the first semester of 2010, seven groups in regular courses out of ten were systematized, and all of them reported the lowest performance in Writing, under the other skills, Reading, Listening and Speaking. This fact confirmed the current teachers' concern. Not satisfied with these results I wanted to find most convenient methodological practices for the staff, so I decided to develop an action research study to identify the reasons of this phenomenon, analyse the factors affecting the students' writing learning process, and find a possible solution to increment their proficiency level.

In the second semester of the same year, I selected a group of false beginners as the target population, and after observing their entry test results (see Appendix E) I detected the lowest grades in Writing, even under Listening, Grammar and Reading skills. Immediately, I applied an initial questionnaire to obtain more data before implementation, and found that most students recognised that missing the appropriate words to describe the context, and the convenient linkers to get cohesion across the text were the biggest obstacles for improving writing. This data, confronted with the results obtained in the diagnostic test, showed that even though most students' background was small in terms of vocabulary and language structures to supply basic

information, they ignored how to formulate single ideas with coherence and cohesion so as to build a text as a meaningful unit. I defined the problem in terms of questions to start the project, and determined that the study would be possible by developing Action Research since, in order to find the answers, I would not modify any of the specific learning conditions and characteristics of the group. I counted on twenty-two hours for implementation, which demanded a single strategy, simplicity of application to involve pupils, hence, visible results in the shortest period of time.

For the study, technological tools which could seem more attractive were discarded, since the focus was on the basic writing skills development. Acquiring skills, as will be described in the literature review, implies the internalization of the essential tools in general composition, such as grammatical elements and rhetorical structure. In former courses in level One, I had introduced several cognitive learning strategies, but could not go further from basic practice in class given time constrains. I consulted the current studies regarding writing skills in EFL basic levels and learning strategies, and found Practicing Naturalistically very convenient to help learners develop their writing abilities, because they had to be self-demanding to produce any text required, as well as practice in a natural way as first language speakers do in their daily life.

### Statement of the Problem

I had experienced as a teacher that several aspects of the learning process depend on a well-designed teaching program supported by all the methodological resources that represent international standards in education. As Graddol (2006) points out, one of the main purposes of learning English is facilitating the learners' access to the world market, thus improving a community's living conditions. For more than thirty years, ULS has supported students with English language learning, through a scaffolding process that is reflected in positive results in the

proficiency exams taken by all students at the end of the English seven-level-course. Its ultimate purpose is to provide students with communicative abilities in English as their second (or third) language to enter the workplace and compete for top positions in their careers. Because of its long trajectory and quality experience, the Proficiency Program of the Department trains its students to take international exams when they complete their courses. In the same way ULS also supports national and international regulations in accordance with Plan Nacional de Bilingüismo Colombia 2004-2019, required by the National government.<sup>i1</sup>

According to its curriculum, the mission of the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures at ULS is responding professionally to global requirements and to social needs regarding foreign languages, bilingualism, and ethnic diversity<sup>2</sup>. Among the related areas of preparation, ULS also seeks for other specific purposes which include self-assessment, autonomy, and competencies<sup>3</sup> for lifelong learning.

The Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures assumed all these tasks by carefully designing and implementing outstanding teaching programs. However, after completing the learning process,<sup>4</sup> it is difficult to understand how, in practice, most students' results in EFL Levels 1 and 2 courses prove limited success in language proficiency tests. There seems to be a gap between what teachers expect when elaborating teaching programs and what students can produce.

At ULS, students are assessed in the production of academic written texts at each of the seven-level course. In levels 1 and 2 students are expected to comply with the task of writing descriptive paragraphs. Nevertheless, classroom writing practice is reduced to single

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<sup>1</sup> Bases para una Nación Bilingüe y Competitiva. Ministerio de Educación Nacional. Al Tablero No. 37, Oct - Dec 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Universidad de la Sabana - Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures: The ELF Curriculum. 1998

<sup>3</sup> Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, ULS, 2006

<sup>4</sup> Consult Evaluation Results File, Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures 2010

instructions, due to time constraints. Consequently, it becomes an artificial process which seems useless in the students' everyday lives and they will not apply any more after attending the English courses. For Homstad & Thorson (1996), writing is only regarded as an introductory step in foreign language acquisition to support oral proficiency. Even teachers consider this a daunting task for students, given their limited vocabulary. Scores obtained by students in final term exams during the first semester of 2010 support this idea (see Appendix A). While students could interpret the content when reading a descriptive text and easily identified basic information from listening sources, their own descriptive writings were poor. Grading sheets often showed that students did not develop any kind of previous task to practice before attending exams. Also, many students obtained better grades in the first and in the second term than in the last term, in which they were expected to have improved as result of the learning process. As Homstad & Thorson (p. 10) point, writing is usually reduced to a single text required by a lesson assignment or a test, and writing assignments cause stress in both teachers and students, but there is little room to stimulate awareness about what this skill means as a whole construction process, because teachers argue lack of time and resources to provide the appropriate feedback. Consequently, very low proficiency is permanent, and short term efforts to help students foster the skill seem useless. Researchers in the field have found strong evidence that poor training in L2 writing is very destructive. Hinkel (2004) has shown that, at the end of their courses, most L2 learners produce academic papers characterized as "being vague and confusing, rhetorically unstructured and overly personal" (p. 4) and that generally these compositions are examined as products and never in their process, which usually determines lack of balance between the writing process and the writing product. Awareness about the process is fundamental to comprehend the nature of writing skills.

Regarding the population, young adult learners reported in the questionnaire that they belonged to different programs at the university, such as Medicine, Childhood Education, and Psychology, and most of them felt overwhelmed by innumerable academic responsibilities. Their own majors demanded high standards of academic writing in L1 and L2. However, when encouraged to develop more and better production tasks in English, learners realised these would demand more time, attention, creativity, and several writing skills.

Most young students at ULS are not completely aware of the advantages learning English in the classroom brings to their professional growth. As the results of the questionnaire showed, seventeen students out of twenty regarded the classroom as a space for a normative language practice in which grammar and repetition exercises to mechanize structures are the most appropriate activities to improve writing.

***Table 1 Partial Results of the Initial Questionnaire***

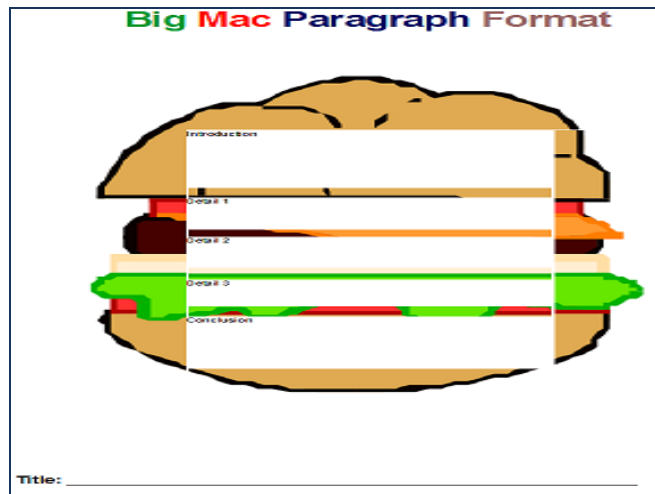
3. What kind of activities do you consider will help you to improve your writing?	
	Number of students ->
A. Many grammar exercises to practice the structure before I write the composition.	9
B. Many repetition exercises with the same structures to mechanize the language.	4
C. Games to play with the vocabulary I need to write my compositions.	3
D. Readings to model the writings I will develop later.	2
E. Dictation exercises.	2
F. I can learn writing directly, by composing letters, mails, and more types of texts.	1
G. Other? What? _____	

Very few students regarded their own learning needs, learning styles, and learning strategies useful to help enhance L2 learning. Being aware of these would empower them as skilled speakers able to express self-identity, recognize otherness, and take active part in the worldwide community, which constitute some of the main objectives of the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, when asked about the time invested in studying English by themselves, most students admitted spending only one hour a week, which proves minimal efforts and lack of awareness when attempting to develop communicative skills.

Considering the weaknesses mentioned above, I decided to implement the research project in an English Level One-group for twenty students from which thirteen participated during the implementation stage. The entry test results showed that eighteen students in the group were false beginners, who quickly identified basic vocabulary and single structures- regarding the use of *to be* to provide personal information- in the grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening sections of this diagnostic (see Appendix E). The first week of the course, I taught the general structure of a descriptive paragraph, the main writing goal of the first level EFL course.<sup>6</sup> Students acquired lexical and syntactical resources and followed the model of the Big Mac Format (see figure 1 below), a graphic organizer useful to identify and mechanize the structure of the descriptive paragraph.

**Figure 1 - Big Mac Paragraph Format**



Powered by: The Online Teacher Resource ([www.teach-nology.com](http://www.teach-nology.com))

<sup>5</sup>See the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEF Resolution of November 2001, Cambridge University Press.

<sup>6</sup> To see the Level 1 Course Program 2010 Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, follow this link [http://virtual.unisabana.edu.co/pluginfile.php/218053/mod\\_resource/content/3/Program\\_Doc\\_Level\\_1\\_2011\\_1.pdf](http://virtual.unisabana.edu.co/pluginfile.php/218053/mod_resource/content/3/Program_Doc_Level_1_2011_1.pdf)

During the second week, learners' performance using basic writing tools previously studied evidenced lack of vocabulary which, according to Silva (2001), prevented them from expanding their ideas, was time consuming, and generated inefficacy in written production because of L1 interference. If not encouraged to write in a systematic way, learners tended to simplify their notes to bullets and single words and later they were unable to recompose them into complete meaningful messages.

After the first writing session, students had to write a single paragraph describing their families. However, their resulting texts did not look like real paragraphs. The excerpt below shows how a composition was reduced to single phrases set apart, joined by commas or periods.

Excerpt No. 1

they are my father  
 my mother and my sister.  
 My father Luis Gonzalo XXXX  
 is fourty nine years he is accounter he isn't practice to it he is manager of school  
 hes tall slim, he is hair blond, his eyes green  
 mother is Maria Teresa she's pedagogue  
 mi sister is Maria Ximena she's a student she's a tall has long, hair and blak and coffee eys.

Moreover, when asked to take notes by writing complete sentences connected with basic linkers, students were unaware of the construction process required to expand their thoughts.

Excerpt No. 2

in my house are five persons.  
 my name is John.  
 I eightin years old i like studing in universiti de la Sabana i am in semester introduction my fater is pilot mi mother is in house in tolima she is pretty gordita and a mi sister is in schol.

The excerpt shows that students were not entirely acquainted with the acquisition of communicative skills and had a very limited vocabulary and grammar background. Consequently, the message seemed to be incoherent. The basic concepts supplied in previous

sessions failed to promote the autonomy expected from them to construct a written text. On the whole, students did not have those abilities and training to follow a formal writing process. It seemed that, as stated by Kroll (2003), most of the work had to be developed at the university.

### Research Questions

#### *Main Question*

To what extent does the implementation of Practicing Naturalistically help students improve their ability to write descriptive paragraphs?

#### *Sub-question*

How do students use Practicing Naturalistically when writing descriptive paragraphs?

### Research Objectives

#### *General objective*

To define the relationship between Practicing Naturalistically and the ability of false beginners to write descriptive paragraphs

#### *Specific objectives*

- To analyse how false beginners implement Practicing Naturalistically when writing descriptive paragraphs.
- To evaluate the effects of Practicing Naturalistically Strategy in composition of descriptive paragraphs.



### Rationale

To answer the questions stated in the current study, I implemented the cognitive strategy of *Practicing Naturalistically* (Oxford, 1990: 4)—henceforth abbreviated as PNS—in my lessons, to help learners to acquire the confidence to develop fluent writing through meaningful practice in context. As false beginners, they may feel encouraged to combine their former and later knowledge to systematically enrich their language performance when writing an academic text. Following action research principles while training them to use PNS, I observed if it might cause any positive reaction, as stimulating them to produce more accurate descriptive texts. Eventually, false beginners and EL learners in general would find PNS useful to produce written outcomes according to the demands of academic writing with professional and lifelong benefits.

The evidences of this study would help improve ELT through the selection of authentic tasks. If the strategy resulted useful, teachers would apply PNS to foster self-identity, sense of belonging, and lifelong learning as fundamental values of the autonomous learner profile expected at ULS, while encouraging learners to acquire the habit to save, compile, and improve their compositions, as part of the writing learning process (Oxford, 1990: 75; McGuiness, 2005: 20), aware of the need for successful communication in which effective written messages point to real EL readers. Learning to write would consist of a continuous proofreading process through which they could expect better quality-writing from the beginning of the course. Additionally, learners would become self-confident, self-committed, and self-sufficient writers constructing their own knowledge, because these tools would help them “acquire precision of thought in [oral as well as in] written communication” (McGuiness, 2005: 27), which are essential tools when initiating the argumentative paragraph in the succeeding levels of the English courses at ULS.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The current chapter deals with these constructs: **Basic writing skills**, required to comprehend the nature of the rhetorical structure of different types of texts; **Descriptive paragraphs**, as the target text that the students were expected to write in the course taken during the implementation of this project; **Practicing Naturalistically**, the cognitive learning strategy used to accelerate the writing process in the false beginners who took part in the current study. And finally, **Authentic tasks**, which resulted from joining the three previous constructs and provided the physical matter of this study.

#### Introduction

Much research has been done in the field of classroom writing to help foster students' writing skills. However, most of it is addressed to higher levels of proficiency and the use of higher order thinking skills, since most researchers are more concerned about the levels of accuracy and complexity that argumentative and expository texts like the essays demand. Groundwork studies developed by Hinkel (2004) over the past four decades to analyse the nature of the language requirements to enhance accuracy (p. 8) in ESL and EFL writing in high schools and universities, conclude that even after several years of exposure to L2 writing for academic purposes, students continue failing to properly use essential writing tools.

Other studies have identified how revision skills help master textual coherence (Lee, 2002; McKay, 1989); Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) and Fathman and Whalley (1990) approach the teacher's feedback provided to students' compositions and also attempt to study feedback in grammar correction in L2 writing assignments (2000); Hamp-Lyons (2010) and Reid (1990)

examine how the topics for writing assignments affect the students' performance. However, Kroll (1990) has compiled studies' results by different researchers regarding several aspects that generate conflict in the FL writing learners, such as the lack of a complete linguistic background that impedes the "writer's possibility of exhibiting mastery over the discourse skills" (Rowe, 1990), even though they do research at the essay level; Horowitz (1986), Campbell (1990), and Eisterhold (1990) study how reading provides factual information for the writing assignment. On the other hand, Matsuda (2001) made world-coverage compilations of the ways L2 writing was addressed in the classroom between the fifties and the nineties of the past century (2010) and also provides evidence on how certain repetitive practices, such as imitative controlled writing at the sentence-level, do not prove to help learners to produce original texts but do seem to demonstrate how controlled practices should be addressed at the discourse-level and as part of the writing instruction that learners require before being able to face free writing by themselves (p. 21).

Chang and Swales (1999) sustain that exposure to reading does not necessarily guarantee improved writing skills and that writing courses on proficiency, addressing single brainstorming techniques while ignoring academic vocabulary and grammar features of a text, are proving to be inefficient and conversely damaging for the learners' proficiency level. Likewise, Bjork, Bräuer, Rienecker and Jorgensen (2003) discovered that particular instruction in academic writing for specific purposes in addition to individual tutoring, writing workshops, and language training, may provide the right assistance for L2 learners to develop proper academic writing abilities (2003: 43). Like Bjork, Bräuer, Rienecker and Jorgensen, other researchers agree that implementing specific strategies in the EFL classroom carries lots of advantages on the short and long term, not only in writing itself but for the entire language learning process. For Homstad &

Thorson (1996), L2 writing strongly benefits both learners and teachers when exposing learners to whether extensive writing or intensive writing (p.11) it is, exposing them to large amounts of writing practice, otherwise, focusing on writing for clarity and deeper analysis on a small scale, given that “both strategies help increase overall language proficiency ... and support other language skills as well” (p. 12). In addition, intensive and extensive writing models promote critical thinking skills and foster cultural interaction.

However, other authors state that writing skills perform differently in L1 and L2, and students need particular support to develop these skills. Buker (2003) proves that the product, the process and the task itself play a starring role in writing since the existing knowledge, ideas, language, aims, and text structure influence the quality of the written text, particularly when L2 acquisition presents an additional problem to the writer. Bruce (2010) supports that the use of the genre-based approach widely benefits L2 academic writing since it integrates both learners’ linguistic, organizational and contextual knowledge when developing tasks for specific purposes.

In the Colombian context, research regarding EFL writing learning has pointed to improvement of learning environments and training in the use of meta-cognition to enhance students’ writing skills in basic and secondary school in both public and private institutions. However, there is a gap in research between schools and universities, which eventually jump to enhancement of written discourse through the use of electronic resources (Rogers, 2007) and to the essay as a product, not as a process. Nieto (2002) develops a study concerning the learning process in the classroom as a communicative one in which the learners acquire a set of tools to perform in the target language. Nieto (p. 16) points to three specific elements to achieve an active communicative classroom: pragmatic competence (regarding the functions of the language), discourse competence (regarding the abilities to perform in oral and written texts),

and strategic competence (regarding the use of adequate materials and the construction of authentic communicative situations in the classroom). The conjunction of these three competences allows learners to generate high performance outcomes (p.18). I found Nieto's thesis very convenient for my research purposes, hence I used them to intervene the type of tasks required to provoke communicative situations when having students writing descriptive paragraphs, fact that allowed me to evaluate the effects of PNS after the implementation.

Muñoz and Alvarez (2008) studied the behaviour of the assessment process in students' written performances regarding syntactic accuracy and complexity and the type of teacher feedback to measure reliability and promote confidence through more efficient uses of particular assessment tools. The study reported improvements in syntactic complexity due to requirements encouraged by the rubrics used for assessing proficiency, but not apparent progress in grammar range or coherence (p. 15). They suggest examining coherence, cohesion, revision and task completion for obtaining factual information about the writing process, and also teacher training to stimulate better commitment in the assessment process.

### Basic Writing Skills

Steele (2004) suggests that, since Writing consists of organising information and communicating meaning, generating ideas is the "key to facilitating the transition from thought to paper". Harmer (2007) points to writing as one of the two skills that only literate people possess, because if they can "[read or] write for specific purposes, they become more prestigious" (323). Lindsay & Knight (2007) define writing as the process of combining "letters in a particular order to form words, phrases, clauses, and sentences and put sentences together to make a coherent text" (p. 7). For Lombana (2002), writing is "the most difficult communicative skill to acquire both in the mother and the target language" (p. 44), especially useful to

consolidate learning in the other skills, subjects, and areas. She reduces writing to two core forms, creative writing and pragmatic writing, which involve the production of writing “connected with everyday affairs” (p. 46). For Melgarejo (2010) L2 writing “is a means of communicating ideas successfully to people from other cultures” (p. 71) and he argues that it should be regarded as a much more complex teaching task since it addresses to a language structure different from the mother tongue.

As a process, writing entails special skills learners must develop in L1 but also during L2 acquisition. Harmer (2007) mentions the main features in writing, –which I considered after the implementation as raw data for colour-coding.– These involve appropriate use of orthography, including script, spelling, and punctuation conventions; adequate morphosyntactic rules of the language, such as verbal and noun agreements and flections; correct word order, which means joining words in the right order and sequence; coherence and cohesion; pertinent vocabulary; a defined writing style adequate for the genre and audience; clear intention of production so that the reader can establish content and purpose; adequate rhetorical structure through which main and supporting ideas are properly established; and basic knowledge of the audience, so as to provide a message accordingly (324). Other relevant features include appropriate layout and level of formality and studying pre-writing skills (325).

These requirements are fulfilled when the learners become accurate in using the writing tools throughout the formal academic learning process, and they constitute the basic skills that distinguish writing from speaking in terms of *accuracy* and *fluency* (Harmer: 2007). Nevertheless, several classifications of essential writing sub-skills have been determined based on different criteria: the ability to do pen writing or handwriting; the level of proficiency in the language learner; the mastery to respond to specific writing assignments. Harmer (p. 36) insists

on the need to develop basic writing skills when learners start the formal writing learning process, since those are intended to help L2 learners to comprehend the relevance of the minimum requirements to begin the process with *accuracy* and *appropriacy*. L2 writing research and teaching have found most of these sub-skills fundamental aspects of the feedback that learners need during the learning process. They were relevant aspects in the current study, since writing constitutes one of the pillars of students' language development at ULS, but also the least practiced by students outside the classroom.

For Brown (2004), written production is parallel to written performance and four categories identify the taxonomy of micro and macro skills of writing<sup>7</sup>. Because the pedagogical design implemented during this study implied instruction on the use of PNS, learners involved moved between two categories: imitative writing and responsive writing, since they first needed acquiring the mechanics of language in the writing process, to lately performing at the discourse level when solving their descriptive compositions.

Based on this categorization, Brown (2004) set up a taxonomy that responds to specific assessment criteria required for the types of writing tasks. He suggests the macro skills, required in responsive [and extensive] writing, which include the use of the rhetorical forms and conventions of written discourse, accomplishing communicative functions of written texts according to forms and functions, using convenient links between events, clearly state the relationships between main and supporting ideas, old and new information, generalization, exemplification, providing literal and implied meanings, cultural references in context,

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<sup>7</sup> The four categories are (a) imitative writing, the basic level in which the learner tries to master the mechanics of writing prioritizing the form; (b) intensive writing, also known as "controlled writing," in which permanent test design controls most assessment tasks that prioritize form at the sentence level; (c) responsive writing, in which the learner is equipped with very specific tools and a criteria set that allow him to move from the sentence level to the discourse level (2004, p. 220), and to develop a well-thought text, usually consisting of brief narrative and descriptive paragraphs. This is possible under pedagogical instruction. Finally, (d) extensive writing is the skill that implies the writer's possibility and ability to produce higher level-written texts, most of them at the academic level. They demand from him capacities to make judgments and present logical argumentation.

paraphrasing, re-drafting and proofreading, asking for feedback, and considering the reader's possible interpretations (p. 221). Considering sentence formation, patterns in the English language are complex and move inside the morph syntactic and semantic levels<sup>8</sup>.

Other authors have established a classification of writing sub-skills based on the close relationship between productive skills -speaking and writing- that all learners need to maintain, in L1 as well as in L2. Lindsay & Knight (2006) classify them as fluency, accuracy, complexity and appropriacy, useful to assess the learners' outcomes in terms of discourse.

*Fluency* is the sub skill that allows the writer to put sufficient pieces of language together into a comprehensible message quickly enough to fit the flow of discourse. To maintain fluency, learners need to adapt what they want to express at their language level and develop strategies to write about what they cannot express directly. Conversely, *accuracy* allows them to utter any message adequately built in terms of grammar patterns, so that the recipient can coherently understand the whole message. *Complexity* is the ability to develop background or core language, including a wide range of expressions at the learner's hand when producing outcomes that fit the situations they are in more and more precisely (Wolfe-Quintero et al, 1998). This specific background determines exactly the language level each learner belongs to. Finally, *appropriacy* is determined by the learner's choice of language to fit the situation. A learner must be able to produce a very accurate, complex sentence and fit it into the flow of the discourse without hesitation (Thornbury, 2005).

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<sup>8</sup> Patterns in sentence formation can be tracked in view of Lindsay and Knight's formulations (p. 91), following suggestions such as (a) making text cohesive if the parts fit together and coherent if it makes sense; (b) avoiding repetition by alternating words or phrases such as synonyms, linkers, pronouns, or simply leaving out the whole word; (c) connecting some sentences with linking devices such as conjunctions to make the text flow more easily; (d) avoiding repetition by merely linking two pieces of information together, by putting additional information into a separate clause, or by joining both pieces of information with a relative clause; (e) signalling or indicating to the reader what is happening in the text, providing signals; (f) using the appropriate layout -writing learners must be aware of the various elements that make up different sorts of texts, and they should learn the specific rhetorical structure of each kind of text-; (g) using the appropriate level of formality, depending on people's relationships to each other and the type of text being composed.



After identifying the writing sub skills that needed to be fostered during the implementation, I needed to define the type of text to be assessed, and the strategy that learners would use to develop a balanced text. “Developing a text with main and supporting ideas is the main goal for the writer attempting to create an effective text” (Brown, 2006). Several strategies demand awareness regarding the type of writing task and the genre of the text required. Its purpose as a message, its degree of formality, its layout, and its particular rhetorical structure are also definitive to consolidate the four sub-skills. Because beginners in writing needed to cope with basic grammar elements that supply them opportunities to provide relevant information through the construction of single meaningful paragraphs, the written responses expected belonged to the genre of description (p, 237).

### The Descriptive Paragraph

The sentence is the smallest discourse unit in the text. Then, the minimal unit conveying a complete message is provided by the paragraph, composed of several sentences coherently connected. Murray and Hughes (2008) define the paragraph as the basic unit of writing, as “a crucial and very visible unit of organization.” According to the syllabus of the English courses at ULS, the paragraph must be taught when students start English courses. Learners at this level move between single sentences with basic connectors, which demand a “set of related sentences that develop one main idea” (Murray and Hughes, 2008, p. 51). Considering this initial level of complexity, paragraphs might consist of only one or two sentences when an idea requires little development, and become more complex as the main idea requires deeper development to be supported. Whenever a new idea is introduced, a new paragraph should appear, and this way of structuring paragraphs defines the specific rhetorical structure of a descriptive text. Because learners in Level One were expected to fulfil different elaborations of descriptive discourse, they

were supplied with linguistic materials such as modelling and reading comprehension exercises based on samples to write structured descriptive paragraphs.

The primary writing model that language learners should be able to create is the **descriptive paragraph**, since it allows writers to express above all what they observe around them. Writing at this level does not demand deeper analysis but the ability to present ideas or objects by providing details that define and characterise them (Murray and Hughes, 2008: 52). For Beare (2010), descriptive paragraphs describe what a person, object, event or place looks and acts like. Both authors agree that descriptive paragraphs provide the reader with multiple descriptive elements that promote real or virtual imagery, which become fundamental for the other genres of writing, from narration to expository texts. In this sense, descriptive paragraphs provide a “comprehensive background” in any other field of writing (Przybyla, 2009), as this genre particularly provides the setting, objects, subjects, and events presented throughout the text, giving them the “crucial” functions that determine the context in which they appear.

For the current study, descriptive paragraphs expected from false beginners in Level One should have responded to rhetorically and meaningfully structured units made up of a number of descriptive sentences which conveyed a main idea and supporting details regarding objects and events. Well-composed descriptive paragraphs should provide three elements: information, contextualization, and descriptive language. Information descriptive paragraphs describe and support ideas regarding roles; contextualization defines the setting of the situation described; and the descriptive language background provides vocabulary that describes the subjects and objects’ attributes as well as the action presented. There are three types of descriptive paragraphs based on the writer’s communicative intention. Narrative description, or storytelling, includes the kinds of descriptive paragraphs which allow the reader to identify characters, their conflicts and

resolutions. Subjective description, promotes a sense of persuasion into the reader, which arises from the descriptive elements in the text that define the characters, scenery, and situations. And objective description enables the reader to experience varied sensorial sensations through reading (Hollowell, 1999).

On the other hand, descriptive paragraphs are characterized by their variety in extension and amount of descriptors. They may be long or brief, whenever they clearly define the elements under their domain -event, person or thing-. For this purpose, adjectives are the lexical tools that provide a particular and unique sense to the text. The words selected as descriptors must provide enough details to allow the reader to re create the picture of what is presented. However, the descriptive elements, used in different contexts and with different purposes, are intended to define different genres of texts, whose content may vary from formal factual information to completely fictional literature.

#### The Rhetorical Structure of Descriptive Paragraphs

Murray and Hughes (2008) also state that the limit between one paragraph and the next one is not always evident, since the writer's style allows a certain freedom to deliberately organize and separate ideas. However, each well-elaborated paragraph must consist of a topic sentence that indicates the main subject, focus, or point of interest. If this main idea appears at the beginning of the paragraph, evidently the writer is clearly stating the topic to the reader. However, the topic sentence may appear at the end of the paragraph, suggesting to readers a sense of expectation that forces them to guess what the main subject is. This main topic sentence stated in the introductory paragraph presents the main idea of a completely descriptive text. Accompanying the topic sentence, a number of supporting details must provide in-depth information across the developmental paragraphs, whose purpose is to give the reader a very

clear picture of the elements described. These supporting ideas are, according to Murray and Hughes (p. 61), academic writing fundamentals. They constitute the corpus of the developmental paragraphs that entail the topic sentence stated in the introductory paragraph. Providing details, justifications, explanatory ideas or exemplifications, development in paragraph, and developmental paragraphs widen the description. Finally, an ending or a conclusion paragraph, which according to Murray and Hughes is often confused with a summary by the writers and readers, must provide a final comment inviting the reader to generate an attitude towards the information provided. In order to clearly define a conclusion paragraph, it is necessary to make the distinction between summaries and conclusions. Summaries simply “restate, in condensed form, key information presented in the body of the writing, while conclusions consider that information and comment on it...” (60). Conclusions show the relevance of the information presented across the body of the text, the way of getting ideas together with a purpose for the reader, to observe, recreate, analyze, reconsider, criticise, and get involved with the text.

Cushing, Weige and Sarah (2002) and Harmer (2007) found that writing activities for false beginners make them aware of the formality or etiquette in composition. Since they point to identifying and properly using the conventions of academic writing, they entail such simple skills as distinguishing capital and lower case letters to more complex ideas in master writing pieces. The process also demands more and more complex learning tasks and constitutes a higher level of composition, with three main stages: pre-writing, writing stage and post-writing.

Even though certain elements and clear instruction might be provided when assigning students a writing task, most of them believe that they do not have the suitable tools to initiate the writing process. Learners feel afraid that they are wasting time unproductively while ideas do not come to their minds; these feelings turn into frustration and loss of engagement (Oxford,

1990; Harmer, 2007). The use of self-directed techniques or strategies that help the learner gain confidence may solve this concern. Fulwiler (1988) suggests a list of phases that lead the writer into the correct path to solve the task: exploring, planning to plan, moving back-and-forth, researching, drafting, revising and editing (p. 19). *Researching* in descriptive composition is essential to provide factual information that gives both the writer and the reader the necessary confidence to approach the text. “Research is a natural part of most writing processes that, like exploration and moving back-and-forth, happens at all stages” (p.19). *Revising* or redrafting, which goes hand in hand with *editing* (p. 21), consists of evaluating every new draft’s quality until the writer produced the final draft. Because describing implies providing factual information, several skills work together in the construction of the rhetorical structure. The learner has to look at the whole written text, consider and decide its shape and appearance (complexity), make proper language selections that flow naturally (appropriacy), and connect them adequately to each other (coherence and cohesion); also, it is necessary to check that the language patterns flow naturally (fluency) and achieve to be clearly understood by the target reader (accuracy). Furthermore, editing requires finding the appropriate visual elements that join the appearance and the logical and fluid reading process (p. 21). However, at basic levels in which descriptive paragraphs become the foundations of the writing process, strategic procedures to foster learners’ awareness to develop the writing skills is compulsory. Certain learning strategies that make the learner feel confident about facing and fulfilling this writing learning process need to be addressed.

### The Practicing Naturalistically Strategy

Formal literature about the use of learning strategies appeared with teachers and researchers such as Rubin (1975) and Naiman (1976), concerned about the characteristics of a

good learner. By 1981, Rubin classified the learning strategies regarding the way they directly or indirectly affected learning. Richards and Platt (1992) defined learning strategies as “intentional behaviours and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information.” From a metacognitive perspective, Baker and Brown (1984) found that some learning strategies come to the learner’s mind when he becomes aware of his own cognitive process, gains control over the tools required to perform accordingly, and solves the demands of the learning situation in the most effective way. However, false beginners require previous tools to gain confidence with the language itself before they can take on specific actions to improve learning processes. Cognitive strategies are critical tools for self-directed involvement, essential to raise the communicative competence. Their convenient use brings about proficiency and self-confidence. These actions make learning easier, faster and more enjoyable, more self directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.

***Table 2 Cognitive Practicing Learning Strategies***

1. **Repeating**-> saying or doing something over and over.
2. **Formally Practicing with Sounds and Writing Systems** -> practicing sound: out of a natural communicative practice, or practicing the new writing system of L2
3. **Recognizing and Using Formulas and Patterns**-> being aware of the use of routine formulas and comprehending unknown patterns.
4. **Recombining**-> combing known elements in a new way to produce longer sequences.
5. **Practicing naturalistically**-> exercising the new language in natural realistic settings.

Cognitive Strategies are aimed at helping the learner manipulate and transform L2 conveniently. According to Oxford (1990), language learners are often unaware of how important practice is when learning a language, and for this reason practicing strategies gain special value. Practicing Naturalistically, PNS derives from the domain of cognitive learning strategies. PNS consists of practicing the new language in natural, realistic settings, as in

participating in a conversation, reading a book or article, listening to a lecture, or writing a letter in the new language (Oxford: 46).

PNS, as the other learning strategies, results effective when a learner deals properly with a specific task. Rubin (1987) identified six conditions that label the language learning strategies: (a) They deal with specific actions or techniques used by the learner; they are not an approach. (b) They may or not be observable. (c) They may be consciously or unconsciously acquired, so that they may become automated. (d) They are problem-oriented, because they are used by the learner “to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information.” (e) They are used regarding the language learning behaviour that “contributes directly to learning,” and (f) as strategies, they are behaviours that the learner may willingly change (p. 7). To develop writing skills in particular, Oxford recommends PNS as the opportunity for learners to meaningfully practice L2 (p. 86) through the production of authentic materials and tasks in the classroom.

The authentic value of PNS appears when adapting tasks, as suggested by Oxford, not only to introduce the language to the learner as its recipient but to encourage his creativity as the producer of the message. The meaningful value of PNS through writing as a chance to solve authentic tasks and other activities lies in the innumerable possibilities he has to learn while producing a message, as an actor and a creator, always aware of the communicative functions of the language and of his active role as the sender in this process (Jakobson, 1960).

### Practicing Naturalistically through Writing Authentic Tasks

PNS and authentic tasks are closely related as fundamental procedures of the communicative approach (Nunan, 1989), since they allow learners to use their own knowledge during their learning process, and being assessed in terms of successful communication. PNS promotes the contextualizing meaning of the language, not as a simple set of grammatical rules

to evaluate the learners but as a communicative element that conveys a live relationship between the learner and lots of cultural aspects involving both the mother and the target languages.

At ULS, the English program in all the levels is intended to develop communication and language proficiency. The Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures promotes the legal use of authentic resources at hand, from printed to audiovisual materials taken from approved websites specialized in L2 training. In addition to the teachers' resourcefulness, local productions, and physical library features, most of the web resources supply the teaching practice especially in preparation for enhancement of the listening and reading skills at all levels from introductory to exam preparation. Nevertheless, specific resources for writing are academic, that is, distant from students' particular interests, but most include resources and activities for learning at the higher levels, especially regarding training for international proficiency tests. They include essays, articles, and reports which perfectly match the intermediate and advanced levels. Lower levels lack adaptable authentic materials and activities, because, as Richards (2001) affirms, they usually contain more complex grammar structures and lots of extraneous vocabulary, difficult to decode by the beginners.

Consequently, teachers should not only seek authentic materials and activities but also design authentic tasks that address communicative competence and convey the linguistic requirements at the basic levels through simpler target language. Because PNS makes it possible to develop L2 through natural settings, it is important to encourage learners to use it (Shananhan, 1997) by exposing them to cultural contents in which the language is alive and eager to be not only identified but expressed.

According to Stuart and Nocon (1996), learning about L2 culture as well as "about one's culture requires tools that assist language learners in negotiating meaning and understanding the



communicative and cultural texts in which linguistic codes are used.” For McKay (2003), culture not only affects the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse levels of the language but also operates in a pedagogical sense in three dimensions according to the source of the materials: target culture, mother, or source culture and international target culture. It operates in the source culture dimension since the learner develops abilities to learn about, express, and know his own culture through the L2 learning process. As expressed in Chapter 1, one of the main purposes of the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures at ULS is providing the learner with tools to develop a sense of identity and autonomy. Bearing this in mind, I analysed the feasibility of encouraging the group studied to elaborate authentic materials, following Oxford’s PNS, as an opportunity to enhance writing skills, by means of negotiating meaningful language and content with learners, while allowing them to communicate their own ideas and culture by writing descriptive paragraphs, so that they could feel writing as a productive, enriching, and valuable skill that rapidly helped them to increase communicative competence.

Considering the materials created by the learners themselves, like Harmer (1991), Ciccone (1995) admits that authentic materials are not created for classroom purposes but for native speakers (p. 203), reason why they may constitute an excellent resource for L2 learning. PNS is commonly used by teachers engaged with a contextualizing environment to promote confidence and for risk-taker and creative learners. However, it seems that most teachers consider authentic materials inappropriate for Practicing Naturalistically during the first stages of the language learning process, because assessing them is more time consuming than the “amount, nature and necessity” of the benefits that they may provide (Ciccone, 1995, p. 203). Facing these concerns, the purpose of this research included having students as recipients but also producers of their own materials to increase their writing skills. Addressing EL speakers

would regulate the language complexity levels according to each student. At the same time, the power of writing to native speakers could result convenient and reliable to provide the confidence that what they were learning in the classroom was completely applicable to real life and would not merely remain as isolated concepts. As Ciccone points, lack of early exposure to authentic materials that provide PNS will increase students' frustration and will "retard" their language acquisition (p. 204.) Ciccone also reports that when learners are supported to deal with authentic materials through guidance from the early stages of the process, acquiring processing strategies will help them decode such complex language, and they will eventually acquire the abilities to focus on its meaningful value, feel more confident and satisfied, and make better progress.

For constructivists, authenticity leads to authentic learning (Oguz and Bahar, 2008), and authentic learning like PNS "is an approach to learning in which students work on realistic problems, participate in activities that solve real-life problems, or create products that have real-life purposes." Oguz and Bahar (p. 329) recognize four main characteristics in authentic learning: (a) structuring information by completing some tasks; (b) relating learning to students' real lives and experiences; (c) keeping on learning in non-school settings such as home, workplace, etc.; (d) cooperation and communication (p. 329). Moreover, authentic learning promotes interaction, creativity, discovery, awareness, and development in and out of the classroom; and, social interactions with other people. Oguz and Bahar affirm that authentic activities guide learners to real-life contexts and tasks from which they comprehend the real value of learning as part of their real-life experiences. Furthermore, authentic learning through authentic tasks encourage learners' development of logical, critical, and creative thinking, which ultimately will help them be prepared for lifelong learning.

### Promoting PNS through Writing Letters as Authentic Tasks

Jacobson et al. (2003) prove the importance of writing letters as an authentic activity for adult language learners when they are actually sent. In agreement with this statement, the final stage of natural practice “*involves exchanges of written messages between individuals or teams*” (Oxford, 1990), such as dialogue journals, letter writing, and computer interaction, which provide wide spaces for students and teachers to share and interchange ideas in a supportive non-judgemental way. Additionally, teachers may encourage learners to keep mailing and emailing in L2 with peers or with keypals around the world (p. 78.) Connecting language learners promotes real communication in a natural way rather than merely focusing on language study. Additionally, Jacobson et al. (2003) argue that, concerning materials production in the classroom, there is no sense in writing letters that are not sent, since conversely this activity becomes decontextualized, school-centred and missing real learners’ lifelong purposes.

A final reflection upon authenticity in EL learning is intended to support the value of PNS as a complete authentic activity. Gilmore (2007) found that, considering ELT books’ production, there is a generalized tendency to disregard the contextualizing elements of communication, which prevents learners from comprehending real situations or recipients to whom the target language they are learning is directed. Constructivism insists upon the completely active role of the learner in the production of authentic materials that account for his own construction of knowledge (Oguz and Bahar, 2008). The current project would make attempts to validate these concerns by promoting real communication through PNS.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter introduces and justifies the relations of the elements that constituted the research design, type of study, researcher's role, context, participants, data collection instruments selected, research strategy and procedures applied through the implementation process to arrive at the solution to the problem stated in Chapter 1.

#### Type of Study

I intended to follow the qualitative action research approach, by means of analysing the context of study in a natural way, without attempting to control any of the variables that appeared in it but through the implementation of well-designed data collection tools. Conveniently applied, tools allow careful observation and detailed description of all the elements that may lead the researcher to interpret and explain a specific human behaviour, in this case, in the classroom context (Burns, 1999). Action research promotes a systematic analysis of a continuous implementation process to determine the validity of a new or a particular methodological approach, so that the teacher may “enhance reflective practice and professional growth and development” (p. 24). To help improve the teaching practice, and to foster students' abilities to enhance language acquisition and raise proficiency levels, action research will encourage permanent updating in teaching procedures, guiding the teacher to understand strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the teaching and learning process, and promoting classroom negotiation and collaborative work.

Action research also favours the validity of the study since procedures for data collection will converge in triangulation by implementing data gathering from different sources. Thus, the

“or the insights can be tested out against each other” (p. 25), ensuring the reliability of the project.

### Context and Participants

The current project was implemented at the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures at Universidad de La Sabana ULS, a campus college outside the capital city that congregates students from all social, cultural and geographical areas.

Participants were twelve learners aged 17 to 19, and one student aged 27. They came from very different towns in Cundinamarca and around the country, such as Zipaquirá, Chía, Cajicá, Ubaté, Facatativá, Sequilé, Llanos Orientales, Cali, Bucaramanga, and Boyacá. They had been classified as false beginners according to results in exams taken during the application process. This meant that they had quite basic knowledge of English, which included basic vocabulary and structures with verb *to be* and the simple present tense. The diagnosis activities carried out during weeks 1 and 2 of the course also proved that from a twenty students-group these thirteen learners, who participated in all the implementation, were false beginners.

According to Questionnaire No. 1, applied before the implementation (see Appendix E), students belonged to different economic levels. Not all of them lived with their parents but depended on them, as they commented in the questionnaires and in several writing tasks. These students lived by themselves and had a certain skill to control their everyday expenditures. They expected to finish their majors, enter the workplace immediately, and cooperate in their family responsibilities. For this reason, they were expected to excel higher levels of proficiency, in their own majors and in their English courses, since becoming proficient users would open more

doors when applying for quality jobs and better educational opportunities in the country and abroad (Graddol, 2006).

### Researcher's Role

In this project I fulfilled the roles of teacher, researcher, and reflective practitioner, aiming at implementing a learning strategy in a natural classroom environment. My endeavours as a researcher included teaching, training, observing, and being part of the community studied (Burns, 1999). Given these particular circumstances and the Action Research principles under which this study took place, I developed it, implemented the methodological approach and the data collecting tools, and worked as the facilitator who trained the learners to use PNS. I also provided permanent feedback to students' writings before, during, and after the implementation.

On the other hand, as a reflective practitioner, I intended to improve my pedagogical practice in ELT through self-awareness (Elliot, 1973). As a member of a collaborative teaching staff, I intended to help enhance the writing teaching process at my faculty. As part of the community, research would provide evidence for solving problems, improving practices, and making sound decisions in the teaching practice (Stenhouse, 1975), hence fostering community teaching practice (Tabacknick and Zeichner, 1991).

Finally, as a student in the Master Program developing a research project at the time, I received permanent advice from my tutor and director for developing the study under adequate conditions to ensure reliability and validity and for acquiring expertise in the identification and structured-based solution to ESLT problems.

### Methodological Approach

#### Pedagogical Design

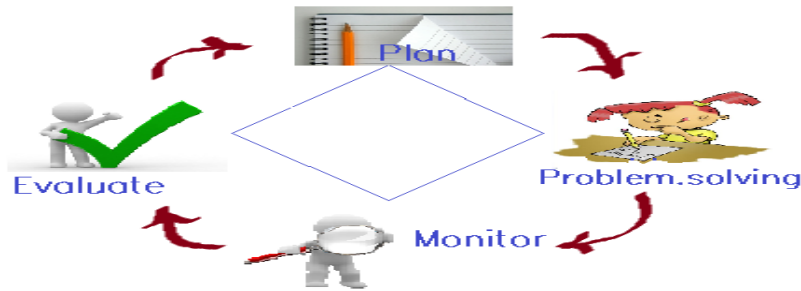
The problem identified was overtly affecting my group's writing performance and tended to grow beyond Level One, according to documentation stored about writing results in the regular courses at the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures in the year 2010 (see Appendix A). Pointing to an implementation that helped solve this problem, I designed an action plan consisting of twenty sequential writing sessions in which students responded to messages sent by some virtual key pal. The procedure is explained below.

In the first stage I established the specific methodology to address the content along the timeline for data collection and implementation (see Appendix B). The second stage was determining the pedagogical design based on the timeline, which meant carrying out constant comparative analysis for the action research project (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I built the instructional framework to implement PNS, which demanded identifying the factors that would facilitate effective instruction for the strategy selected, considering both the teacher's role as a trainer and researcher and the students' profiles. The syllabus of the course had to be followed exactly, reason why the writing sessions were separated from the other skills, and students often did one hour of writing per week.

For teaching the strategy, I adapted the Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning suggested by Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, and Robbins (1999) to the syllabus of the course and to the actual writing learning needs of the group, so that Strategic Learning Instruction on PNS was explicit when teaching learners to write descriptive paragraphs. Strategic Learning Instruction is a proposal (Chamot et al, 1999) for identifying and understanding the roles that teachers and learners acquire when using learning strategies. Most of their suggestions were completely useful to develop the instructional design and the action plan of the current project.

The instructional design for PNS, adapted from Chamot's Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning, compiles four metacognitive processes: planning, monitoring, problem solving, and evaluating (p. 11). I did not follow this sequence strictly but adapted them according to the tasks' demands and the interaction between the learner and the task (p. 12). The graph below illustrates the flexibility of the model according to learning requirements:

**Figure 2- Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning**



– Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary & Robbins (1999)

To avoid time constraints during the implementation, I created a contextualizing panorama and an avatar that involved students in the writing learning process as if they had a challenge to overcome during the course. The avatar<sup>9</sup> was Jennifer, an American native friend living in an English-speaking country with whom they had to keep contact by replying her mails and postcards. This character and other English-speaking friends were designed to encourage the learners to respond in English, as the only choice since these virtual key pals only spoke English.

Following the syllabus requirements, writing sessions were regularly set one hour per week. I designed the writing model for the students to follow as a learning guide, in which they found their task as a contextualizing activity that compiled all the grammar and lexical contents

<sup>9</sup> Coined by Geoffrey Parrinder in 1982, an *avatar* is a “computer generated visual representation of a user created within a three dimension virtual reality environment”, who allows a user (the teacher) to acquire a virtual character. The term avatar was inspired from the ancient Hindi word that referred to a deity reincarnated in a human form. Deuchar and Nodder (2003), *the Impact of Avatars and 3D Virtual World Creation of Learning*, p. 255.



of the week in a completely communicative way. As registered in the ULS platform in Virtual Sabana,<sup>10</sup> I prepared and uploaded the learning guides in the teachers' Level 1 2010-02<sup>11</sup> forum at least four days in advance, so that I could pilot the tool through my colleagues, who also supplied feedback regarding the contents and applicability. This fact allowed us to follow a communicative trend that connected the syllabus with the current strategic instruction about PNS so that the learning guides provided the context and became the writing tool for the project during the entire course.

### Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

In order to gather data to analyse the relationship between PNS and the learner's ability to write descriptive paragraphs, as this action research project requested, I used the following tools in the implementation: questionnaires, learning guides, and students' writing outcomes, besides a list of conventions for writing and rubrics.

#### Questionnaires

Because questionnaires are "*set out*" systematically to obtain specific data about facts and personal perceptions (Wallace, 1998), I applied three questionnaires previous to, during, and after application stages, to gather data concerning the learners' profiles and writing backgrounds and their feelings about their writing learning process (Hopkins, 2008). To collect and systematise this information easily (Burns, 2010) I used a five-to-seven point scale questionnaire with most close questions about the kind of artefacts and activities that would be later implemented in the classroom (see Appendix E). Each tool was explained and responded in fifteen minutes.

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<sup>10</sup> Virtual Sabana is the Virtual space provided by the university to all the courses in the different programmes, including the language resource space for all English course levels, which is used to support the classes and the learning process full time, in addition to providing independent work and promoting autonomy.

<sup>11</sup>Documentation must be asked for directly from to the general coordinator of the regular courses at the DFLC.

The second questionnaire, applied during the implementation stage, was particularly important to know students' feelings during the process and their knowledge of the strategy. In the closure stage, the last questionnaire would help to analyse the extent to which PNS was appropriate to enhance the written level expected. These three questionnaires were overlapped to develop a comparative analysis, and to observe if students' beliefs about their writing learning process regarding descriptive paragraphs evolved by the use of PNS, during the implementation process, so as to consider it a valuable tool to improve their writing ability.

### Artefacts

Initially, I counted on the rubrics and list of conventions for writing, used to evaluate student's written outcomes at the end of each term.

At first, **rubrics** for writing descriptive paragraphs had been designed to provide an overview of how students' writings would be assessed during term exams, so they could visualize the basic requirements they had to accomplish through their writing outcomes<sup>12</sup>. Three rubrics defined the parameter and criteria for writing assessment and conveyed the contents developed each term, according to the procedures agreed for Level 1.

In addition, the **list of conventions for writing** helped students to identify the elements considered in the feedback of their writings (Lu and Horner, 2007). According to Pearson (2010), conventions are a set of "generally accepted standards for written English."

### Learning Guides

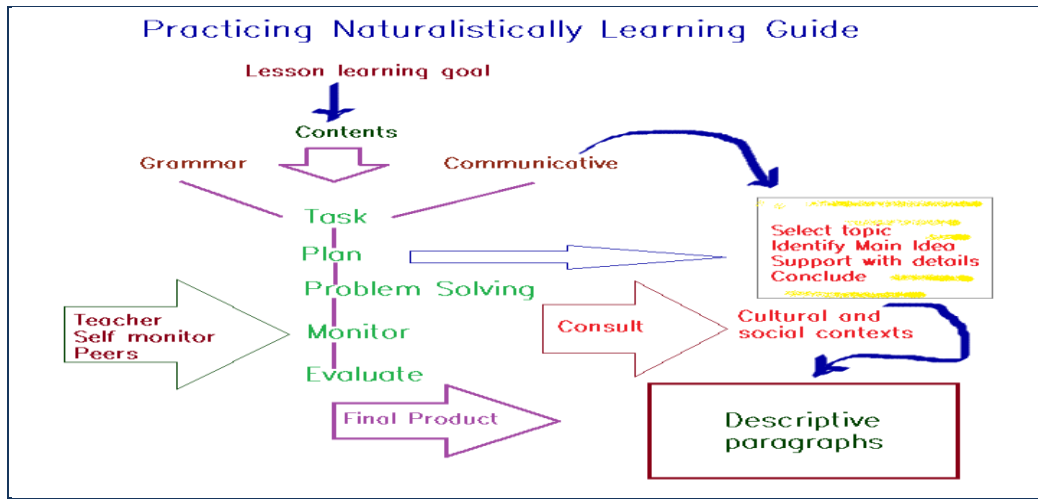
As explained in the methodological approach, I designed the writing learning guides for the implementation of PNS but also to collect the raw data. The products expected from these

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<sup>12</sup> According to TeAch-nology (2011) "Rubrics" are "performance-based assessments" used to measure the student's proficiency in a specific task, skill, or competence, according to very specific criteria, which learners should know in advance. To access TeAch-nology follow this link [http://www.teach-nology.com/web\\_tools/rubrics/](http://www.teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/)

learning guides were authentic texts written by the students themselves, because they provided precise opportunities to observe and analyse how they used the strategy in the classroom context during the writing learning process (Burns, 2010: 91).

**Figure 3 - Structure of the PNS Learning Guides**



The learning guides had four major purposes: (a) to introduce the main goal to reach when completing the task, (b) to remind the learner of the contents assessed during the writing task in terms of grammar and communication, (c) to present the specific task as a communicative problem to solve, and (d) to provide instruction on how to use the strategy, following the four processes delineated by the Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning, so that students could use PNS in a formal and structured way, and varying the order according to their needs and interests (Chamot 1990.)

Additionally, the guides suggested different formats to the learners according to their particular tastes and commitment with the task. Each format consisted of five or six features explaining each section of the task. The extracts below show samples of the way they were structured in the learning guides: (a) An introductory authentic document, presenting the main

goal, competence, contents and the specific task, which consisted of a message that Jennifer expected to receive. In this guide the student clicks on Jennifer’s message and he can know what she means to obtain from the learner’s writing task.

**Figure 4 – Learning Guides Part 1: Introduction**

DEPARTAMENTO DE LENGUAS Y CULTURAS EXTRANJERAS- UNIVERSIDAD DE LA SABANA  
 MASTER IN ELT AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS  
**ENHANCING DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS THROUGH PRACTICING NATURALISTICALLY - IMPLEMENTATION STAGE**  
**Writing Workshop – Sending a postcard about two cities**

Main goal:	You will invite your key pal from other country to visit two cities in Colombia.
Competence:	You will tell people about similarities and differences between two different cities in your country.
Contents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How the people live..., travel, move around the town...</li> <li>2. Where they live (houses, apartments, huts, farms)</li> <li>3. Their common activities on labour days and in their free time</li> <li>4. The daily life in that place regarding schools, workplaces, shopping and main attractions...</li> </ol>
Grammar contents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Connecting words TOO, NEITHER, BOTH, BUT, AND,</li> <li>2. Ordinal and cardinal numbers to tell the dates and times</li> <li>3. The calendar: months, seasons, days of the week, festivals and popular ...</li> </ol>

**Implementation procedure:**

**Activity 1:**  
 Your key pal Jennifer has decided to visit your country and is very interested in knowing from you about two different cities to visit when she comes. Click [here](#) to listen to her message in your answering machine.

(b) A sample solution of the task, modelling a possible initial plan to solve the task (which will be explained widely in the Pedagogical Intervention); (c) Some graphic organizers for learners to cluster the main and supporting ideas;

**Figure 5 – Learning Guides Part 3: Planning the Solution of the Task**

**Activity 3:**  
 Now select your cities and design a similar table with the aspects you are going to describe:

Cities selected		
Weather		
Transport		
Typical festival or celebration		
Common labour activities		
Work time		
...		
Interesting places to visit		

(d) An outline to write the draft of the requested task, shaping the discourse form of a letter composed of descriptive paragraphs (an introductory paragraph, one or more developing

paragraphs and a closure paragraph). Layouts created during the implementation included letters, postcards, a poster, a brochure, and some recipe-form writings (see samples of the learning guides used in the writing sessions in Appendix H).

**Figure 6 – Learning Guide Sample Outline for Letters**

**Activity 4:**  
Now you are ready to write your postcard. Now design your postcard writing the text you can write comparing both cities. Observe carefully the use of the grammar concepts you know to describe places, and use both (when they are similar in an affirmative way, neither, when they are similar in a negative way, and too, when they are similar and you want to put them in separated ideas):  
Include a couple of nice pictures of your two cities and send it to Jenny through the forum. Good luck!

**Writing Workshop No. 4 – Friday September 10th**  
**Sending a postcard about two cities**  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ...  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ...

And (e), a sample of the final version of the task to be sent in its current layout. This version contains a reading comprehension activity so that learners identify the main features of the type of text being read and composed, and some of the relevant aspects they should include when generating their own texts.


**Figure 7 – Learning Guide Sample Layout of a Postcard**


**Activity 5:**

Here is an example of my own post card:

*Dear Jenny,*

*I am very happy to know you are visiting Colombia soon. When exactly do you come? When you come, you definitely have to visit Medellin and Bucaramanga because they are really ...*





*Weather is quite different in **both** cities since Medellin is warm and fresh and Bucaramanga is warm and sunny all the time. **Both** people in Medellin and Bucaramanga...!*

***Both** cities are almost the same size. To go around the city... in **both** cities.*

*In Medellin people wake up ... **too**, but they don't ... **neither**. In **both** cities, people go to ...on weekends.*

*People usually ... or go to the movies because ... at this moment of day in **both** cities.*

*If you want to ... traditional Colombian food, **but** in Medellin you can have **both** Colombian and international food.*

*There are many interesting places to visit in **both** cities. You can ... **too**, but discos and bars do not remain open **but** until 3:00 a.m. **both** in Medellin and in Bucaramanga...*

*Looking forwards to your email back to help you prepare your trip.*

### Validity and Reliability

I verified the consistency of the results by gathering and contrasting the students' writing samples -before, during, and after the implementation- and assessed by means of the criteria previously established in the rubrics for writing descriptive paragraphs. I also contrasted them with the diagnostic tests gathered before implementation. Supporting the study with grounded theory during data analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), I found the categories that responded to *how students used PNS when writing descriptive paragraphs*. Eventually, by comparing all the samples selected at random, I could identify *to what extent PNS helped improve the quality of the false beginners' descriptive paragraphs*.

Following the Metacognitive Strategic Learning Model (Chamot, 1999), I implemented the learning guides based on PNS with practical writing tasks, instead of a set of grammar rules for mechanizing concepts, expecting in return to obtain authentic texts. In these guides, I introduced communicative goals and shaped PNS-based activities that guided learners to respond

to a special addressee. During implementation, students interacted with Jennifer, the virtual pal who was to receive their messages, consisting on emails and other types of texts in which they shared with her common interests and told her about their culture. As the data proved, descriptive validity consisted of the sampling gathered, directly observed, analysed, and assessed when developing comparative analysis and grounded analysis (Elliot and Fischer, 1999). As a third instrument for interpretive validity, I also collected the students' perceptions provided in the questionnaires, to verify the validity of the tools implemented and the writings assessed (Maxwell, 1992).

## CHAPTER 4

### PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION

The current chapter explains step by step how the intervention and implementation processes were carried out and describes the procedures used with each data collection tool.

#### Methodology

The instructional approach that centres its attention on the learners' role focuses on the "*students' learning processes, as well as on products and outcomes*" (Oxford, 1999). It points to the mental processes carried out in their minds during their construction of language:

Teachers focus not only on technically "correct" language use but also on the message that students are trying to communicate and the reasoning behind their responses...During the students' explanations the teacher can point out when they use strategies, especially if they seem unaware that they are doing something strategic... (p. 38)

During the implementation, I used a focused instructional design to map the intervention process, but it served for many more purposes: to identify the adequate strategy, to select and design the artefacts used during the Strategic Learning sessions (described in the previous chapter), and to determine the specific timeline for the writing sessions (see Appendix C). Besides training students to use PNS and construct descriptive paragraphs (by means of the strategy itself), it also encouraged their self-reflection upon the manner to use the strategy to attain writing task goals. It meant that using or not PNS would be evident in their final products. Additionally, because PNS is a non-observable strategy<sup>13</sup> (Oxford, 1990; Chamot, 1999), I needed to consider very close observation tools that allowed me to gather data about the students' behaviour throughout the writing process carried out in the classroom. On the other

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<sup>13</sup> Most cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies are mental processes which cannot be directly observable. It means that in order to prove their applicability and how effective they could be for the learner, artefacts must be used (Chamot, 1999).



hand, I had to conceive a manner in which the mental process of exploiting PNS could be directly observable in the writing papers. For the first purpose, I used field notes all through the implementation, written on removable pop sticks at the margins of the learning guides that I would transfer later to my blog<sup>14</sup> (follow this [link](#) to access the blog). Moreover, the three questionnaires were used to collect students' views about the way they were involved with PNS. For the second purpose, I designed a general outline that fitted the requirements of the rhetorical structure of descriptive paragraphs students would write for every task and I inserted them in the first four Learning guides. This way I would portrait the exact progress in writing through the authentic texts while students used the strategy. The whole process is described below.

#### Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning Procedure to Implement the Learning Guides

During the pedagogical intervention, I revised the syllabus every week in advance and the contents and goals that needed to be conveyed. I looked for communicative contents and previous listening and speaking activities that could support the grammar concepts and the vocabulary background which was to be taught during the week before the writing sessions. I worked with my colleagues in Level 1 to identify the possible communicative contents and prepared the learning guides and other materials in advance so as to pilot them before each implementation. Every learning guide was introduced virtually with the same body so that teachers and students got familiar with its structure, and each activity dealt with the stages of the Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning. Before or instead of printing the guides, teacher showed them in the video bean at the beginning of the session. Several listening and speaking activities developed during the week had been designed considering the communicative contents implicit in the guides, since they would help students acquire the mechanics of language

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<sup>14</sup> Malaver, Y. *Jenny's Action Research Follow Up*, July-November 2010, retrieved from <http://jennymalaver.blogspot.com/>

necessary to retain certain elements. So when introducing the learning guides, these would look more familiar and be part of the whole learning process completely connected to the other skills.

**Figure 8 – Identifying Contents and Goals before Applying the Metacognitive Model**

Unidad de La Sabana  
**ENGLISH LEVEL 1**  
 DEPARTAMENTO DE LENGUAS Y CULTURAS EXTRANJERAS  
 DEPARTAMENTO DE LENGUAS Y CULTURAS EXTRANJERAS- UNIVERSIDAD DE LA SABANA  
 MASTER IN ELT AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS  
 ENHANCING DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS THROUGH PRACTICING NATURALLY  
 IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

**Identify the task in terms of a message to communicate** → Writing Workshop – Fifth Week September 13<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>  
**Sending your Key Pal an Email about your Best Friend**

<b>Main goal</b>	To write an e-mail to your key pal describing your best friend's preferences.
<b>Competence</b>	You will tell others about somebody's personal information, personality and preferences.
<b>Contents</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who somebody is (identity: name, age, nationality, job, language, etc.)</li> <li>2. How somebody is (he, she) (personality and character)</li> <li>3. What he / she looks like (physical appearance)</li> <li>4. What he / she likes about different issues (food, sports, hobbies)</li> <li>5. What he / she does every day and in his / her free time</li> </ol>
<b>Sub-competences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize and produce topic sentences.</li> <li>• Verify if sentences express complete ideas</li> <li>• Give support details and examples.</li> <li>• Provide concluding sentences.</li> <li>• Revise and check <b>grammar, spelling, capitalization and punctuation.</b></li> <li>• Proof-read and edit paragraphs through the use of rubrics and conventions.</li> </ul>

**Identify grammar contents with a communicative purpose** ←

**Evaluate what you have learnt during the week and join it to your background** ←

The initial part of the guides presented the grammar contents previously studied and the goals and communicative competences. Besides, the task was introduced as a communicative competence.

**Figure 9- Identifying the Task Stage of the Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning**

**Introduction:**

**Activity 1:**

a) Look at Jenny's best friend's photo album in Week 8 resources.

b) What can you remember about Linda? Write and ask your peers questions about her. Try to respond.

c) Now, in your notebook, write 7 things that Linda likes and 3 things that she definitely doesn't like.

**Task** →

Now, students were prepared to know the task, presented through any specific message sent by Jennifer or some other EL keypals. When clicking on the link students would have access to a telephone message, a brochure, an email, a video, etc.

Usually, students could take the next stage of the process by planning their task, but while being trained, they also had access to samples of the solution of the task by analysing different materials. To do so, the second activity in the learning guides trained them to evaluate the written material, by reading samples with excerpts and developing comprehension exercises with problematic situations, so that they also became aware of the typical mistakes they could make during their own writing process. This way, problem-solving, monitor and evaluation stages worked together helping them acquire the mechanics for proper language use (including rules like spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and semantic and morph syntactic) and identify obstacles in appropriate communication (such as coherence and cohesion).

**Figure 10 - Problem Solving Stage of the Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning**

**Activity 2:**

Now, look at the original email that Jenny was typing about her best friend Linda. Check the rhetorical structure of this descriptive text about Linda's identity, character, common activities and hobbies. Answer these questions: Which paragraph (s)...

- a) Provides details and explanations about previous general information? ----
- b) Provides more details about the subject's life style? ----
- c) Provides contrasting ideas about preferences? ----
- d) Concludes the letter with an invitation? ----
- e) Introduces the character with basic information about her/his identity? ----

Find, identify and correct **fifteen different mistakes** and rewrite the corrected version in your notebook. Compare it with two peers.

**Implementation Procedure:**

*Dear key pal,*

*I want you to know about my best friend her name is Linda. She is a beautiful tall and thin girl. she has twenty-one year. is from Houston, Texas. She is North America she is intelligent, funny, very outgoing.*

*Linda is a actress and she lives in a apartment big in mexico city. She speak English, Spanish and italian. She loves travel and collecting antiquities from different places in the world ...*

Reading exercises intended to develop language awareness and the mechanics of descriptive paragraphs.

During the planning stage, they could consult and evaluate extracts of samples of the task modelled inside the first four learning guides, because they needed to comprehend and acquire the mechanics of the rhetorical structure of the descriptive paragraphs that they were expected to write. In the succeeding sessions not models were given, because I needed to verify if they had resorted to PNS to develop their tasks.

According to the complexity of the task requested, students should need additional cognitive strategies such as using mind maps and graphic organizers, especially when they needed to include information related to cultural and social aspects. In these cases, learning guides showed them how to build and use these strategies. If not required, the same guides provided the outline as a graphic organizer for learners to follow and mechanize the rhetorical structure of the descriptive paragraphs. This way, students would need to produce more than one draft and proof read their writings before editing, as part of the evaluation stage, apart from the teacher’s feedback and Jennifer’s replies pointing to remarkable aspects in their own messages.

**Figure 11- Planning Stage of the Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning**

**Writing Project: Writing an email introducing your best friend**

**Procedure:**

1. Think about your best friend and plan what you are going to write about him or her.
2. Write the draft and then fill in the formal outline to describe your best friend.
3. Reread your draft to improve, complete or modify ideas. Then edit it and hand in to your teacher.
4. You can have peer correction by exchanging your text with your peers in class.

**Writing Workshop No.5:**

Students' name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Group: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Introductory paragraph	Introduce personal information about your friend (name, age, job, physical appearance, personality)	
Developing paragraphs	Describe her everyday activities and her favourite activities.  Compare things that she likes and things she doesn't like.	
Closure paragraph	Invite your reader to write about his/her best friend.	

Now rewrite, edit and send your letter completed to Jennifer.

The Metacognitive Model for Strategic Learning also encouraged learners to find more convenient resources and information in their context that demanded natural language at the moment of responding their emails. So, they looked for recipe books, brochures about tourism

and transport in their hometowns and other places, weather forecasts informing climate conditions, and many more (see samples in appendix F). The ways students addressed these authentic materials would help comprehend to what extent they were engaged with producing real messages to real 2L speakers, and thus, how able they were to express meaningful language. Now, during the problem-solving stage, I could analyze the form students gave to the text by studying the specific layout and rhetorical structure which conveyed descriptive paragraphs, as suggested by Harmer (2007), Cushing et al (2002), and Murray and Hughes (2008). My role as a researcher at that moment reduced to gather samples of their final works, and observe the manners as students combined the specific writing sub skills, by means of Lindsay and Knight's theoretical support (See Appendix J.)

Because of time constraints, students just filled in the graph organizers and wrote their first draft in the classroom. They had to rewrite their drafts and hand them in paper the next class. I collected them and provided feedback immediately, so that for the next writing session they had completed their tasks by sending them to Jennifer's mail.

### Implementation Timeline

This implementation covered sixteen weeks, of which twenty sessions of an hour each were devoted to the intervention (see Project Timeline and Action Plan in Appendixes B and C).

#### Pre-Intervention Stage

The first two weeks, I taught students the theoretical background for the rhetorical structure of descriptive paragraphs and trained them to use PNS, while I observed their behaviour when addressing the writing process to carry out every single task. Inconformity and frequent disregard were generated by their lack of language background. I collected samples of

the students' writings before implementing any data collection tools. To complete the diagnosis, I asked them to write a free composition about themselves, expecting that they produced brief descriptions of their background, their personal lives, physical appearance, and their likes and interests, using their current background (see the comparative results of the Entry tests in Appendix D). From this tool, I identified the students' language levels and confirmed their difficulties and needs regarding writing.

During this diagnosis stage, I implemented the second data collecting tool, consisting of the initial questionnaire (see Appendix E) that contained two groups of multiple choice questions. It had three main purposes: on the one hand, it was aimed at identifying the students' learning styles (inviting them to raise self-awareness and commitment with their own writing learning process). On the other hand, gathering data on their awareness of their current background and the relevance it had in their learning process. Thus, I designed the artefacts that were to be used in the implementation stage. The third aim was creating expectation about PNS and encouraging students to use it during the course as a means of empowering them with two elements: strategic use of tools for writing and awareness and commitment over their own learning writing process in L2.

The analysis of the questionnaire let me confirm the students' learning styles, their character of "false beginners,"<sup>15</sup> their feelings, interests and expectations towards the writing sessions. These observation tools made it possible to shape the artefacts and to develop PNS guided by the learners' profiles, the syllabus of the course, and their role during implementation.

## Implementation Stage

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<sup>15</sup> The MacMillan Dictionary defines a 'False beginner' as "*someone who starts to study a language from the beginning again, although they already have a slight knowledge of it.*" Online version Macmillan Publishers Limited 2009–2011

In the third week session I introduced the three artefacts which would help students raise awareness about the writing process: the convention list for writing, the rubrics for assessing writing, and the first learning guide.

To train students to use the list of conventions for writing, I developed a couple of lessons regarding how to interpret the writing feedback whenever required, as a way of promoting collaborative work by peer-evaluating some pieces of writing. Learners used the conventions list, identified the meaning of each symbol and practiced through self-correction when proofreading their writings. On two opportunities students developed collaborative sessions to practice peer correction. I gave them their pieces of writing with the feedback in annotated versions,<sup>16</sup> and they exchanged them, identified the conventions, and helped each other to analyse their mistakes; then, they discussed about how they could correct and avoid future mistakes.

For every new task assigned to elaborate each new piece of writing, students knew in advance the criteria for assessment, because each item was expressed with a general descriptor in the rubric, and was pointed out in terms of grammar contents and communicative contents at the beginning of each learning guide. To fulfil the task, students had to follow the procedure indicated in the outlines for the rhetorical structure of descriptive paragraphs. After the first term exams (carried out in the fifth week), students received feedback on their written exams. I encouraged them to analyse and interpret the results obtained by contrasting them with the criteria stated in the rubrics.

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<sup>16</sup> According to ICALT (2005), ESOL Examinations, University of Cambridge, an *annotated version* is a brief rationale in which the teacher assesses the written production of the learner, focusing on specific considerations pertinent to the task assigned and to the level of language of the learner, providing him appropriate feedback, and a summary with clear comments useful by the learner to improve the current task and eventually the writing proficiency level.

From weeks 3 to 16, I implemented twelve writing sessions following the instructional design previewed in the action plan, and using the Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning. During the third and fourth weeks, I taught them how to use the strategy in the class and through their independent work. They could see PNS applied to models of descriptive paragraphs through letters and short emails suggested in the learning guides, so that they could realize when and why the strategy was useful (Chamot, 1999) (See a sample in Appendix F.) They also analyzed the rhetorical structure of the paragraphs provided in the first learning guides and compared it with the Big Mac graphic organizer used at the beginning of the course (see figure 1 in Chapter 1), so as to make conclusions and mechanize this structure. Step by step, the strategy led them into the process in a natural way. Jennifer called them, sent them messages, or informed them about any news, and they started to plan and build their replies, as suggested by Oxford (1990), considering normal circumstances under which messages such as emails, postcards, and letters are typically used.

Following the action plan, the Metacognitive Model for Strategic Instruction suggested the students PNS when writing descriptive paragraphs. Because of Jenny, their “virtual pal,” students began to chat during the semester to establish friendship with an English native speaker who only spoke her native language. In order to become friends and keep in touch with her, they were encouraged to use the language they were learning formally so that circumstances compelled them to exercise their writing skills and “improve” their language level. (See Jennifer’s avatar [link](#) in the Appendix J.)

Jennifer continued sending messages in every new learning guide, asking them specific tasks in which they were expected to use the strategy by themselves. Every time they required a higher level of language to keep chatting with her, which demanded wider ranges of vocabulary,



grammar structures and coherence and cohesion tools to conform the descriptive paragraphs. When observing the students' behaviour during the writing sessions and through their final outcomes, gaps and inappropriate uses of essential grammatical and lexical resources persisted, as Hinkel (2004) had stated. This fact encouraged me to take particular actions in the design and implementation of the subsequent learning guides.

Bearing in mind research objectives and current needs, I selected and introduced the topics that better encouraged learners to write descriptive paragraphs (Reid, 1990.) The former learning guides demanded more writing controlled practice (Matsuda, 2001), but the following learning guides allowed learners to freely decide how to use the strategy, it is, they had to outline the rhetorical structure and the layout. Also, I had to be cautious about providing sufficient but not fatiguing opportunities for extensive writing through descriptive paragraphs (Bruce, 2010).

After all, the continuous practice through PNS suggested that students had already acquired the mechanics of language and could write by themselves any descriptive text, knowledgeable of its rhetorical structure (Harmer, 1983). For this reason, instead of indicating every step, the latter learning guides demanded ability to express their feelings regarding specific contents, autonomy in their actions, independence in their decisions, and a personal writing style in their outcomes (Büker, 2003), therefore, certainty in the production of authentic communicative resources (Nieto, 2002).

The final learning guide would assess two particular aspects whose criteria were established in the rubric. On the one hand, students' writings were observed to analyse levels of improvement in descriptive paragraphs. Then the way the learners did or did not use PNS when writing, and, finally, how they experienced this strategy when composing descriptive paragraphs given the current learning conditions.

The process carried out over the 20 sessions in sixteen weeks generated between nine and thirteen products per student, which proved intensive writing practice (Homstad & Thorson, 1996) with average to higher levels in their writing performance as first level language students. During this process, students learned basic structures and elements that would allow them to increase their descriptive language background and organize their ideas coherently following the convenient rhetorical structure of descriptive paragraphs.

All the students who attended the writing sessions wrote the first drafts provided in the learning guides every week, but not all completed the final versions. Some students only completed writing tasks during final term exams. This fact suggested that not all the learners used the strategy to write descriptive paragraphs and that learning strategies are freely used by the learners (Oxford, 1990) since, when acquired, they become fixed as mental constructs, most of them non-directly observable (Wenden, 1987), in consequence, learners retrieve them according to their needs, tastes, current circumstances, and interests (Chamot, 1989).

#### Post- Intervention Stage

In this stage I revised all the data collection process and verified its validity and reliability through triangulation and saturation techniques. Triangulation involved selection of the tools from three different viewpoints (Hopkins, 2008) so as to ensure the validity of the tools. Likewise, saturation was a determinant for the selection of the specific number of tools useful and sufficient to ensure the reliability of the data and gain clearer insights for interpretation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Hopkins, 2008).

Only the learners who completed the process were introduced in the sampling to assess and measure if there was progress in the students' writing performance (Burns, 1999) since they had chosen PNS to help improve their writing skills. To gather the data, I collected the students'

written outcomes —either in the final paper draft or the final outlined version— in my computer, scanned and classified under different files labelled according to the number of the workshop that corresponded to each learning guide. Finally, from twelve learning guides implemented during twenty sessions in sixteen weeks a total of thirteen students completed all the processes with PNS, and I selected four writing final products from each student.

The questionnaires were stored in another file and labelled pre, during and post-intervention. The rubrics for descriptive paragraphs were kept in an extra file with the final term exams and are at hand to be used as document tools for future studies.

The analysis of the data collection tools was expected to enlighten the interpretation and the comprehension on how the false beginners implemented PNS when writing descriptive paragraphs in suggested and in imposed situations. This project also demanded to verify if the tool had become or not valuable for them to enhance the writing skill. This is to be explained in detailed through the findings in the analysis.

## CHAPTER 5

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In order to display and analyse data, the starting point was establishing the validity and reliability of the sampling selected. Subsequently, I assembled and coded data, as suggested by Burns (1999), and then I developed grounded theory in its three stages, following Corbin and Strauss (2008).

## Validation Procedure

During data collection, the observations that permeated the process led me toward constant self-questioning that I registered in my field notes<sup>17</sup>. The resulting reflections usually pointed to the learners, their outcomes, and the target language used to solve the task requested in the learning guides. These three issues were useful to continue improving the design of pedagogical intervention artefacts.

Regarding their behaviour, false beginners became more and more critical about their former and their current learning experiences and also were likely to put together their learning strategies and those suggested by their instructor. In addition, when solving their tasks, I saw that some of them tended to ask for different elements instead of limiting to the requirements. Others were reluctant to follow the model, looking for new words or structures or pretending to be original and more creative when addressing their reader. I also observed that independent students just read the model and tried to use the strategy by themselves, being confident about their capacities. Dependent students, conversely, followed the model exactly making little effort

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<sup>17</sup> The fieldnotes consisted of a blog written by the teacher-researcher in the implementation stage, and, as could be seen by accessing the link <http://jennymalaver.blogspot.com/>, it collects most of the author's reflections recorded when observing current students' behaviour in the classroom, before and during the application of PNS, considering the features of the implementation (project overview and pedagogical intervention).

to construct new utterances. For these reasons, the tasks had to be increasingly meaningful, more appealing and more challenging to ensure that both styles of learners continued using the strategy. Oguz and Bahar (2008) suggest that for constructivists, authentic materials must promote the active role of the learners in which, through real situations and real objects, they can construct information on their own based on their background knowledge.

Additionally, learners' writings revealed problems such as wording and sentence structure, especially when trying to utter messages whose grammar structures in L2 did not have a parallel in L1 or corresponded to higher levels of language knowledge than provided through the current course. Furthermore, at this level most students relied heavily on L1 to solve the task so first language interference was continuous, as seen below:

Excerpt No. 3

Transcript:

- 1) Hello friend. My name is XXX. I have 18 years. I'm from Colombia, I'm study XXX. I'm tall, pretty, hair brown, eyes brown and big, I'm intelligent, noble and happy. My actor favorite is Rafael Novoa.

Nevertheless, when receiving and analyzing the feedback of their previous tasks, they realized they clearly comprehended the nature of their mistakes, and when improving their drafts, they became more reflective upon the grammar and syntax constructions in L2. At first glance, PNS seemed to help them raise awareness.

I registered students' comments and described their attitudes in my field notes. However, in order to avoid bias and confirm validity and reliability, I had to submit these early conclusions to validating techniques that led me to more elaborated interpretations. Two validation techniques emerged to support the process: triangulation and saturation.

Triangulation, as stated by Burns (1999) and Elliott and Adelman (1973), gathers three different standpoints in the teaching situation to consolidate the validity of the process of building hypotheses. I only estimated triangulation when I could verify that it was pertinent in the current project. I found that its three components were respectively (a) PNS, (b) the students' writing skills, and (c) descriptive paragraphs. PNS represented my action as a teacher because I had implemented it trying to improve a particular learning process that affected students' writing skills. The students played the role of writers on whose skills the strategy was assessed. Finally the learners' descriptive paragraphs were the pure matter that I observed and collected. I attempted to follow the process objectively, avoid bias, make my own interpretations, and compare the results among the three sources.

**Figure 12- Validation Process through Triangulation**



Consequently, I had to submit the tools to saturation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) affirm that hypotheses generated from observation must be tested against the data to identify the regular frequency of predictable events that occur and become valuable and repetitive throughout the process. It is necessary since there comes a time when this "repetition" does not provide any new refutation or amplification to support the hypothesis. When determining the validity of the tools collected, I estimated that too many writing products would be both unnecessary and time consuming because, as Hopkins (2008) elucidates,

saturation appears when “the utility of the observation decreases” and there is enough support to validate hypotheses (p. 134).

Data in the second file was going to be useful to find support regarding students’ own perceptions and feelings about the writing process (Hopkins, 2008.) For this reason, I submitted the three questionnaires to triangulation, too, and found that the sampling was sufficient, valuable and appropriate to obtain data regarding two particular issues that indirectly addressed the research questions of this study. To begin, how conscious students were about PNS, and then, when aware, if they perceived any particularity when using it.

I used the data systematized from the questionnaires to estimate frequency, but I only contrasted it against facts present in their writing outcomes through qualitative analysis, because figures did not really elucidate the answers for the behaviour of the learning strategy affecting learners’ writing skills, which only qualitative action research helped to solve (Kemmis and McTaggard, 1988.)

Finally, I recognised that the most convenient tools to find answers to the research questions were the students’ writing outcomes, since, besides helping avoid bias, they allowed me to collect, contrast, and establish triangulation (Burns, 2010) by identification of the three variables that would intervene in the data analysis.

#### Procedures for Data Analysis

After I classified data gathered in the three files, I revised the diagnosis documents in the first file, checked the initial students’ outcomes before implementation, and contrasted them with their opinions declared in the first questionnaire in the second file (p. 55.)

Regarding the questionnaires, I found that students' feelings did not offer an objective vision neither of their own writing abilities nor of the strategic ways to enhance them. At first, I used an MSEXCEL™ file to systematize answers to the three questionnaires quantitatively and labelled the specific issues that provided any kind of responses concerning PNS and writing skills and the relations among them. Then, as Glaser and Strauss (1976) suggest, I compared the questionnaires to analyse students' perceptions in the three moments, and found patterns that revealed different levels of awareness and commitment regarding their writing process. Concepts obtained focused on the students' opinions about the usefulness and applicability of PNS in their everyday life, and about their levels of awareness regarding their *modus operandi* and performance when writing descriptive paragraphs.

Then, I took the learners' writings –in the second file–, used colour-coding techniques to visualize common aspects, and contrasted the task-topics developed by the students throughout their writings by applying questioning, an analytic tool suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008). Sensitizing questions provided insights to create a framework in which I analysed the process. But later, theoretical questions which derived from the identification of the formal aspects of writing in the students' outcomes –such as coherence, cohesion, use of language, descriptive paragraphs, and layout– let me see the tools in a kaleidoscope pattern, where the concepts were the same in all the mirrors but became clearer and changed in colour as I turned the lenses clockwise and counter clockwise. Practical questions in this sense led to determine the appropriate extension of the theoretical sampling and, at the same time, ensured the validation of the project. This process was also useful to discard unnecessary tools that would not lead to an objective identification of the functional role of PNS in the students' outcomes. At this point, Burns' (1999) encouraged me to adopt a more critical attitude as a researcher leading this study.



### Sample Data

From the reflection described in the former paragraph, I selected four specific products besides the entry test, applied during the diagnosis phase, as the outcomes for the data analysis. I re-printed and grouped them in a new file so that they were ready for analysis. These tools were spread to verify triangulation, which now permitted me to cross the three aspects to be searched, compared, and contrasted to find similarities in the learners' writing processes.

These tools included the initial composition written by students to diagnose their actual writing skills, on the pattern of a descriptive paragraph. In this task I had asked students to describe themselves and their families using all their language background. The other tools selected for the sampling were four authentic writings (artefacts) that resulted from the implementation of PNS and involved four tasks related to specific contents: friendship, classroom relationships, tourism, and food (see Appendix H). The learners could employ and express their ideas and perceptions about these topics, considering their personal and cultural interests, with two purposes in mind: to maintain constant written communication with an English language speaker and, through this contact, to help themselves improve their writing skills. Now, I was ready to verify to what extent the strategy had been useful to enhance the students' writing skills by means of developing very specific descriptive texts, such as letters, mails, and postcards.

### Colour Coding

Having the raw data entirely at hand and completing the triangulation helped me reformulate the process and apply colour-coding in a tangible way. Glaser and Strauss (1967) found that colour-coding allows the researcher to point to particular pieces of information which frequently appear in the tools as substantial raw data sources and extract from them

generalizations that can be defined as concepts specific to the area of study. In this case, these data presented specific concepts involving writing sub-skills, which students developed to a smaller or a greater extent, such as coherence, cohesion, punctuation, capitalization, use of pronouns, prepositions and adjectives, grammar patterns, word order, and more elements comprising sentence structure. Besides, I found other communicative aspects which included the students as senders, the manner in which they addressed their readers, and the message as a conveying unit. This unit used a particular layout for each type of descriptive paragraph or groups of paragraphs and often involved a main idea with a topic sentence and developing ideas or supporting sentences.

After applying saturation and triangulation to validate the tools, concepts began to emerge as generalizations that explained the nature of the grounded theory events that remained hidden in this process. Thus, I re-elaborated my former interpretations around the findings made during the implementation. Hopkins (2008) notes that grounded theory contributes in several ways to reflect, validate, generate, and promote particular “current, changing, and new behaviours and practices in classroom research” which help us understand and benefit from certain practices, such as teaching (p. 136).

I registered the current stages of the process in an MSWord™ document and used different colours to mark these initial findings, identified with single phrases in the margins of each paper, and then I transferred them with specific labels to the MSWord™ document.

When I completed the colour coding process, six different aspects had been labelled with different colours and new names, all related to the language level, structure of the text in terms of paragraphs, and communicative functions. I also found content and shape of descriptors. The first three groups of marks emerged from colour-coding and questioning procedures. It is

pertinent to explain that, at that moment, colour coding had provided many more types of labels regarding grammar patterns (orange), lexical background (blue), coherence and cohesion (red), text structure (pink), and communicative functions (green). I reconsidered all those labels in terms of a more complex analytical approach in which the students' products could be assessed with a communicative approach instead of reducing the analysis to a single grammatical and structural product. Other different pieces could not be classified in the same instances, so I kept them in gray to report the accomplishment of the task as a formal requirement but not yet seen as an authentic text. In the end, thirty-three original labels were regrouped according to those colours.

### Data Reduction

#### Students' Written Outcomes

As noted by Miles and Huberman (1994), this interactive process involved selecting, regrouping, simplifying, and reducing the raw data until obtaining more abstract concepts and identifying categories. Hence, I found the categories that were imbedded in the students' written outcomes. These categories connected the role that PNS had played in helping to produce written discourse with certain rhetorical qualities which appeared in the work of every participant, with greater or lower levels of ability or with higher or lower frequency. Through the analysis of the products, I discovered two key events taking place when using PNS.

On the one hand, the quality of the discourse produced by the writers in their descriptive paragraphs could be described in terms of fluency, accuracy, appropriacy, and complexity, as defined by Lindsay & Knight (2006) through their writing discourse analysis studies. Furthermore, it was less palpable at glance, but also imbedded in the writings, that PNS provided

a communicative environment, reflected in the form of the discourse and also in the way that learners addressed a communicative process underlying the single written outcome.

**Table 3 Open Coding Process**

Concepts		Categories	Properties	Dimensions
Fluent		The discourse produced through the descriptive paragraphs is defined by these writing sub skills	Fluency	Frequency: The writing is... <b>Always fluid</b> <b>Frequently fluid</b> <b>Sometimes fluid</b> <b>Never fluid</b>
Accurate			Accuracy	The language used is... <b>Very appropriate</b> <b>Somewhat appropriate</b> <b>Inappropriate</b>
Appropriate			Appropriacy	The language chosen in terms of lexical and grammar patterns is of <b>High level</b> <b>Average level</b> <b>Low level</b>
Sufficiently complex			Complexity	The use of PNS at the communicative level was <b>Completely effective</b> <b>Somewhat effective</b> <b>Non-effective</b>
Effective use of the strategy at the communicative level		Quality of PNS in the elaboration of authentic descriptive paragraphs	Effective verbal communication (message across)	The use of PNS at the RS level of the DPs was <b>Highly efficient</b> <b>Regularly efficient</b> <b>Inefficient</b>
Efficient use of PNS at the formal level of the discourse			Efficacy at the Rhetorical Structure level (form / layout)	

The table above shows how the main concepts, on the left, were grouped and generated these major categories, whose properties were defined and delineated with their corresponding dimensions on the right.

This analysis let me confirm that PNS exerted a dominant role in the elaboration of written discourse in terms of verbal communication (as a process) and rhetorical structure (as a formal and meaningful writing construction entity). From this second reflection, the strategy could be assessed regarding its efficacy and efficiency in the construction of both rhetorical structure (of descriptive paragraphs as single texts) and as a verbal communicative process conveying a complete message with certain language functions. This second aspect had been neither noticed nor considered in the theoretical framework but it was clear now that it implied analysis of Jakobson communication process (1978).

### Students' Perceptions through Questionnaires

Besides the analysis of the students' writings, I reduced and analysed data contained in an MSExcel™ about the questionnaires. Through the initial questionnaire most students admitted devoting little time to practicing English and ignoring learning strategies apart from exercises-repetition to mechanize grammar structures and vocabulary. Then, during the implementation students were not entirely aware of the process since their replies evidenced a gap between their views of the strategy and its application. When requested about their feelings regarding the writing learning guides, most responded that they were a good activity to improve writing. Later, when asked about applying PNS in their own writings, they claimed that it was a good strategy to express their ideas and apply their knowledge immediately into real situations.

However, when requested about their improvements in writing descriptive paragraphs, perceptions changed from the first to the last questionnaire. Initially, they pointed that the little time devoted to Writing in English was the reason for their poor level. Then, during the implementation, opinions were divided among those who considered that they could do simpler tasks with little efforts and achieve better results, while others admitted that the strategy was good in terms of practice. Some students considered that they had made little improvement, and very few insisted that PNS did not satisfy all learning styles, and at the same time declared that they could achieve better descriptive paragraph writing through more grammar and vocabulary practice out of context.

After the implementation, data in the third questionnaire revealed that most students had changed their minds, considering PNS very useful and interesting, immediately applicable to everyday real writing situations, and also convenient to practice vocabulary and grammar. When requested about their relation with Jennifer, most revealed that they had felt encouraged to

practice a particular rhetorical structure and use descriptive language; otherwise, Jennifer would not have understood them. Regarding the writing skills, at the end of the implementation, students admitted acquiring a basic theoretical background that included terms such as coherence, cohesion, rhetorical structure, descriptive paragraphs, main idea, supporting details, language background and 'learning strategies'. However, most accepted that they would try PNS in future opportunities, depending on the tasks assigned by their teachers.

### Interpretation of Data

I had to be careful about the interpretations of the data obtained from the questionnaires, since it could lead to bias. For this reason, I used it only to support the interpretation of the other tools. However, through comparative analysis, it was possible to analyse results in the questionnaires and derive the following data:





When I compared the data contained in the MSExcel <sup>TM</sup>Chart about the questionnaires, I found that during the implementation students were not entirely aware of the process since their replies evidenced a gap between their views of the strategy and its application. Their feelings evidenced lack of objectiveness for evaluating their own writing work, but definitely, their perceptions regarding their writing procedures had changed throughout the implementation.

I labelled the constructs from the writing observation tools, grouped and compiled them in the labelling table, and then analysed and reshaped them into bigger groups that were identified as concepts. Eventually, these concepts were grouped in two major categories that resulted from the whole process.

Comparing and contrasting the incidents that were grouped by means of their similarities and immediately named and regrouped as descriptive concepts was essential to distinguish the

emerging categories, and their properties and dimensions (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). I also confirmed the validity of these categories by contrasting them with the writing rubrics used for the assessment of the students’ writings during the course —another tool that I kept in the third file of data gathered. I found the same categories after analysing the five authentic writings elaborated by the learners. After this new verification of the validity of the analysis, I obtained a matrix in which the following categories were reflected:

**Table 4 Open Coding Salient Categories**

<b>Categories</b>	
1. Writing sub skills (define the students’ ability to write in terms of the discourse produced through the descriptive paragraphs)	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="width: 80%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of writing sub-skills.</li> </ul> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> </div>
2. Quality of authentic descriptive paragraphs (defines the role and the manner students take part in the communicative process through text construction)	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="width: 80%;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Integration of verbal and rhetorical features in Authentic Letters.</li> </ul> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> </div>

**Identifying and Defining the Categories**

The categories that emerged from the open coding stage of Grounded Theory analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) were now redefined again, as required in the axial coding stage (p. 97), in order to understand the events that occurred during the students’ production of their writing outcomes. I also analysed the conditions under which these events occurred, so that the nature of PNS as a factor affecting writing skills could be better defined. When observing the data during implementation, I regarded PNS as a single strategy affecting the writing abilities that the students required to compose descriptive paragraphs and the paragraphs as simple texts in their formal structure, with a main idea introduced at the beginning, secondary ideas to support it, and a concluding idea to close them. In sum, I expected that PNS would help these paragraphs acquire the quality of descriptive ones. However, throughout the analysis, I identified numerous incidents that generated a phenomenon when applying PNS in several continuous tasks, increasingly complex. The context and conditions delineated the usefulness of

PNS; the actions or interactions would respond to these phenomena, and specific consequences resulting from those actions would derive into theoretical assumptions (p. 96).

*Category 1: Developing the Writing Sub-skills*

According to Wolf-Quintero, Inagaki, and Kim (1998), three major categories related to the grammatical and lexical aspects are identified in the development of second language acquisition, fluency, accuracy, and complexity. They suggest that we can measure fluency as the learner's message is automatically accessible through the written outcomes, while accuracy and complexity are measurable because of the form of representation and restructuring of the outcome. As the authors propose,

...the learner's discourse abilities can be assessed in terms of how appropriate the discourse moves in the context (accuracy), how varied the moves are (complexity) or how easily and rapidly the moves are executed (fluency). (p. 5)

Lindsay and Knight (2006) suggest that when analysing the structure of written discourse, apart from fulfilling a set of stages in the process of writing certain types of formal texts, learners are trying to balance four aspects in their language ability that are also fundamental in the writing process. Fluency, accuracy, appropriacy and complexity appeared in several and varied levels in all the students' outcomes. The indicators of cohesion among sentences, inclusion of connecting words among phrases and sentences and logical sequence of events, which allow the discourse to flow in a natural way, were grouped to define *fluency*. The management of grammar patterns and sentence structures, responsible for coherence in written discourse referred to *accuracy*, whereas the selection of suitable language resources to ensure the solution of a specific written task was defined as *appropriacy*. Finally, indicators of the descriptive characteristics of the paragraphs (often adjectives, adjective or prepositional phrases) determined the *complexity* of the lexical background used by the students in their paragraphs.



The category of writing sub-skills was divided into four aspects, because appropriacy, not mentioned by Wolf-Quintero, Inagaki and Kim (1998), also evidenced that the learners went beyond the form of the discourse. This first category was easily detected as it responded to the formal character, or causal condition, of the written discourse requested (descriptive sentences inside letters) and showed the existence of writing sub-skills, common to all formal writing texts which include descriptive, narrative, and argumentative discourse (van Dijk, 1997).

These writing sub-skills were so defined as the subcategories of writing: fluency, accuracy, appropriacy, and complexity. In summary, *fluency* was assessed by the frequency of flowing discourse, free of obstacles, and logically connected through linking words and appropriate punctuation. *Accuracy* was measured in terms of the frequency of grammatically correct sentences written to convey the message. *Appropriacy* was determined by the pertinence of the language used to produce the message that fulfilled the task, (very and somehow appropriate and inappropriate were used as descriptors), and *complexity* regarded the number and variety of different lexical and grammatical patterns chosen to convey the message. Visualizing these four properties in the written texts, I could detect how PNS was permeating them by means of the dimensional characteristics that allowed assessing these four subcategories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 72) as follows:

- Frequency of fluid and accurate (grammatically precise) utterances in the written outcomes, rated *always*, *frequently*, *sometimes* and *never*.
- Level of appropriacy, that is, how the learner selected a specific language background to accomplish the task, graded *very* (V), *somehow* (M), and *inappropriate* (P).
- Level of complexity in terms of variety in the lexical and grammatical structures used to fulfil the descriptive task, ranged between *low*, *average* and *high*.

Using an MSEXcel™ chart, suggested by Rutherford (2005) and et al. (2006), data were transferred to math formulas which provided a visual understanding of the results obtained for each sub skill through the implementation of PNS. The table below shows how the writing sub-skills moved in the implementation in each task. The figures refer to the improvements made by all the participants from the first to the last task.

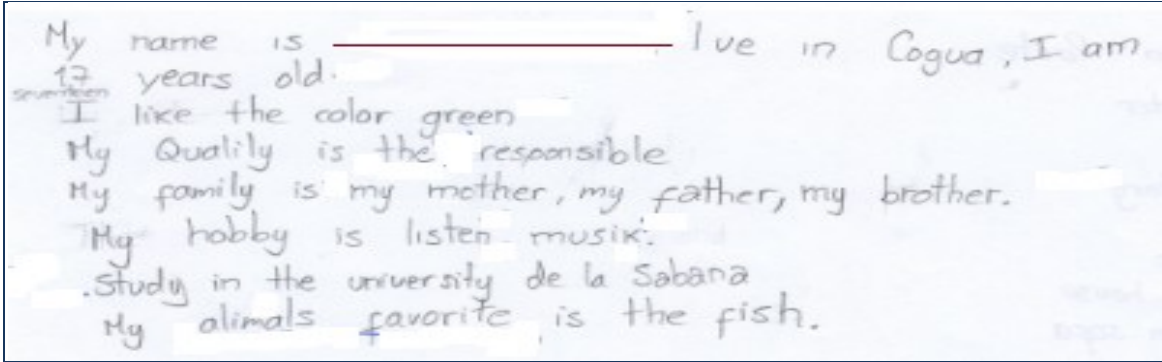
**Table 5 Behaviour of the Writing Sub skills along the Implementation of PNS**

	FLUENCY	ACCURACY	APPROPRIACY	COMPLEXITY
T0	39	40	39	19
T1	52	47	39	33
T2	57	54	55	47
T3	59	56	45	47
T4	60	56	59	47
T5	62	57	51	43

**Level of Fluency:** The frequency with which *fluency* appeared in the paragraphs was represented with numbers from one to five and identified through the descriptors *never, rarely, sometimes, frequently, and always*. Fluency, as defined by Johnson and Layng (1996), indicates “flowing, effortless, well-practiced and accurate performances” (p. 282). They state that the frequency of ‘free-operant performances’ must increase to develop this sub-skill. They also explain that performances are permanent and gradually evolve more elaborated responses to the different stimuli received from the situation. Interpretations of the fluency MSEXcel™ chart indicated that whatever the initial condition of students’ fluency had been, performances always improved gradually in all the students. False beginners always started the course with a minimum number of written performances, less frequent than the resulting utterances during implementation, even though for two of the thirteen students, it was difficult to raise the level of fluency. The excerpt

below was taken from diagnostic composition, in which the learner had to send a message introducing herself:

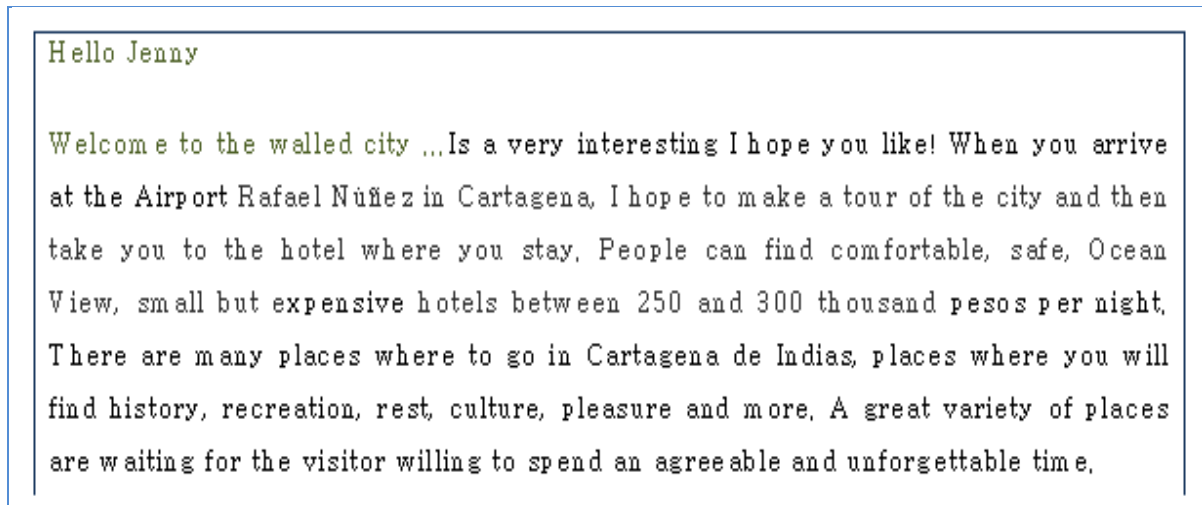
Excerpt No. 3



My name is \_\_\_\_\_ I've in Cagua, I am  
 12 years old.  
 I like the color green  
 My Quality is the responsible  
 My family is my mother, my father, my brother.  
 My hobby is listen musik.  
 Study in the university de la Sabana  
 My animals favorite is the fish.

This student performed adequate utterances at the beginning of the course. They were as simple as her language background, because she was not completely skilled in certain grammar aspects and she seemed unacquainted with connecting words. In general terms, the flow of her discourse was adequate for false beginners and ideas were well organized, although there was no evidence of an adequate textual rhetorical structure. After six hours of implementation of PNS she had moved from 4 to 5 in the fluency scale, which allowed her to express her ideas smoothly, in a well-connected and structured text, where basic linkers were properly used in a solid paragraph, as shown in the excerpt below:

Excerpt No. 5



Hello Jenny

Welcome to the walled city ...Is a very interesting I hope you like! When you arrive at the Airport Rafael Núñez in Cartagena, I hope to make a tour of the city and then take you to the hotel where you stay, People can find comfortable, safe, Ocean View, small but expensive hotels between 250 and 300 thousand pesos per night, There are many places where to go in Cartagena de Indias, places where you will find history, recreation, rest, culture, pleasure and more, A great variety of places are waiting for the visitor willing to spend an agreeable and unforgettable time.

**Level of Accuracy:** Learners become more proficient writers when they produce fewer errors as they are more aware of the norms of the target language (Lindsay and Knight, 2006, p. 4). Research in the writing field (Tedick, 1990; Young, 1995; Ellis and Yuan, 2004; Hamman, 2005; Vickers, 2006) has proven that students who prefer length instead of precision tend to be less accurate when expressing their ideas, while according to Bailey (2006) most of their inaccuracies are due to L1 interference in the acquisition process during writing learning. Similar results in fluency were found regarding the levels of accuracy that students developed through implementation. Even though two students did not manage to improve their levels of accuracy in the use of the grammar structures pertinent to prove growth in language background, most students reached higher levels during implementation. Most students began the process with a marked tendency to omit the subject, using verbs and other words influenced by L1 in utterances such as “*I have seventeen years*” instead of “*I am seventeen years old*”; they ignored articles, pronouns, and prepositions as well as auxiliaries, as there is not a parallel in L1. The excerpt below shows the initial tendency to miss basic elements such as verbs, auxiliaries, or subjects. Evidently, the message could be interpreted although the language level proves to be very limited.

Excerpt No. 6

Study in the University the Savanath.  
 I from in Ubate; in the Hospitality, the Salvador  
 My interests is study, work in garden Infantil Hospitality

In the following excerpt, the progress in accuracy is substantial, considering the way the sentences are structured in English, following the typical sequence *Subject + verb + complement* (Hinkel, 2004). There is a high frequency of correspondence between subjects and verbs. Ten

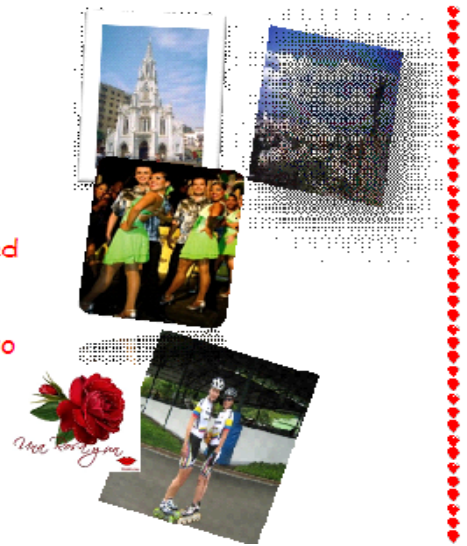
out of thirteen students became acquainted with the rigid order of phrasal elements that Basic English syntax implies (p. 66).

Excerpt No. 7

Hello Jenny!

I was born in a city that is called Cali, or "the capital of the sky", it is located in Colombia. Cali has many unique characteristics. For example a place with a spectacular view, called Sebastian de Belalcazar or a big church called "La Ermita" that is very important for all the citizens.

Cali's people is very charming and they have the ability to dance. Most of the days are shiny, maybe that's why women are compared with the flowers' beauty.



**Level of Complexity:** Results point to the increment of vocabulary background in all the students during implementation, even those students who had the lowest lexical background level before it. The fast growth of their lexical background was palpable and, along with fluency, represented greater improvements in the students' writing performance during implementation. The tasks assigned regarding family, friends, tourism, and food demanded wider fields of vocabulary which encouraged the students to be more precise, it is, more descriptive in their paragraphs. More details in their descriptions had demanded more complex vocabulary, certain idioms, and other grammar structures than those studied during the grammar lessons in the course. The following excerpt is an attempt of a student to provide more detailed information when describing her hometown. She turns to lexical aides such as the translator, which shows how the student is so concerned with her task that she goes beyond the possibilities provided by the course (simple present structures for Level 1). She includes ideas in past tense to describe the origins and the name of the place.

Excerpt No. 8

Hi! Jenny

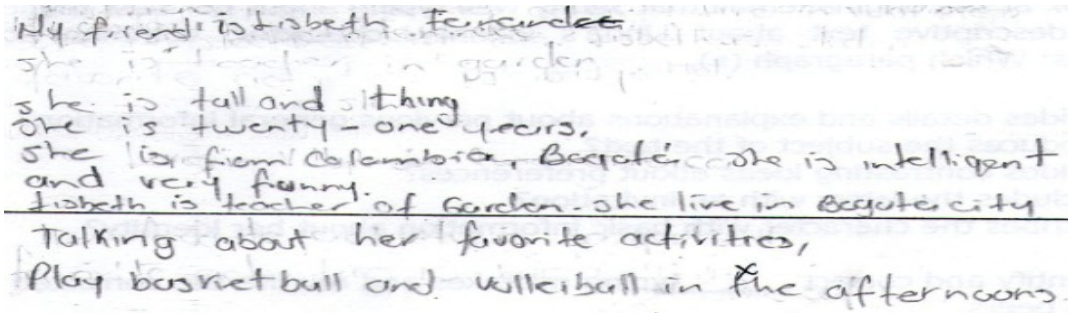
I [redacted] Comer Pulley am located in Fúquene's Lagoon, it was founded on November 6, 1638, and his founder was Gabriel Carvajal.

The word this Fúquene composed for fu - Quyny, this wants to say " Bed of the Fox " or god's bed Fo or Fu, to whom worship was yielding itself in the big island of Fúquene's lagoon, which in epoch of the Spanish conquest one was handling as indigenous refuge.

This one located in Fúquene Cundinamarca; and it borders on Ubaté, Susa, Guacheta and Boyacá's department, his municipality possesses mountains, gullies and rivers. Since it is very cozy for his tourist sites, his crafts and his local dishes.

**Level of Appropriacy:** Regarding the selection, structure, and domain of a language pertinent to solve the tasks, most students used language applicable to the task assigned, which suggest instructions were clear to most of them. Nevertheless, for almost a third of the population observed, the language used does not reflect a completely clear understanding of specific aspects required in the tasks. The following excerpt belongs to a student's task Number 2 during the implementation stage.

Excerpt No. 9

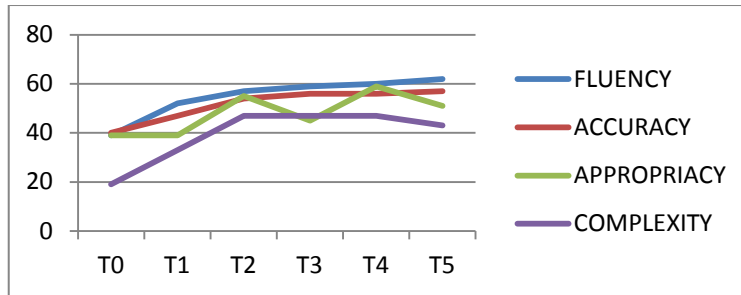


My friend is Isbeth Fernandez  
 she is teacher in garden  
 she is tall and thin  
 she is twenty-one years,  
 she is from Colombia, Bogotá, she is intelligent  
 and very funny.  
 Isbeth is teacher of garden. she live in Bogotá city  
 Talking about her favorite activities,  
 Play basket ball and volleyball in the afternoons.

This writer had not assimilated the type of text required yet. The description is simple and clear but there is no paragraph structure. Sufficient supporting details are present but not a main idea, apart from what seems to be a heading. There is no evidence of a letter because the writer does not take the role of a sender nor addresses a recipient. It seems that there is not a

clear intention of maintaining communication alive but simply to demonstrate a certain level of language acquired. Hence, appropriacy is poor since it does not accomplish the requirements of the situation that a letter demands (Lindsay & Knight, 2006).

**Table 6- Consolidating Data Analysis of the Category of Writing Sub-skills**



Data offered in Table 5 represent the behaviour of the learners' four writing sub-skills in the implementation stage. The table shows how *fluency* and *accuracy* grew systematically along the process. *Complexity* quickly rose to remain the same by the middle of the process and went subtly down when implementing the last task, which implied a very different vocabulary and context focus related to food preparation, not used in any of the previous tasks. It may be possible that, in the former tasks, the urgent need to express some ideas in particular encouraged learners to increase the number of words and grammar structures more efficiently, since a common range of vocabulary and very specific grammar concepts were used between Tasks one and four. This ensured learners set into their lexical and grammar background and additionally became confident in using this background properly within their paragraphs. Mechanizing structures and language helped them to build wider contexts of application. However, using something different in the last task did not prove to what extent students would be able to adapt new language to their core knowledge (already acquired). Further tasks in which new vocabulary and structures were used and mechanized through multiple exposures and meaningful

and contextualized instruction and practice would warrant their storage in the students' lifelong background knowledge (Marzano, 2004).

Finally, the levels of *appropriacy* fluctuated throughout the process. Appropriacy allowed students to search for pertinent language forms to solve the writing task (Lindsay and Knight, 2006), but this relationship between the task and the learner's language background implies comprehension and internalization of the task's requirements. Studies developed by Cumming (2006) and Weissberg (2000) reveal that while students are provided more convenient contexts to develop their writing products and sufficient opportunities to practice, they can convert the newly acquired competence into "[...] controlled skilful performance, since they gain more control to plan, revise, and edit their texts" (Cumming, 2001, p. 5), and they become more aware of the need for more appropriate background to solve their tasks, as well as respectful of L2 conventions.

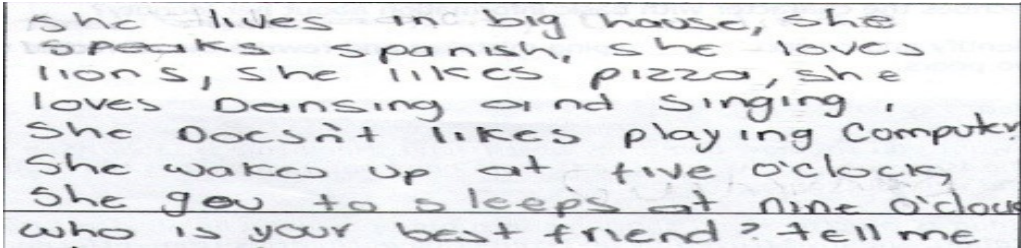
There was not always an adequate correlation between task instructions and the way the students responded to them. On two opportunities, appropriacy steadily fell and then rose at a faster pace than fluency and accuracy, probably proving that the instructions for some tasks were not completely assimilated by some students, or possibly because not all of them had already internalized the language background required to perform them. Accordingly, adhering to Cumming (p. 6), learners may require more practice to gain that confidence that allows them to make better language choices while they become more aware of the specific conventions of the text required.

In the following excerpt, the student had already gained both grammar and lexical domain over some basic topics regarding habits and likes. The excerpt shows how she carefully



used verbs plus gerunds to express likes, and as well the third singular person in the simple present tense. As a result, she performed quite well regarding the simple present, providing clear and sufficient information about her friend's routines and likes.

Excerpt No. 10



In the following sample, learners were expected to describe their favourite place.

Excerpt No. 11

My dear Jenny,

In vacations I went to know Leticia, this is in the Amazonas' department the south of the country. This site borders with Brasil and Peru, these countries are separated by a beautiful and very big river, in addition there is a jungle where know at the time meet Indian culture very different from our people of different cities and countries and especially know other languages, Englishman, portuges and guayru. I am called the attention it is that the Indians paint the face themselves with a fruit of a tree and certainly I make up, but let's take the surprise to myself of that this me hard one month. I wait you have liked my experience.

I \_\_\_\_\_

At the time of this implementation, comparatives nor past or any perfect tenses had been even mentioned. For the information that the student wanted to supply through her letter, she required more elaborated forms of the English language than the simple past.

As seen in the sample, the student managed to convey these and other more complex forms of language, such as the passive voice, at the expense of punctuation, capitalization, some

common prepositions, and connecting words. She even dared to use many more connecting words than practiced through the course syllabus, which only pointed to connectors *and*, *but* and *because*, and to avoid repetition and demonstrate some skill, she used *in addition* and *certainly*.

Appropriacy, which has been the least analysed writing sub-skill,<sup>18</sup> seems to be a tool required and acquired by the learners only when they have become aware of the type of linguistic material relevant for communicating with specific purposes, as well as of the concomitant presence of the other three sub skills. Appropriacy may comprise the other sub-skills, even though they can independently be acquired. In other words, as seen in Excerpts 3 to 11, students can develop fluency, accuracy, and complexity, each independently from the others, but actual communicative purposes would not be reached if the writer is not aware of the potential background acquired to perform accordingly. Simpler cognitive learning strategies could help develop these three sub-skills (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Chamot et al, 1999). However, PNS impacted the development of the four writing sub-skills much better in the students who addressed real communicative purposes through their written outcomes. When these four elements converged, the students' writing ability improved to obtain very descriptive materials. It is important to analyse, now, the quality of these products regarding the communicative process carried out in the students' written outcomes.

### *Category 2: Improving the Quality of Authentic Descriptive Paragraphs*

It was much more complex to identify the specific elements that participated in generating the rhetorical structure of this type of discourse. It was necessary to interpret how learners could use PNS to select specific content and set it up conveniently into each section of

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<sup>18</sup> Recent studies carried out regarding basic skills in the writing field only point to fluency, accuracy, and complexity and do not reveal a clear definition of this skill (Ellis & Yuan (2004), Vickers & Ene (2006), Myskow & Gordon (2010), Carroll & Dunkelblau (2011).

the text containing the descriptive paragraphs. Students would rather point to one paragraph with an introductory main idea, a development made of supporting details, and a closure, or they would rather build a text with different types of paragraphs. While the letter should be conveniently structured in a conventional format, for the clarity of the reader, the choice belongs to the very personal reasoning and free selection of the writer, who decides how to adapt the text (Library Online, n.d.<sup>19</sup>) Under such conditions, understanding to what extent PNS could have helped learners set up a main idea, develop it through very specific sentences, and connect them in a particular way, that is, assessing how pertinent it was to solve the task in a form that responded to the exclusive structure of a descriptive paragraph, as required by the current action research study, was not as clear-cut as identifying improvements in the writing sub skills to define the formal structure of the written discourse.

Through constant comparison (Glaser, 2002), I identified the common elements that made PNS functional for the learners to consolidate the final products expected. As concluded through open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1991), most of the tools presented certain common incidents related to the ways the learners established particular communications with Jennifer.<sup>20</sup> I detected that, when solving the task, a different kind of utterances produced by the learners, such as “dear friend”, “my dear Jenny”, “you will like my best friend”, “I am sure that you enjoy it,” suggested a link between them and Jennifer. This link represented an authentic relationship between sender and recipient in an authentic communicative process. In fact, according to data analysis of the post-implementation questionnaire, when requesting students’ perceptions regarding Jennifer and PNS, most market that they felt encouraged to write appropriately since

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<sup>19</sup> Library Online (2009) <http://www.ipl.org/IPL/Finding?Key=letter+writing&collection=gen>

<sup>20</sup> As described in the Implementation Stage in Chapter 4 (Pedagogical Intervention), Jennifer was the character “virtually” introduced to students to keep permanent communication with, through their letters, mails and postcards. Jennifer, a young American woman, was designed with the purpose of encouraging students to express their ideas in the target language, since there was no chance that she speak, write or understand their mother tongue. She was the moving element conceived as authentic material to promote Practicing Naturalistically during implementation.

they were keeping real communication, and that Jennifer was a valuable person for them to practice the language.

I confirmed that another type of incidents was embedded in the data, by observing more in detail the conceptual labels registered during open coding. They could be grouped according to the communicative process built through the learners' products. Making use of Grounded Theory in search of a new category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), these incidents could be named with concepts regarding the communicative process, underlying the grammatical structures in the texts. In this sense, the messages implicit in the formal structure of the writings involved, on one hand, a formal relationship proper to the communicative process, which manifested the roles of *sender, recipient (or receiver), message, code, channel, and verbal communicative functions* (Jakobson, 1960). On the other hand, the discourse analysis suggested that through the descriptive elements present in the rhetorical structure of the letters-genre, the writers attempted to accomplish one or several communicative functions proper to the discourse, known as language functions by Jakobson (p. 375).

These incidents allowed me to name this salient category “***Improving the Quality of the Descriptive Paragraphs***”, as it would facilitate responses to the question “*How do students use PNS when writing descriptive paragraphs.*” I considered the capacity of PNS to help students improve both the communicative process carried out in the messages and the rhetorical structure of the descriptive paragraphs, considering that authentic texts like letters or postcards were the channels through which the communicative process occurred. Students were able to compose authentic descriptive paragraphs, through which real active communicative processes took place between them and Jennifer. I revised this category and its properties derived from two integrating elements, the verbal and the rhetorical features in the authentic writings. The

rhetorical features obeyed a particular layout defined as letter, postcard, or email, and the verbal features registered the communicative processes that occurred, which included certain language functions.

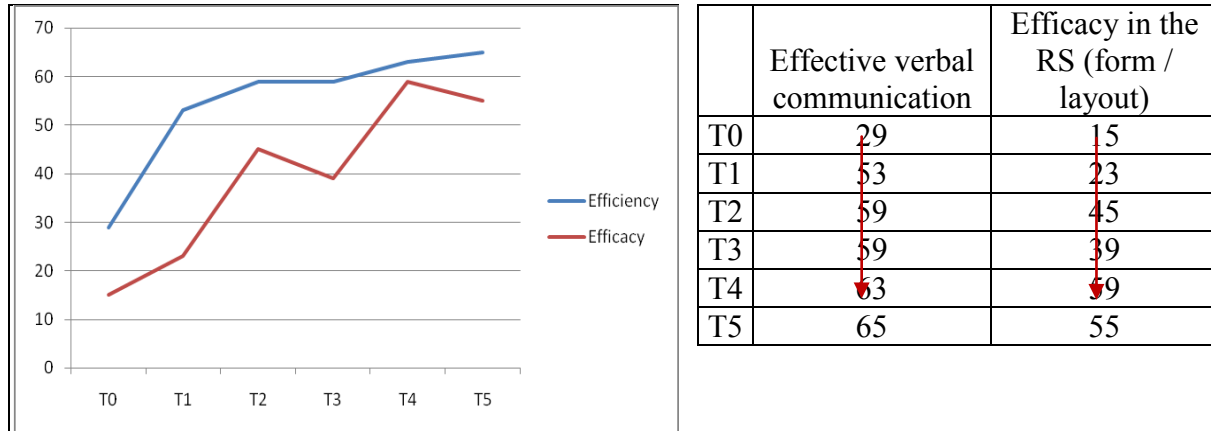
To respond to how students used the strategy when writing descriptive paragraphs, deeper analysis of their outcomes revealed different levels of efficacy and efficiency of PNS in the fulfilment of the tasks. This latter evidence concerning both the management of the rhetorical structure as well as the verbal roles confirmed the criteria for assessing the strategy in terms of *efficacy* and *efficiency* to elaborate authentic descriptive paragraphs. These terms are defined below.

On the one hand, *efficacy* is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as the capacity of an element to produce an intended effect. In this case, PNS was a remedial strategy that resulted efficacious to help students' improve their ability to produce descriptive paragraphs. *Effectiveness*, on the other hand, points to the extent to which time or effort is properly used for the intended purpose. A strategy is efficacious, or efficient, when it achieves the desired outcomes, and it is effective when minimum effort, time and energy is needed to produce them. Students were expected to produce letters: There would be *effectiveness* when these letters were authentic to provide real verbal communication, and there would be *efficacy* if their paragraphs complied with the rhetorical structure of descriptive ones, visible through the layout of real letters.

To test my assumptions, I carried out further analysis through comparisons, considering both properties of the quality of PNS valuable to comprehend this new category, stimulating the theoretical sensitivity necessary to succeed in this stage of data analysis (Strauss and Corbin,

1990). The same process of transferring the information obtained to Excel™ charts to manage and reduce data produced the results observed in the following tables.

**Table 7 - Quality of PNS in the Elaboration of Authentic Descriptive Paragraphs**



While the level of *effectiveness* of PNS to consolidate the communicative process grew systematically throughout implementation, the level of *efficacy* varied in certain opportunities, not always allowing the learners to produce an appropriate text at the rhetorical structure level. For some students it was difficult to maintain the communicative process while developing a layout for the text required. Evidently, some students succeeded while others did not keep permanent contact with Jennifer, and some students were more skilful in identifying a main idea and supporting it all through the text, providing enough descriptive information. Nevertheless, both properties of the category improved in terms of the quality of the descriptive paragraphs.

***Efficacy of PNS at the Level of Rhetorical Structure:*** The following sample shows how the learner, careful about the text structure, divided it into three specific sections, each one fulfilling the role of a different type of paragraph.

Excerpt No. 12

<b>Introduction</b>	Dear Jenny, I want you to know about my best friend. His name is Juan Carlos, he is twenty-nine years old, he is from La Plata, Huila. He lives in an apartment in Bogota, he studies law at the Libre University in Bogota and, he speaks Spanish, English and French.
<b>Development</b>	He is tall, he has short and black hair, he has brown light eyes and white skin, he is very tidy, serious, sincere and honest.  He likes listening to music, play Xbox and reading books, his favorite sports are horseback, cycling and swimming. He loves horses, animals and nature. He likes seafood and ice cream, he likes scary movies. He like the National Geographic Channel, Discovery Channel, and History Channel. He hates bullfighting and circus. He doesn't like smoking, he doesn't like novels.
<b>Closure</b>	Tell me about your best friend. I want to know a lot of things about him or her.  Looking forwards to your email,  XXXXX

In the introductory paragraph she introduces her best friend; in two development paragraphs she separately describes him physically and then his likes and dislikes. In a third section, in no more than three sentences, she closes her letter, inviting Jenny to respond. The main idea is clearly stated in the introductory paragraph and is developed through the other paragraphs.

In the following sample, the student was concerned about the “apparently” adequate structure of the text required. In fact, it is possible to observe, at first glance, a letter-shaped document with all its formal elements –recipient, sender, greeting, closure–, although not completely achieves the requirements of the descriptive paragraph.

Excerpt No. 13

**Dear Jenny**  
**My best friend is Diana, she is seventeen years old and she is studies systems engineer in San Martin university. She is tall and slim, White skin, she is happy, polite and inteligent**  
**She lives in a beautiful house in Bogota and her favorite food is the ice cream, ¡¡she likes eating ice cream!!! she loves listen to music and playing computer. she likes to swim, sing, and dancing she loves to playing soccer it is a good athlete**  
  
**she doesnt like coffee, she doesn't like watching television or cooking**  
  
**her best quality is honesty and friendliness is a very good friend!**  
**I hope you can find it**  
**I want know about your best friend**  
**Bye Jenny!**  
**XXXX**

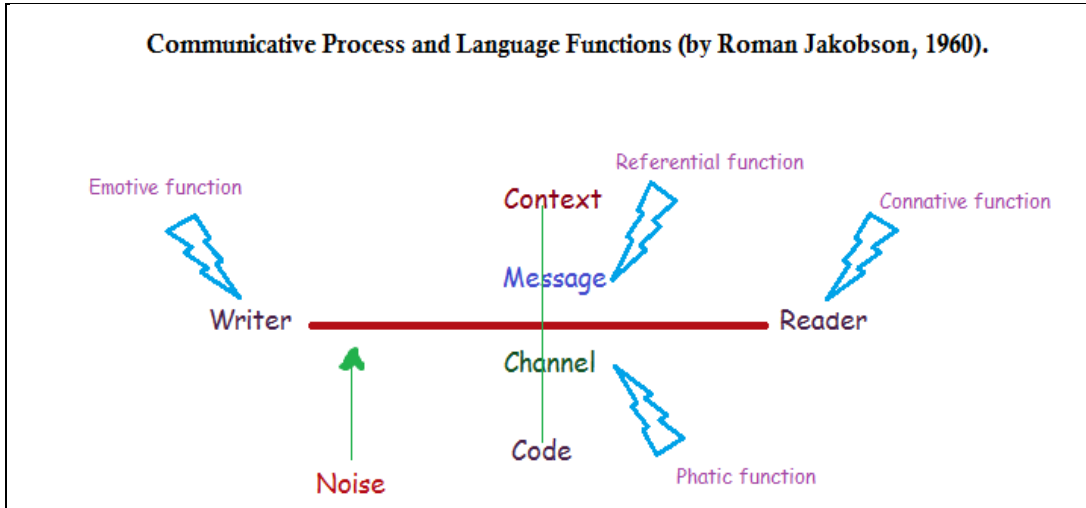
There is an introduction conveying the main idea and sufficient supporting details, and there is a closure paragraph. However, there is an unnecessary second paragraph that looks blurred as it offers only two sentences that should belong to the previous paragraph. Furthermore, most sentences that integrate the closure paragraph are put apart, although they perfectly convey and support a single clear concluding idea and even summarize the whole message of this letter. At this point, it seems that comprehending the rhetorical structure of the paragraph is a complex task. Achieving this goal would give students greater advantages considering the target language conventions, logical linkages, paragraph cohesion, and many mental associations (Kellog, 1999). As stated in the Owl Purdue Writing lab,<sup>21</sup> this is a requirement for university students, which helps them acquire their status in the academic writing community (The Purdue University: 2011).

***Effective Verbal Communication:*** For measuring the quality of PNS, I examined the authenticity of the tasks regarding effective communication. This meant that, to write letters, postcards, and emails and to convey descriptive paragraphs, learners must have considered two features at the same time: the text itself as the message and the format as the channel. Meeting the requirements of a complete and single unit, students sent a particular message that conveyed information regarding a specific topic as well as an intention and a specific response. In the process of communication, these factors point to the functions of the language (Jakobson, 1960).

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<sup>21</sup> The Owl Purdue Writing Lab, 2011 <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>



**Figure 13 - Jakobson Model of the Communicative Process and Language Functions**

As a consequence, ideas explicitly written not only had a logical organization and a specific level of language but also aimed at producing certain reactions in the receiver, promoting active interaction to keep the communication process alive.

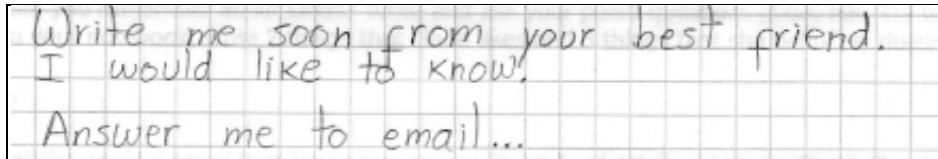
Students who reached this purpose established their personal level of confidence with their recipient, Jennifer. It was exactly this level of confidence which made their products authentic writings. Some students were confident enough to address Jennifer with familiarity during the process; others were aware of the fact that she was their recipient but did not demonstrate a close relationship with her; others were rather timid or indifferent, and sometimes one student seemed to ignore the existence of a recipient, so his outcomes did not acquire the connotation of letters.

The phenomena occurred during the communicative process are clearly comprehended when analyzing the functions of the language defined by Jakobson.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup>For complete information, follow this link [http://www.answers.com/topic/roman-jakobson#The\\_communication\\_functions](http://www.answers.com/topic/roman-jakobson#The_communication_functions), which retrieves information from Jakobson theory of communicative functions (1960).

If students pretended that their letters implied real communication beyond the single descriptive text to provide information, they responded to Jennifer by attempting to generate different reactions:

Excerpt 14



Write me soon from your best friend.  
I would like to know!  
Answer me to email...

In the excerpt above, the learner pretended to be expecting a real personal reply. Other intentions were elucidated in which, trying to keep the communicative cycle alive, the students sent Jennifer greetings, asked for details, or even invited her to different events. In the excerpt below, the writer demonstrated certainty about the fact of the receiver visiting his country:

Excerpt 15

...when you come, I hope you enjoy and know the best of my country....

The language characterized by this natural connection with Jennifer was to some students closer and with others more distant, more formal or less formal. Challenged by the task, their outcomes showed more or less confident writing learners, performing verbal interactions through the linguistic elements acquired or even searching for unknown ones on their own, encouraged by their curiosity and resourcefulness. Swapping their roles of senders and receivers of the messages, several phenomena occurred, as presented below:

When applying PNS, one subcategory, derived from the quality of the strategy, reflected how the writers built the written discourse, tangible by means of their language behaviour: a formal paragraph containing the topic sentence, the main idea, and the supporting details.

Additionally, language behaviours became visible through specific utterances which manifested a particular communicative intention. Contrasting the students' utterances with the functions of the language modelled by Jakobson (1960) it is evident that the writers assumed particular roles during their writing production, each playing a specific language function. These acts might not have been unconscious at all, since PNS demanded specific behaviours that the learners freely adopted to fulfil the task, and remained registered throughout their performances. Certain functions of the language became exposed through the learners' utterances, generating higher or lower complexity in the verbal performance as well as in the rhetorical structure of the descriptive paragraphs.

By means of the *emotive or expressive function*<sup>23</sup>, learners revealed how concerned they were with the task and with the communicative process and how involved they were with their receiver. Their intentions allowed them to utter less or more elaborated descriptive paragraphs about certain characters, places, and events.

#### Excerpt No. 16

*Hi Jenny,*  
*I hope you are well . I study English everyday to improve my writing, reading and speaking. Well now I tell you about my classmates.*  
*In my class we are 21 students, we study different programs at university. The most people study medicine or similar careers. I'm the only student administrative and the only who attend with suit. My favorite classmates are Xxx, xxx and Xxx they like studying English as my.*  
*Xxx is very friendly , she is small and wellbuilt. She has black long and straight hair, she has brown eyes and small nose. Your skin is brown. She lives in Tenjo and everyday gets up early to go to the university. She likes dancing on weekends but nobody invite she. She enjoys eating out with friends or her parents*  
*Xxx is very funny, he lives in Chia near the university, He always drive to the university because dislikes catching a bus. He likes go to the clubs with his best friend.*  
*Xxx is 18 years old. He is tall and slim ; he has short black hair and brown eyes. He likes study English and he is very clever he likes hanging out with his friends but dislikes drinks.*  
*Jenny, they are my classmates, what do you think about them ?*  
 XXXXX

<sup>23</sup> According to Jakobson, the expressive function identifies the sender's internal or emotional state.

The main purpose of the task was to develop a good descriptive paragraph. Since this function lies in the message, most of the time related to the context itself or to elements around it, students used the *referential function* to provide most of the relevant information. For this purpose, they used great part of the layout to provide details. In the excerpt below, taken from her postcard, the learner was not acquainted with Jennifer as the receiver of her message, but she succeeded in producing a short outcome completely dedicated to introducing her favourite place, according to the elements that she knew from the context and her own experience:

Excerpt No. 17

Hello Fabian

I am in Cali Colombia. This is Known as 'The branch of heaven', this city is distinguished by the strong presence of salsa music that has earned the title of 'Salsa Capital of Colombia.' His reputation as a partier is evident especially during the end of the year, with the making of this great event: 'La Feria de Cali'.

My favourite place is the cane park quality is the main center of the sugar region and one of the most important industrial and commercial centers of the country.

Take care....

The following excerpt shows how the writer used several functions at the same time. Through the *phatic function*<sup>24</sup> she reaffirmed the attention of the reader. Then, she not only used the *connative function* to generate a particular reaction from her receiver, but also called (her) attention to extend an invitation and encourage (her) to prepare her favourite recipe by herself.

Excerpt No. 18

Transcript:

Dear reader,

Now we have a delicious recipe easy and fast to prepare. I invite to cook and tell me about your experience. Surprise your friends and family with this recipe.

<sup>24</sup> The phatic function is the factor intended to keep interaction alive. The sender is concerned about the receiver's attention and needs to confirm that the process continues.





Apart from *referential function*, which would respond to the descriptive paragraphs by itself, the other language functions made the students' outcomes more elaborated compositions that disclosed a whole communicative process. With the implementation of PNS, the aim of producing descriptive paragraphs was achieved. In most cases, complex rhetorical structures had grown, and most learners designed longer pieces, giving account for their ability to elaborate an introductory paragraph, a development paragraph, and a closure paragraph, maintaining the main idea and the supporting details as the attributes of each one.

Additionally, most learners revealed clear comprehension of formal rhetorical structure in letters, emails, and postcards, and their function as channels in the communicative process. Even though not all the students who took part in the implementation demonstrated awareness of the communicative process that they were developing, most succeeded in adequately using the layouts that the current channel of communication demanded. (A good sample of an authentic letter produced by a student during the implementation may be seen complete in Appendix N.)

#### Moving from Open Coding into Axial Coding

After analysis of the categories that emerged from open coding and further analysis through constant comparisons (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), more commonalities and linkages among their properties generated the need for exploring beyond. The context of analysis, that is, the students' letters, emails, and postcards within which certain communicative processes were taking place, revealed a set of incidents that generated a deeper phenomenon not yet completely understood. By regrouping categories to reconstruct the process that would lead to answer the questions in the current study, I took a first step in this axial coding stage of Grounded Theory (p. 97). Axial coding was fundamental to comprehend the nature of the incidents, and understanding the phenomenon to make theoretical assumptions (Szklański, 1997).

**Table 8 Putting concepts back together into Axial Coding**

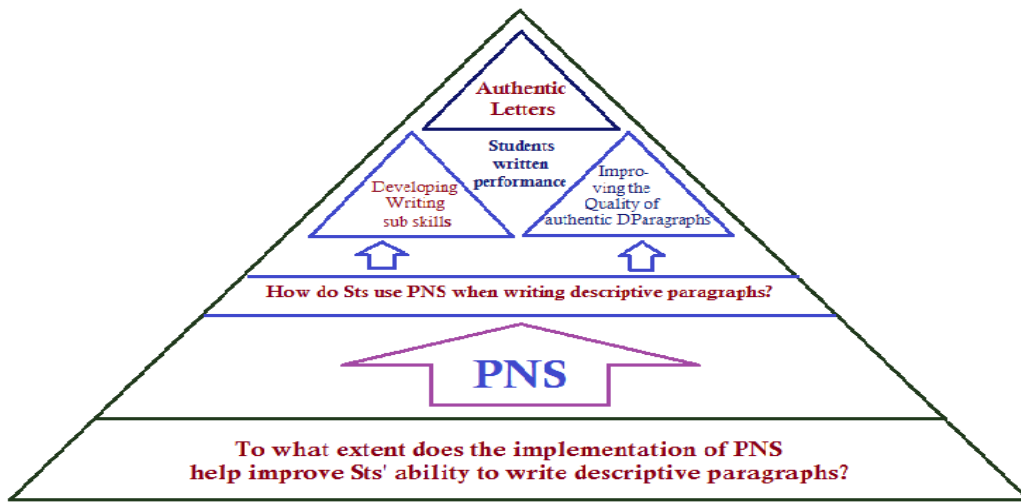
Research Questions		Categories	What is measurable?	How?	Outcomes
To what extent does the implementation of PNS help students to write descriptive paragraphs?	<b>PNS acts</b> 	Developing the Writing sub-skills.	Students' written performances reveal different levels of fluency, accuracy, appropriacy, and complexity.	Writing sub-skills are directly observable through compositions 	 <b>Authentic letters</b>
How do students use PNS when writing descriptive paragraphs?		Improving the quality of authentic descriptive paragraphs	Students' behaviour in the communicative process shows how they integrate verbal and rhetorical features.	Quality in the use of PNS helps improve the final product: 	

Following Strauss and Corbin (1990), I explained how the data was fractured and how the resulting characteristics, properties, and dimensions of the categories supported the development of the writing sub-skills; moreover, I analysed student behaviours that justified how they had integrated both the verbal and the rhetorical features common to the communicative process that letters, postcards, and emails demanded. In the next stage I put these data back together, establishing links between the categories, so as to find precise answers to the phenomena resulting from the intervention. While applying axial coding, Strauss and Corbin urge theoretical sensitivity to see deeper inside the phenomena (p. 76).

Axial coding allowed me to understand how the *incidents* common to both categories concurred in a single *context*, the letters, which joined several types of *interactions* during the writing process. Students who were encouraged by the strategy had to fulfil certain writing criteria relevant to prove their writing ability in terms of fluency, accuracy, complexity, and appropriacy. Additionally, they were expected to set their descriptive paragraphs in letters that would be read by a specific recipient. The initial connections between both parts, sender and recipient, were only two: the letters and the English language as a common code. The *incidents* that took place through these *interactions* (between the sender and the “virtual” receiver,

Jennifer) provoked specific *reactions* that explained and supported the value of implementing PNS as a solid strategy to enhance the students' ability to write descriptive paragraphs. The *intervening conditions* included factors that facilitated or constrained the efficacy and effectiveness of PNS but also, a comprising concept, its reliability in the development of writing sub-skills, (p. 96).

**Figure 14 - Axial Coding Diamond Model**



Analysis of the incidents, the context, the intervening conditions, and the reactions by means of the integration of the categories led me to establish to what extent PNS improved writing skills through the descriptive paragraphs, revealing, in every student, individual levels of efficacy and effectiveness in the integration of the verbal and rhetorical features. When I compared the patterns derived from the concept coding stage and regrouped them again to explore their relationships, a new linking process revealed new concepts. Modelling Corbin and Strauss' sample of the pyramid representing the axial coding structure (2008: 199), I found that the same patterns, the concepts that had generated the categories during open coding, belonged to different levels of the pyramid and interrelations among them suggested hypothetical statements.

## Findings

After developing open coding and axial coding (p. 199), I could finally establish the connections among the two categories, —developing writing sub-skills, and improving the quality of descriptive paragraphs, — and I could find that a small but significant relation between them resulted solid to respond to the research questions. This close relation defined a new core category involving them by selective coding (p. 263). These core and main categories fed the theoretical assumptions that accounted for the current Action Research Project.

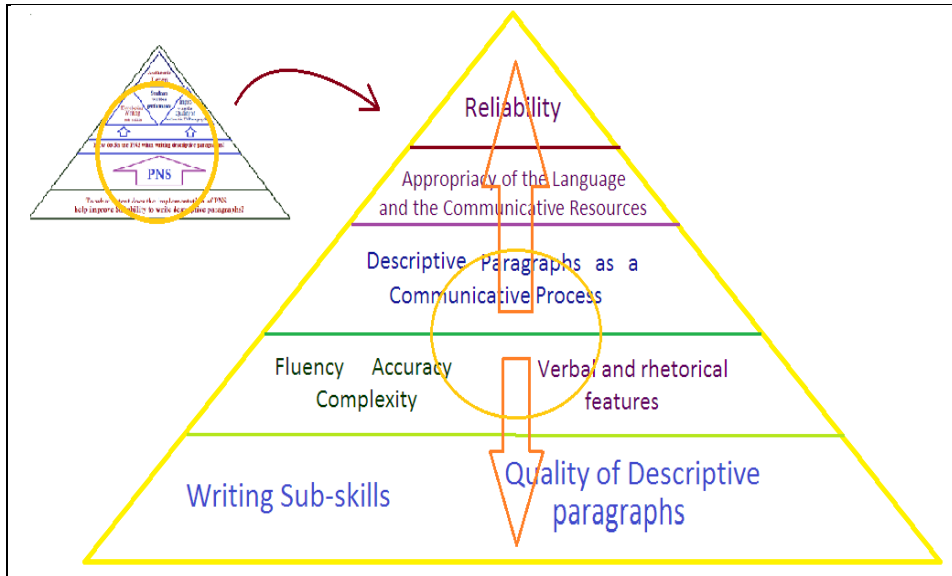
Recognizing the connections between both categories through axial coding, regularities, and intersecting features conducted me to the formulation of hypotheses (Szklański, 1997) that revealed the nature of student outcomes in authentic letters. This process could only be originated and assisted by means of Selective Coding, the final stage in Grounded theory, since, as stated by Corbin and Strauss (2008), the diamond-shape reconstruction process and realization of linkages between the categories during axial coding showed a picture of the storyline at the top the core category that would help me “found” the hypothesis. It was an intersection that revealed the same images seen in the kaleidoscope when I started open coding. Looking inside the pyramid led to the following hypothetical statements, explained below the graphic representation.

When students became confident about the linguistic material that they were approaching in the classroom and at the same time became acquainted with the communicative process that contextualized the tasks, appropriacy grew suitably to help learners select convenient verbal and structural resources that they needed to solve the tasks. This faculty had surmounted the



boundaries between cognitive and metacognitive skills since learners were now taking control over their learning process (Oxford, 1990:135).

**Figure 15 - Selective Coding Pyramid**



Appropriacy also gave them the command to balance both aspects of the tasks: form and content. Regarding content, the verbal features in the second category joined the three subcategories in the first one – *fluency, accuracy, and complexity*, – accounting for the explicit utterances that the learners produced in their descriptive paragraphs and achieving the explicit communicative intentions of introducing, informing, describing, inviting, and complimenting. Regarding form, the students who took advantage of the letters, emails, and postcards to shape their descriptive paragraphs were more concerned with the channel and the code, and so they attempted to adapt the rhetorical structure of the paragraphs constructed to a more formal layout.

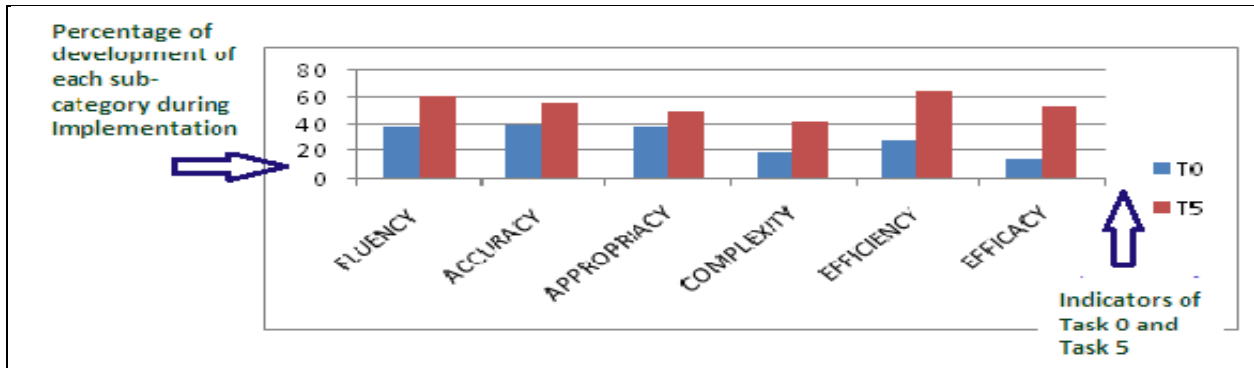
As stated earlier, I relied on two main authorities to elucidate answers to the main question of the project, inquiring *to what extent the implementation of Practicing Naturalistically helps students improve their ability to write descriptive paragraphs*. After the coding process

and later by developing constant comparison (Corbin and Strauss: 2008), I supported my analysis with Lindsay and Knight’s concepts regarding general writing sub-skills (2006), from Jakobson communicative process (1960).

During data observation and analysis, I saw how the categories identified as *Developing the writing sub skills*, on the one hand, and *Quality of the authentic descriptive paragraphs*, on the other, helped identify two particular ways in which students applied the strategy.

The table below represents a comparative analysis of the students’ abilities, depicted from the diagnosis phase, in both the writing entry tests and the initial questionnaire (when PNS had not yet been applied) to the end of the implementation stage.

**Table 9 Behaviour of PNS in Both Categories during the Process**



In relation to the first category, PNS influenced the development of writing-sub skills positively. Students became more fluent and accurate writers of descriptive paragraphs, and their abilities to select the appropriate language as well as their lexical background improved significantly compared to the situation before the implementation. PNS was useful to help learners increase their lexical background, express their ideas more coherently, use more adequate linking words to gain cohesion, and exploit the grammar structures studied during the learning process more fruitfully. Even though the lexical background, which refers *complexity*,

did not rise as much as the other writing sub-skills, it clearly overcame its original state to a significant extent. For these reasons, I could estimate that PNS was to guide false beginners in their writing process.

In relation to the sub-question “*How do students use PNS when writing descriptive paragraphs?*” properties in both the first and the second category allowed me to test how PNS promoted integration of verbal and rhetorical features in a natural way. Authentic letters involve genuine communication (Powell and Davidson, 2005). As observed during this implementation, writing letters was not reduced to the production of paragraphs to merely assess students’ writing skills. The analysis of the intersection between categories and subcategories revealed that the learners had appealed to PNS in two different senses: (a) considering a meaningful context to provide the information requested and (b) accepting an appropriate layout as the convenient rhetorical structure of the written discourse, which played the role of a formal channel for their descriptive paragraphs. Regarding structure, two types of elements were necessary: the rhetorical structure of the letters and the descriptive quality of the paragraphs in those letters. These intersections let me see how both elements shaped a single entity produced in different forms by every student. I dare to suggest that the individual particularities belong to the personal style of each writer, and evidence the self control that the metacognitive skills promote.

At the same time, the value of the strategy grew when the students suitably adapted the language and the communicative material acquired to solve the writing tasks. This is what Lindsay and Knight (2006) define as the *appropriacy* sub-skill in writing. Efficacy in the elaboration of descriptive paragraphs following the elements their rhetorical structure demanded, –a main idea and supporting details– depended much on the *appropriacy* with which the learners adapted verbal resources, including the ability to gradually balance the other writing sub skills.

For this reason, appropriacy was in the intersection (lens) point between the purely writing sub-skills and the communicative incidents (sender's intention, the formality of the language used, the particular utterances conveying the message), which were determined by the language functions.

Moreover, when students realized the communicative process carried out by the production of authentic letters and the code they were sharing with their receiver, they became more aware of the need for employing language resources more precisely. They also took advantage of the language functions to express their ideas more accurately, including what they expected from their recipient. Again, this suggests that these learners had gained the confidence for mentally processing the language, storing and retrieving new information, and use the language despite "large gaps in knowledge" (Oxford, 1990: 37). These are processes that cognitive learning strategies like PNS are intended to help enhance in the language learners.

Additionally, PNS helped writers produce good quality descriptive paragraphs, since they combined the target language that they were learning in the classroom (which seemed completely academic) with meaningful practice that supplied language its communicative quality. This way, students were able to write formal texts fulfilling what the rhetorical structure demanded, the statement of a main idea and its support through descriptive details. According to data collected from the third questionnaire, eight out of thirteen students were very aware of this fact. As a result, students who had a more realistic relationship with their receiver produced not only more formal but also more meaningful outcomes, because they had acquired more *appropriacy*, that is, the ability to appeal, select, and balance the elements in the writing process with those in the communicative process.

Results also reflected that even when conveying these elements in the appropriate layout to support the rhetorical structure of descriptive paragraphs (*efficacy*), most students were able to establish them through PNS, through meaningful and authentic practice (Jacobson et al., 2003; Kilickaya, 2004). After greeting and introducing a particular topic to develop in their paragraphs –usually related to a person, a place, or an event, as in their last task in which they were expected to describe a recipe– in other words, to keep a topic for communication, students fulfilled the referential function of the language, since all of them introduced the main idea and supported it with descriptive sentences with lower or higher levels of accuracy, complexity, and fluency. Regarding the position of the main idea, it was not always in the introductory paragraph where it is conventionally set, but most students generated supporting details around the specific topic.

Excerpt No. 17

**Hi, Jenny,**  
**Really? You come to visit me? I cannot believe. I have many plans to do together. I recommend to visit and know the following cities...**  
  
**...at night we can go to night clubs...**  
  
**Jenny, a place very exciting is la Piedra del Peñol, is a big rock. From this location you can see all city....**  
  
**Jenny, I hope you come soon because I want you to know my country.**

Other students included appealing sentences pretending to be talking with their receiver and even concluded their paragraphs with striking invitations, proving the strength of the connative function of the language, as seen in the excerpt above.

In regards to the specific topics used to elaborate their writings, students were assigned tasks in which description was reasonable. They described people's physical appearances,

personalities, and backgrounds. They also described many of their favourite places and food. I must confess that, as a teacher, sometimes I regarded these two topics in particular as dull for the type of learners I had in this group, considering the natural interests of young first year college students. When writing 'by' Practicing Naturalistically, in theory, young adults may seem to have no interest in domestic issues, but in practice, as good language learners do, they were uninhibited and willing to practice and use the language for true communicative purposes (Brown: 2006), and most of them were keen on developing lessons about cultural issues such as food preparation. According to Kilickaya (2004), cultural contents underlying the language are very convenient in promoting new and open perceptions of one's own and others' comprehension of the world.

Furthermore, the strategy facilitated the discovery of incidental advantages that can benefit language learning through classroom practice in all instances, not only considering writing skills. Using PNS, students demonstrated interesting aspects in their learning styles, such as qualities of independent learners. Risky learners profited from PNS to express their interests and took the risk of being wrong (Brown, 2006, p. 160) when trying new grammar structures not yet studied in their current course, looking for more complex vocabulary or consulting many issues regarding the task they were solving. To other students, PNS fostered autonomy when students took control over their learning process and made convenient decisions regarding the specific contents (p. 130). Moreover, motivation was fostered when PNS targeted different learning styles and facilitated individual decisions of the students (p. 168). Therefore, students made particular choices regarding refinements in the layouts, showing higher degrees of effort when designing attractive outlines for their letters and appealing to web tools to give them a personalized appearance.

### Summary of Results

PNS focuses on “using the language for actual communication” (Oxford, 1990, p. 74). Certain commonalities on the levels of writing sub-skills –accuracy, appropriacy, fluency, and complexity– were appreciated through student outcomes. It seems that according to their learning styles –the way they feel better when acquiring knowledge and when solving their tasks– false beginners make sound decisions related to the language used to express their ideas as well as to the very specific writing style they acquire to address their recipient.

#### Excerpt No. 20

*Dear reader,*

*Now we have a delicious recipe, easy and fast to prepare. I invite to cook and tell me about you experience. Surprise your friends and family with this recipe. (Sample, Student Q)*

The initial approaches to the target language encouraged students to build up *appropriacy*. The data analysis showed that varied products reflected how the students’ followed instructions and demonstrated that acquiring *appropriacy* depends on two features: the clear identification and interpretation of the instructions provided in the task and sense of language correctness that learners develop when they become engaged with their learning process. When students concentrated on the task expressed as an authentic message, they recognized the importance of being clearly understood and were determined to answer that message in the same way. The more engaged they felt with the task, the more suitable elements they used to write their descriptive paragraphs. Research done by Cumming (1989, 2006) found that *appropriacy*, much more than what occurs with the mother language, provokes in the learners the need for making more analytic decisions regarding both the form of the language and the convenience of the resources used to obtain a good product, in terms of discourse, that

satisfies what the sender wants to say and what the recipient needs to know. Being so, PNS demands the selection of authentic tasks in which the learners deeply comprehend the importance of using appropriate language to communicate their ideas.

While acquiring *appropriacy*, the other writing sub-skills increased at different rates during the process. The students' confidence was evident in more fluid and more complex compositions. Besides focusing on precision, learners also looked for more descriptive words which helped them to expand their ideas. Risky students looked for and dared to use more adjectives that provided more detailed information. Less skilful writers did not expand their ideas but tried to be precise, at the expense of uttering plain descriptions. They seemed to be more distant with their recipients but managed to provide suitable information. Their paragraphs were less elaborated and usually the main idea was not explicit. Even in those cases, the levels of accuracy kept on rising. These phenomena became noticeable as deeper and more elaborated core language, required for every new task, joined the previous knowledge, making the learners' language background more solid and extensive.

Students freely chose the layout for their messages by themselves.<sup>25</sup> This proved that PNS became a suggestive tool for learners who recognize themselves as independent, self-demanding, risky, and very creative, able to act autonomously while promoting and keeping real communicative situations throughout their learning process. They were aware of the fact that knowledge derives from experience (Brown: 2006), so, as I noticed during the implementation, they felt confident that they were learning to use real language while writing authentic documents. In fact, some students felt rewarded by Jennifer's positive comments about their

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<sup>25</sup> Follow this [link](#) to see a sample of a glogster designed to describe and compare two cities.



improvements in their language learning process and felt free to express their language concerns to their recipient.

Excerpt No. 21

*Hi Jenny,*

*I hope you are well. I study English everyday to improve my writing, reading and speaking. Well. Now I tell you about my classmates.*

*...*

*Jenny, they are my classmates, what do you think about them? (Sample, Student M, sent via mail).*

PNS did not develop homogeneously among students, as the writing sub skills did not grow in the same way for all of them. Students used it as their writing abilities grew, and their abilities grew according to many factors affecting the writing learning process: anxiety, time constrains, interest about the topic, familiarity with the topic, but, overall, strength of language background. Although these circumstances usually affect the learners (Brown, p. 161), PNS wielded enormous power in strengthening writing sub-skills. When any of the writing sub skills grew higher, especially fluency or accuracy, students felt more confident and were less anxious when writing. PNS helped students become aware of their limitations as false beginners but also gave them confidence that, in the end, meaningful writing would increase proficiency.

In general terms, a process that started with lower levels of writing abilities grew through the implementation of PNS, obtaining positive results in most of the students' outcomes. It seems that developing authentic tasks, through PNS, students may be much more concerned about their written production and can systematically develop their writing skills.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I evaluate the most important findings according to the questions and objectives of the project stated in Chapter One. Then, I provide an overview of the pedagogical implications. Finally, I present the limitations that appeared during this study and make some suggestions for further research in the field.

Since I found that writing was the most unattended language skill, with a consequent poor performance among A1 students, I developed this action research study to implement PNS in their writing sessions, and analysed to what extent it helped them improve their ability to write descriptive paragraphs. I tried Oxford's cognitive learning strategy of PN to design the writing tasks during a 20-sessions implementation, and in the end I found that when writing tasks are authentic, they are not only meaningful but valuable tools to empower students' writing skills in the formal production of a text with a specific rhetorical structure, as well as in the appropriacy of the language to perform a real communicative process.

Through the application of writing learning guides with specific tasks directed by an English speaker, I encouraged students to respond to this key pal, by writing descriptive paragraphs that became letters, postcards and emails. Results obtained from data analysis of their writings made me discover that PNS played two basic functions during the writing process. On the one hand, PNS inspired the increase of four basic writing sub-skills at individual levels —fluency, accuracy, complexity and appropriacy, — depending on their learning styles and disposition towards the strategy. These sub-skills might have been consciously or unconsciously acquired by the learners, according to the level of confidence, awareness and self control over

their own learning process that each student develops during the writing process. These specific skills allowed students to write texts with the verbal and rhetorical structure of the descriptive paragraph. On the other hand, PNS, which for the purposes of this study meant exactly the implementation of authentic tasks (Oxford, 1990; Kilickaya, 2004), lead the writers into a communicative process which some learners approached consciously, and led them to assume writing (descriptive paragraphs) as the means to establish and keep verbal contact, assuming particular roles and language functions proper of any real communication process.

While most students improved gradually their abilities to write descriptive paragraphs by developing accuracy, fluency and complexity at individual paces, not all of them managed to select language conveniently because of their poor background as well as in the mental processes that a new language in particular demands, which still limited their opportunities to communicate ideas conveniently.

Another conclusion reveals that beginner writers were aware of their roles as senders of a message they tended to fulfil very specific language functions according to the requirements of the task and the reactions they pretended from their reader. If students were completely aware and they relied on their writing abilities, they could make better use of the language resources, increasing the levels of appropriacy, and at the same time, achieving to produce more elaborated outcomes, in terms of the rhetorical structure and their descriptive content. This fact proved the value of PNS regarding its effectiveness in terms of verbal communication (conveying a message, a context, a channel, a sender and a recipient and a language, and fulfilling specific functions of language), and its efficacy to help produce a written discourse with special qualities in terms of descriptive paragraphs at the level of the rhetorical structure.

The final conclusion derives from the analysis of the quality of PNS when contrasting effectiveness and efficacy. Even if the language background is limited in terms of vocabulary and grammar structures, which limits the improvements in the complexity writing sub-skill, beginner writers can put their messages across through descriptive paragraphs effectively, by making chains of single sentences, and providing general descriptive information through an only or not deeply elaborated paragraph. As a consequence, the learners achieve the purpose of conveying their message by supplying a main idea supported by minimum single details. In terms of the rubrics that assess their writing performance, under these conditions writing learners will always obtain a pass at least. However, in terms of improving the writing abilities, PNS only results efficient when there is a balance between the four writing sub-skills, it is, when students have acquired the sufficient language background, including grammar, vocabulary and coherence and cohesion devices, which provide the writers several possibilities to construct an adequate rhetorical structure, with main ideas and sufficient and varied descriptive details.

Finally, students' perceptions regarding their improvements in the writing process are also important, ever since they become aware of the factors affecting their learning process. They may consider the writing task meaningful and the strategy valuable to foster writing, but it will never occur if they are not willing and committed to exercise the writing sub-skills through the practice.

In summary, PNS encouraged writing sub-skills improvements when writing descriptive paragraphs because these were suggested through authentic tasks in which students could carry out true communicative processes. Additionally, students who internalized PNS moved from controlled practice with extensive writing to free writing practice in which they had the command to use their writing skill to produce the descriptive paragraphs suggested.

If all these ‘created’ circumstances proved that authentic tasks can be produced by students in the classroom to obtain substantial results in the improvement of their communicative competences –in this case, by means of the development of writing sub-skills what kind and levels of results can be achieved if both the activities and the resources are completely natural to the practice. The point of this reflection is that, in the long run, we as teachers will have to seek for and supply our students with real communicative context practice in which they can get in touch with other English language speakers around the world, in our own teaching sessions, virtually, or in the classroom. Teachers at ULS are becoming “virtual” teachers for “real language learning purposes.” which makes of this a real requirement right now.

#### Pedagogical Implications

Consolidating a proposal for the use of authentic tasks in A1 students’ writing process has a deeper value when they may consider themselves as able to use language closer to real communication. PNS may have a similar and a better impact when authentic tasks in the basic levels promote more meaningful practice about the syllabus contents through a wider range of communicative events, such as narrating experiences and anecdotes, expressing wishes, justifying actions, discussing about cultural issues, describing routines, feelings and emotions..

Writing is undoubtedly a process that involves the other skills, and for this reason, it should be more valued in the second language syllabus. Writing tasks will not be merely evaluated as a final product, but they will exhibit opportunities to enhance the other skills, as part of a totalizing learning process. By providing students opportunities to write what they expect and what they may need in their own academic and professional fields, writing tasks will acquire

both meaningful and contextualizing characteristics. Additionally, students will develop more awareness in the analysis of how the target language can be better acquired (Hillyard: 2008).

For the solution to some of the tasks designed in the learning guides,<sup>26</sup> students had to interact in a natural way so that they obtained information to later solve their writing tasks. For example, there was an opportunity in which they had to build a letter describing their peers and their classroom atmosphere. The task encouraged long oral conversation in L2. In that opportunity writing became the media to promote oral production and interaction, as it is currently occurring with chat spaces in ICTs. This suggests that we, teacher and learners, can benefit from our authentic writing activities while improving the other skills, using the strategy for several communicative purposes as students learn to write. In fact, PNS suggests innumerable possibilities for authentic activities that Oxford and Chamot (1999) simply introduce and can be applied in both the productive and the receptive skills for several learning purposes.

Instead of generating anxiety and frustration, PNS and similar cognitive learning strategies are intended to help learners the skills that ensure language command, and the opportunities to express their ideas with arguments, which is finally the purpose of formal composition. Tasks conveniently designed to have learners using real language, particularly when writing, will inevitably push them to seek adequate rhetorical structures according to the level and text-genre that only authentic materials supply and demand.

Oxford (1990) suggests that PNS is also useful to model grammar, through poetry, lyrics, and many other genres, which are very convenient when students need to mechanize grammar

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<sup>26</sup> As presented in Chapter 3, Learning Guides were the products through which PNS was introduced as the task for the writing learner, shaped as a message they should respond to a certain text composed of descriptive paragraphs.

structures, and result much more creative to practice the language. For instance, students can create beautiful poems while they practice particular grammar concepts and recycle vocabulary (Oxford, p. 75). It is also necessary to ensure adequate and permanent use of this lexical and grammar background so as to help students store it as part of their lifelong learning skills.

Regarding writing PNS puts forward the continuous practice of intensive and extensive writing. Teachers cannot expect results in the short run but it requires time, patience, and continuity. It exercises itself as one of its best qualities in its applicability to real contexts, which ensures students' confidence in the successful learning process apart from obtaining higher proficiency levels.

During the implementation and analysis stages of this study, I became convinced that, as Oxford (1990) states, an instructional design to facilitate the students' comprehension of this and many other learning strategies is the most convenient methodological approach to guide learners towards adequate use of the strategy (p. 74). By following a structured procedure such as the Metacognitive Model for Strategic Instruction, students acquire self control over their learning process. Additionally, artefacts such as rubrics and conventions for writing give them the certainty that they know exactly the criteria under which they will be assessed. Eventually, students will be able to use them on their own and will easily identify the circumstances in which they can apply the knowledge acquired and the strategy learned.

### Limitations

Research in the field of the Naturally Practicing as a Cognitive learning strategy has not been analysed to a long extent. In fact, it is usually associated to the use of authentic materials, but not with its essence that is developing authentic activities in the classroom. There are not

studies that consider other areas of application but for L2 courses with higher levels of proficiency.

On the other hand, because of constant modification in the records of the assessment process carried out at the basic levels of the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures,<sup>27</sup> it was not possible to count on more complete data for results in the students' writing levels of proficiency during the recent years.

#### Further Research

Considering the fact that the teacher adapted the use of authentic resources into an avatar and the learning guides to assign the learners specific tasks, such as sending voice messages and emails, further research must be done in the analysis of the effects of the strategy involving realia and authentic materials for actual communication, and considering the cyclical nature of the communicative process –this means that researchers should study the effect of replying to letters and other types of correspondence, following the track of the sender and the recipient in double sense–. This issue carries several concerns for further research in the composition of letters, emails, and more complex types of correspondence. On the one hand, it would be very valuable to study the correlation that may be generated between the learner as a sender of a message and the learner as its recipient. Future projects could analyze the effects of feedback or the reply gotten from the native English speaker-receiver of the messages, regarding the document sent by the English language learners, and how this mutual channel may affect the learning process of writing this type of texts (Oxford, 1990.)

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Further studies can be carried out to analyze to what extent PNS is able to target authentic English language compositions made by false beginners and even true beginners in the introductory stages, when they are just identifying the communicative skills and the cognitive learning strategies and meta-cognition processes.

Research in the field may also point to the implications that PNS has on the other communicative skills, since its application may affect positively or negatively their levels of proficiency. As mentioned in a former section of the data findings, during the implementation stage of this project, students were encouraged by the strategy to retrieve and register information in the target language as a way of obtaining the previous documentation for their current product. They ended up interacting orally with their peers. This fact remains infrequent in English lessons at the initial stages in many language courses. Research that studies to what extent PNS can encourage faster development of the speaking skills is urgent at these levels, especially in EFL programs at both public and private institutions that usually complain about the limited time allotted to foreign language teaching.

Last but not least, during this process, the first and second term writing exams applied were administered by other teachers who evaluated the students' outcomes. Results in the exams can be used in further research as data analysis to compare how the application of the strategy by the students themselves may or not be evidenced through potential improvements in the levels of their written compositions. Students' feelings may also be studied in a comparative analysis of what they think about the use of the strategy and what the actual results reveal.

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**Appendix A** Comparative Results in the Skills Proficiency Level 1, Year 2010 Semester 1

<b>DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES - REGULAR COURSES - ENGLISH</b>				
<b>Proficiency Levels and Performance in the four Communicative Skills</b>				
GROUP/TERM	GRADE AVERAGE IN THE FOUR SKILLS PER GROUP			
	READING	LISTENING	WRITING	SPEAKING
GROUP 1 - 1	48	49	40	44
2	34	26	42	41
3	35	46	41	35
GROUP 7 - 1	27	35	25	28
2	32	31	27	33
3	28	27	28	37
GROUP 8 - 1	28	37	29	37
2	36	41	29	34
3	33	31	30	33
GROUP 4 - 1	26	36	25	23
2	19	27	21	25
3	24	28	20	20
GROUP 3 - 1	17	18	16	18
2	36	39	33	35
	28	41	33	37
GROUP 4 - 1	32	36	31	33
2	19	27	21	25
3	24	28	20	20
GROUP 2 - 1	17	18	16	18
2	33	32	40	42
3	20	17	21	24
<b>GENERAL PROMEDIA</b>	<b>READING</b>	<b>LISTENING</b>	<b>WRITING</b>	<b>SPEAKING</b>
	<b>28</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>30</b>

### Performance in the four Communicative Skills

Skill	Percentage
Speaking	26%
Reading	24%
Writing	23%
Listening	27%

The figures correspond to the university grading system, from 0 to 5, in which 50 is the highest grade, and 30 in the minimum grade for approval. The **bars table, on the above right graph**, represents the actual promedia in the four skills, according to the grading system, in which only **Listening and Speaking** are over the minimum pass grade, that is 30. The cake graph shows the performance in the four skills in terms of percentage of approval, in which the lowest levels correspond to the Writing skill.

## **Appendix B: Implementation Timeline**

Activity /Date	September				October				November				January to June							
	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Janu	Febr	Mar	Apr	May	June
Step 1: Initiation																				
Step 2: Preliminary Investigation																				
Step 3: Literature review																				
Step 4: Action Plan Design																				
Step 5: Implemen- tation																				
Step 6: Monitoring/ data collection																				
Step 7: Analysis and interpretation of data																				
Step 8: Reflection & decision making																				
Step 9: Sharing findings																				

*Implementation Timeline*

**Appendix C Implementation of Instructional Design timeline**

Stage &	Week	Activity	Data Collection	Reflections
---------	------	----------	-----------------	-------------



Month	(Dates)		Instrument(s)		
Pre-stage	August	Aug 6 (1 hour)	Identify the problem through a diagnostic test for assessing false beginners' writing level.	Diagnostic test: free composition introducing oneself.	A questionnaire was applied to gather information on three main issues: 1. Students' identity. 2. Students learning profile. 3. Students' feelings and general insights regarding their writing skill. Students wrote their first composition in the diagnostic test, to show their current ability in the writing skill.
		Aug 10 – 13 (4 hours)	Train students to use of PNLS learning guides. Introduce the general rhetorical structure of a descriptive text. Practice the use of the artefacts such as the list of conventions for writing and the general rubrics for writing.	Artefact: convention list for writing. <b>Tool:</b> <b>General rubrics for writing a descriptive text.</b>	
While-stage	August	Aug 19-20 (2 hours)	Teach Sts how to write an introduction mail to a key pal. Show the use of adjectives in the descriptive sentences, before writing a descriptive paragraph.	<b>First Product: E-mail</b> Introduce yourself to Jennifer through an email.	From weeks 2 and 4 Sts learnt about: 1. The rhetorical structure of the descriptive paragraphs. Meanwhile, they were using them into different products. 2. The layouts for the outcomes expected. 3. The way to join their writing products into their writing portfolios. 4. The use of the conventions lists for writing and the way they address the feedback for them to can improve and edit their writings.
		Aug 26-27 (2 hours)	Students will learn how to write a postcard to show their key pals their favourite / or their hometown landmark.	<b>Second product: Postcard From a famous landmark.</b>	
		Au 30- Sept 5	<b>First term exam</b> <b>ntroduce yourself and people around (family, famous people you admire, your friends)</b>		
	September	Sept 3 (1 hour)	Students will be taught to write a descriptive letter to introduce their families providing very detailed information.	<b>Third product: Letter No.1 this is my family</b>	According to the syllabus for the course, Sts will be taught about the use of the grammar contents and vocabulary so that they have enough background to produce communicative outcomes. In the meantime, they will be learning the use of the practicing naturalistically cognitive learning strategy, and will be provided samples so that they can design a final layout that always derives from a specific kind of text containing descriptive paragraphs.  The data collection tools will consist of the students written outcomes (twelve, average), over the months of august, September, October and November, in which it will be possible to monitor the Sts' improvements and gaps in the writing process (Burns: 2010). At the end of each term (3 in total), Sts will be interviewed in order to gather their own feelings and opinions regarding the levels of awareness in the use of the learning strategy. Additionally, their final texts will be collected and analyzed to check to what extent they use the learning strategy inside the classroom final writing tests.
		Sept 9-10 (2 hours)	Students will learn to create a poster to introduce their hometown.	<b>Fourth product: A poster about life in my hometown.</b>	
		Sept 16-17 (2 hours)	Sts will be taught how to describe their daily routines through a descriptive paragraph, regarding calendars and agendas.	<b>Fifth product: E-mail No.2</b> <b>Invite Jennifer to visit two cities in Colombia</b>	
		Sept 24 (1 hour)	When learning about likes and dislikes, St will design an email to find a matching-friend through the internet.	<b>Sixth product: A mail describing your best friend.</b>	
	October	Oct 1 (1 hour)	Sts will be given tools and ideas on how to report their favourite person's life, providing interesting details about their activities, personalities, likes and hates.	<b>Seventh product: Telling Jennifer about my English classmates</b>	At the end of the data collection process, three types of gathering data tools will be collected and analyzed: 1. The diagnostic and final evaluations. 2. The Sts' portfolio with their outcomes. 3. The Sts' group interviews applied at the end of each term.
		Oct 7 (1 hour)	Sts will learn to express ability through the use of the modal CAN. They will design a brochure telling how a tourist can move in an unknown city.	<b>Eighth product: tell Jenny about tourism in a city in Colombia</b>	
		Oct 12-15	<b>Second term exam</b> <b>Either describes tourism, friends or classmates.</b>		
		Oct 15 (1 hour)	Sts will be taught the use of THERE BE to introduce quantities.	<b>Ninth product: a report about tourism in your city</b>	
		Oct 26 (2 hours)	Teacher will lead Sts to learn the use of countable and uncountable nouns, some, any, how much and how many.	<b>Tenth product: Tell Jenny about your favourite recipe.</b>	
	Post-stage	November	Oct 29 (2 hours)	Sts will identify the main typical recipes in their hometowns and their preparation.	<b>Eleventh product: Describing your favourite typical recipe</b>
Nov 5 (1 hour)			Sts will learn how to join complete information about their (favourite) cities or hometowns.	<b>Twelfth product: A brochure about food in a country in the world / Tell Jenny about your favourite recipe</b>	
Nov 12 (1 hour)			They will write about their favourite recipes.		
Nov 19 - 22			<b>Last term exam</b> <b>Thirteenth product: explain what the people in your city traditionally eat, describe their main typical recipe.</b>		

**Appendix D: SELF DIAGNOSTIC TEST**

**LEVEL 1 ENTRY TEST - July 25<sup>th</sup> 2010**  
**SELF DIAGNOSTIC FOR ACTION PLAN INTRODUCTION**

**PART 1 – VOCABULARY**

Play STOP to check how many words you know about the following topics.

Letter	Animal	Adjective	City or Country	Food	Occupations	Places/ the city	Verbs	Score
1. L		long						
2.						museum		
3.			Canada					
4.								

Score: 10 points.

**PART 2 – READING COMPREHENSION**

Read the following letter and mark the sentences as T (true) or F (false). Then correct the wrong answers:

*Hello, my name is Carla Mitchell. I am sixteen years old and I live in Sidney in Australia. There are four of us in our family. My father, Adam, is a pilot. He's a very clever person. My mother Christine is a singer. She's a beautiful tall woman with dark brown hair and gorgeous blue eyes. She's very kind and patient. My brother, Leo, is seventeen years old. He's quite short with fair hair and green eyes. He's clever too, but a bit bossy sometimes.*  
*Well that's all about me. Write back and tell me about your family.*  
*Best wishes,*  
**Carla**

- Carla is Australian \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Carla is seventeen years old \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Carla's father is a doctor \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Carla's mother is short with green eyes \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Carla's brother is clever \_\_\_\_\_ .

Score: 10 points.

**PART 3 – GRAMMAR**

1. Read the following dialogue and complete the blanks.

**Maria:** Hello, my name \_\_\_\_\_(1) Maria. What's your name?  
**Tom:** Hello Maria. My name \_\_\_\_\_ (2) Tom.  
**Maria:** Where \_\_\_\_\_ (3) you from Tom?  
**Tom:** I \_\_\_\_\_ (4) from London. Where are you from?  
**Maria:** I'm from Spain. I live with my parents and my brother.  
**Tom:** How old \_\_\_\_\_ (5) your brother?  
**Maria:** He \_\_\_\_\_ (6) 15. How old are you?  
**Tom:** I \_\_\_\_\_(7) 18. I live with my cousin, Jane.  
**Maria:** How \_\_\_\_\_(8) is she?  
**Tom:** She's 20 and she \_\_\_\_\_ (9) a student at the university.  
**Maria:** Are you a student Tom?  
**Tom:** Yes, I am. Are you a student?  
**Maria:** No, I \_\_\_\_\_not (10) a student. I'm a nurse.  
**Tom:** See you tomorrow Maria.  
**Maria:** Yes, goodbye Tom.

2. Complete the sentences with the words in the box:

Live - from - years - an - school - old - brother - a - parents - his

I am Sonia Ríos, I am 1. \_\_\_\_\_ accountant. I am 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Cali but I 3. \_\_\_\_\_ in Bogotá. I am twenty-one 4. \_\_\_\_\_ 5. \_\_\_\_\_. I live in 6. \_\_\_\_\_ house with my 7. \_\_\_\_\_ and my 8. \_\_\_\_\_. 9. \_\_\_\_\_ name is Carlos and he is studying at 10. \_\_\_\_\_.

Score: 10 points.

**PART 4 – LISTENING**

Listen to the following interview and fill in the spaces with the personal information about George.

Complete Name	Age	Nationality	Hometown	Occupation	Likes	Dislikes

Score: 10 points.

**PART 5 – WRITING**

Write about yourself, your family and everything you can say about your occupations, physical appearance, likes and dislikes.

Score: 10 points.

**APPENDIX E: SELF DIAGNOSTIC TEST RESULTS**



**LEVEL 1 ENTRY TEST - July 25<sup>th</sup> 2010**  
**SELF DIAGNOSTIC FOR ACTION PLAN INTRODUCTION**

**RESULTS SHEET**

Student Number	PART 1 VOCABULARY 100%	PART 2 READING 100%	PART 3 GRAMMAR 100%	PART 4 LISTENING 100%	PART 5 WRITING 100%	INDIVIDUAL SCORE Maximum grade 50
1	20	85	50	50	50	25
2	28	88	65	80	40	30
3	72	56	70	70	60	33
4	84	78	100	60	60	38
5	80	90	95	50	40	35
6	92	97	90	70	60	41
7	40	88	80	30	50	29
8	56	97	95	30	80	36
9	76	56	70	20	40	26
10	80	40	60	80	50	31
11	88	88	100	60	30	36
12	84	88	85	70	50	38
13	28	88	75	40	30	26
14	16	85	55	80	70	30
15	36	97	40	70	20	26
16	48	56	45	60	40	25
17	88	97	70	30	70	35
18	76	56	35	40	50	26
20	92	88	70	80	60	39
21				70		
<b>TOTAL AVERAGE</b>	<b>59.2</b>	<b>75.9</b>	<b>67.5</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>47.5</b>	<b>30.36</b>



7. What are your daily activities during the week?

- A. You take English as a free course only.      C. You take your major and study in another place.  
 B. You study your major at university      D. You study your major and work

**Your Writing Skills:**

1. How did you feel when you wrote your first writing text in this course?

- A. It was easy. I did not have any problem to write a complete text.  
 B. I had some difficulties but then I felt fine writing my composition.  
 C. It was very difficult for me. I could not complete my composition.  
 D. It was so complicated that I could not do it.  
 E. I did not understand what I had to do.

2. When you were writing your composition, what was the most complicated part?

- A. Finding the appropriate words to describe my context.  
 B. Knowing the appropriate grammar structures  
 C. Connecting words  
 D. Connecting sentences  
 E. Organizing the letter in the appropriate layout.  
 F. Following the instructions to solve each part of the task  
 G. Other? What? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What kind of activities do you consider will help you to improve your writing?

- A. Many grammar exercises to practice the structure before I write the composition.  
 B. Many repetition exercises with the same structures to mechanize the language.  
 C. Games to play with the vocabulary I need to write my compositions.  
 D. Readings to model the writings I will develop later.  
 E. Dictation exercises.  
 F. I can learn writing directly, by composing letters, mails, and more types of texts.  
 G. Other? What? \_\_\_\_\_

4. What kinds of compositions would you like to write in this course?

- A. Letters      C. Postcards      E. Articles      G. Others? Which ones?  
 B. Emails      D. Reports      F. Poems and songs      \_\_\_\_\_

5. Grade from 1 to 5 your ability to write, being 1 the lowest grade and 5 the highest grade:

- A. 1. I feel do not have writing skills.  
 B. 2. I have very little ability to write in English  
 C. 3. I know a little and need to practice a lot.  
 D. 4. I have some good abilities to write. I can do better!  
 E. 5. I am really good at writing in English. I know I will do a very good job to improve it.

## Appendix F: Data Collection Tool - While Stage Questionnaire



### Implementation of the Practicing Naturalistically Cognitive Learning Strategy

Researcher:	
Purpose of the project:	To analyze the relationship between the practicing naturalistically cognitive strategy and my students' ability to write descriptive paragraphs.
Group	2
Date:	September 18 <sup>th</sup> / 2010

### Questionnaire (Survey) No. 2 for the Students

Dear learner,

You have completed the first term of the English course you are taking, and you have already been practicing a specific cognitive learning strategy with the purpose of helping you improve your writing skills. This is *practicing naturalistically*. Please take 10 minutes to read and respond the following survey, marking in one square with an **X**, according to your personal considerations. So when it is required please provide the necessary information.

Remember that the purpose is to know your feelings during this first stage of the implementation and help you improve the writing process.

#### A: How you understand the *Practicing Naturalistically* learning Strategy:

1. How do you feel when developing the writing learning guides every Friday?

- A. This is a good activity to help improve your writing. You feel fine.
- B. You feel a little overwhelmed since this is too much work to do.
- C. It has been a new experience for you: You are writing while you practice writing.
- D. It has been very complicated. You find it difficult to understand the instructions.
- E. You think this has been a very difficult way to practice. You would prefer using other strategies to improve your writing. For example: \_\_\_\_\_

2. When you are implementing the PN learning strategy in class, you find the following advantages:

- A. You can apply your knowledge immediately in a real and useful composition.
- B. You felt you were really communicating with someone.
- C. You can express ideas related with your everyday life and your own interests.
- D. You can use simple everyday language that you are learning in the English classes.
- E. You can organize your ideas in a way that is easy to understand.
- F. You can develop your creativity, even though you are suggested to write a specific type of text.
- G. Others? What? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Regarding your teacher support training you to use the PN learning strategy **PNLS**

- A. She has been clear and you can understand her explanations and instructions.
- B. She has clearly explained the strategy, but her instructions to solve the tasks are not as clear.
- C. She has given you clear examples in which you can apply the PN strategy.

- D. She gives you the adequate feedback to improve your writing tasks after you develop them.
- E. She encourages you to use the rubrics and the list of conventions for writing so that you can understand the writing process and comprehend the feedback through the annotated versions that she gives you.
- F. Other? What? \_\_\_\_\_

4. When you are practicing naturalistically during the writing sessions, you find the following disadvantages:

- A. There is no relation between the strategy and the manner to improve your writing level.
- B. You find the strategy very complicated and overwhelming for your general level of English.
- C. You think you can do simpler tasks to practice writing and you could get better results effortlessly.
- D. You think the strategy is very exigent and it demands too much work and effort for your level.
- E. You have to prepare too many things to be able to solve your writing tasks.
- F. You cannot solve most of your tasks simply with the contents you regularly practice in the English class.
- G. Others? Which ones? \_\_\_\_\_

**B: Evaluating results with the implementation of the PNLs:**

6. Grade from 1 to 5 your improvements until your first term writing exam, being 1 the lowest and 5 the highest grade:

- A. 1. You feel you have not made any improvements.
- B. 2. You have developed very little ability to write in English
- C. 3. You have made some improvements. You think the strategy is a little bit useful for you.
- D. 4. You have made good improvements in writing. Maybe you can use better the PNLs!
- E. 5. You have made lots of improvements! You think this strategy is very useful for you!

7. Considering how aware you are when using the PNLs, you think that:

- A. This strategy matches your own learning style. It is useful for you.
- B. The strategy is good, but it does not go with your learning style.
- C. The strategy is interesting, but it makes things more complicated to me.
- D. Definitely you do not feel it is important to use it to better your writing.

8. When you were solving your writing exam...

- A. Were you aware (conscious) that you were using the PNLs to develop your composition?
- B. You simply thought of responding your task writing whatever to respond the requirements.
- C. Did you think on the tips that the strategy supplies and used them to write your text?
- D. Never thought of using the PNLs to write your composition.

**C. Evaluating the process of writing descriptive paragraphs:**

9. Are you using the PNLs to solve your writing tasks?

- A. Yes. Always.
- B. From time to time.
- C. Rarely.
- D. You even do not know what it is about
- E. Yes, You know about it but you never use it.

1. Only If your responded A or B in the question 9, respond this question:

Since (If) you are implementing the PNLS in your texts, do you feel you can write better descriptions in an accurate way?

- A. Yes. Always.
  - B. Sometimes it has been very helpful.
  - C. It has been useful in very few opportunities.
  - D. No.
11. In which of the types of descriptive tasks below do you feel you are doing much better?
- A. Describing people.
  - B. Describing places.
  - C. Describing objects.
  - D. Describing activities such as transport, celebrations, commerce, every day activities.
12. How do you consider that you can do better to write better descriptive paragraphs?
- A. Practicing more vocabulary out of context.
  - B. Practicing writing more sentences in the notebook.
  - C. Doing visual activities that allow you remember vocabulary and structures.
  - D. Practicing writing...by writing in a natural way.
  - E. Other.
- Which one? \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix G LEARNING GUIDES ARTIFACTS - IMPLEMENTATION OF PNS**



DEPARTAMENTO DE LENGUAS Y CULTURAS EXTRANJERAS- UNIVERSIDAD DE LA SABANA  
 MASTER IN ELT AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS  
**ENHANCING DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS THROUGH PRACTICING NATURALISTICALLY**  
 IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

**Writing Workshop – Friday August 20<sup>th</sup>  
 Creating a poster about your hometown**

<b>Main goal:</b>	You will invite Jennifer, your key pal and other people to know your hometown.
<b>Competence:</b>	You will tell people about habits in your hometown and will show them images about it.
<b>Contents:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How the people live</li> <li>2. What they eat everyday</li> <li>3. How do they go /travel/ move around the town</li> <li>4. Where they live (houses, apartments, huts, farms)</li> <li>5. Their common activities on labour days and in their free time</li> <li>6. The daily life in that place regarding schools, workplaces, shopping and main attractions.</li> </ol>

**Introduction:**

**Implementation Procedure:**

**Please click on the [voki](#) to listen to Jennifer sending you**

**Activity 1:**

Follow this link to see a poster about one of your teachers’ pretty hometown.

<http://yolk27.glogster.com/wwlcome-to-my-pretty-hometown/>

**Activity 2:**

Now, look at the original text used to create the poster. Check the rhetorical structure of a descriptive text about habits in a town or city. Count the number of paragraphs and the number of ideas in each paragraph. What kinds of paragraphs may you identify in the whole text? What does each of them contain?

*This is my beautiful hometown. Welcome to know it!*

*Hello, this is my hometown! Charalá is a beautiful town in the department of Santander, in the north east of Colombia.*

*In Charalá people wake up very early to go to work, practice sport or study. They don't take the bus or drive because the town is very small. Most people work from 7:00 am until 12:00, and from 2:00 pm until 5:00 pm. Children go to school from 7:00 to 3:00 pm, and they have lunch at school.*

*Charaleños always take black coffee early in the morning, and they usually have a big breakfast: they take changua, caldo, mazamorra, eggs, arepa de maizpelao, envueltos and chocolate with*

*cheese. They punctually have lunch at noon. They always take soup at lunch!!!*

*Most stores in Charalá close at lunch time, when people often take a nap! Stores close early on Sunday, and all the people go to the church at 6 a.m., noon or 6 p.m. The shopping day is on Tuesday, when the farmers come to the town and sell their products in the central market and in the main square.*

*To go to the town, people always drive their car, or go by vans, chiva, truck or jeep. Farmers usually ride their horses or donkeys. At the weekend, most people go to the rivers Taqueza and Pienta, they swim and practice water sports and have a barbecue.*

*In the picture below, my father and my cousins are in the main street of Charalá. Do you like my hometown? Now, show me yours!*



Type of paragraph	Number of paragraphs	Number of ideas	Content
Introductory paragraph	1	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greeting and topic introduction</li> <li>• Location of the place</li> </ul>
Developing paragraphs	4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General everyday activities</li> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Work</li> <li>• School life</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
		5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eating habits</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
		7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shops &amp; commerce</li> <li>• Traditions</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
		7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Details in transport and economy.</li> <li>• Common leisure time activities</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
Closure paragraph	1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal opinion (request and invitation)</li> </ul>

**Writing Project: Creating a poster about your hometown!**

**Procedure:**

1. Select the city or town you are going to describe.
2. Brain storm ideas and write an outline of the content you will write in the poster in the form of a single text.
3. Write the draft and think of the layout (final appearance of your poster). Think and find the pictures, images, videos, or any other elements you want to add to your poster.
4. Reread your draft to improve, complete or modify ideas. Then edit it and hand in to your teacher.
5. You can have peer correction by interchanging your text with your peers in class.
6. Write the formal outline of your poster in the paper below, using the following layout.
7. Finally, take the final version of the text and design your poster in <http://www.glogster.com/>

**Writing Workshop No. 3:  
Creating a poster about your hometown**

**Students' name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Group:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Title			
Introductory paragraph	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greeting and topic introduction</li> <li>• Location of the place.</li> </ul>	<b>General introduction of the town or city</b>
Developing paragraphs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main everyday activities.</li> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Work</li> <li>• School life</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eating habits</li> <li>Time, place.</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shops &amp; commerce.</li> <li>• Traditions</li> </ul>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Details in transport and economy.</li> <li>• Common leisure time activities</li> </ul>	
Closure paragraph	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal opinion</li> <li>• (request and invitation)</li> </ul>	

After feedback, write the final version of the text. Suggestion: design your own poster in <http://www.glogster.com/>

**Appendix H**



DEPARTAMENTO DE LENGUAS Y CULTURAS EXTRANJERAS- UNIVERSIDAD DE LA SABANA

MASTER IN ELT AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

**ENHANCING DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPHS THROUGH PRACTICING NATURALISTICALLY  
IMPLEMENTATION STAGE**

**Writing Workshop No. 10– Fourteenth Week October 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>nd</sup>**

**Write Jenny inviting her to eat your favourite recipe.**

**Last Stage: Implementing the Practicing Naturalistically Learning Strategy**

Main goal	To write others how to cook your favorite recipes.
Competence	You will describe your favourite recipe.
Contents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Countable and uncountable nouns / Quantifiers and containers.</li> <li>2. Vocabulary related to foods, meals, kitchenware, dinnerware and cooking verbs.</li> <li>3. How much and how many.</li> </ol>
Sub-competences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the imperative mode to describe cooking processes.</li> <li>• Count and tell both countable and uncountable quantities.</li> <li>• Express volume and capacity measures about food items.</li> <li>• Use sequence linkers to present the steps of a process.</li> <li>• Ask and provide information regarding quantities.</li> </ul>

**Implementation Procedure:**

Jenny sent you a message telling she is happy about her soon arrival and she wants to eat the special typical Colombian recipes you have invited her to eat. Please, describe your favourite Colombian recipe:

Students' name: \_\_\_\_\_

Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix I Data Collection Tool – Post-Stage Questionnaire

### Enhancing Descriptive Paragraphs through Practicing Naturalistically Group 2 – Implementation of the Practicing Naturalistically Cognitive Learning Strategy Final Questionnaire (Survey) No. 3 for the Students

November 18<sup>th</sup> / 2010

Dear learner,

You are ready to complete your first level English course at the Foreign Languages and Cultures Department at La Sabana University. You were trained on the use of Practicing Naturalistically with the purpose of helping you to improve your writing skills. Please take 10 minutes to read and respond the following survey, marking in one square with an **X**, according to your personal considerations. When you do not feel satisfied with the options presented, use the lines to provide the necessary information.

#### A: How you understood the *Practicing Naturalistically* Learning Strategy:

1. Having Jennifer, an English speaker who does not speak Spanish, to practice writing in English, was
  - A. Very useful and interesting.
  - B. Somehow useful.
  - C. Not useful at all.
  - D. Neither useful nor interesting at all.
  - E. You do not know as you never used the strategy.
  
2. When you were Practicing Naturalistically, you found the following advantages:
  - A. I could apply my English language knowledge immediately by writing a real message to someone.
  - B. I felt I was really communicating with someone.
  - C. I could express ideas related to my everyday life and my own interests.
  - D. I could use the language and vocabulary that I was learning in the English classes.
  - E. I could organize my ideas in a way that was easy to follow when writing.
  - F. I could increase my creativity, even though I was suggested to write a specific type of text.
  - G. Others? What? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. During the last term, your teacher let you use PN by yourself. Were you able to use the strategy?
  - A. Yes. In all the writing tasks. I was very aware about expressing my ideas clearly because, otherwise, Jennifer would have not understood me.
  - B. Yes. However, I did not use it all the time.
  - C. Yes. Although I did not notice when I was practicing naturalistically. I simply tried to solve a writing task.
  - D. I simply tried to solve the writing task but did not think about the strategy.
  - E. I never understood the strategy. It was very complicated for me.
  
4. Now that you learnt to practice naturalistically, you can conclude that
  - A. There is no relation between the strategy and the manner to improve my writing skill.
  - B. Practicing Naturalistically was very complicated and overwhelming for improving my writing.
  - C. I do not need this strategy to practice writing. I can get better results effortless.
  - D. Practicing Naturalistically is time consuming and it demands too much effort for my level.
  - E. I have to prepare too many things before being able to solve my writing tasks.
  - F. Others? Which ones? \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Writing messages to an English speaker is a useful learning strategy to improve your writing skills because

- A. It is meaningful: I find it practical writing messages to someone who will learn about me through English.
- B. Is practical: I am developing writing skills such as coherence and cohesion because I need to send a clear message to someone who will only understand me in English.
- C. Is encouraging: I need to effort myself to be understood, so I have to do the best possible writing with logical sense, appropriate vocabulary and grammar structures, and following an adequate sequence.
- D. Is useless. I can write any type of text if I am simply taught its formal structure.

**B: Evaluating results with the implementation of Practicing Naturalistically:**

6. Evaluating your improvements along the process, what do you think about your results in writing using PN?

- A. I feel I did not make any improvements.
- B. I developed very little ability to write in English.
- C. I made some improvements. The strategy was a little bit useful for me.
- D. I made good improvements in writing. Maybe I will use Practicing Naturalistically in more contexts and other types of texts!
- E. I made lots of improvements! I think this strategy is very useful for me!

7. Considering how aware you were when using PN, you think that:

- A. This strategy matched my own learning style. It is useful for me.
- B. The strategy was good for bettering my writing abilities, though it did not match my learning style.
- C. The strategy was interesting, but it made things more complicated to me.
- D. Definitely I did not feel it was important to use it to better my writing abilities.

**C. Evaluating the process of writing descriptive paragraphs:**

8. How do you understand the relation between Practicing Naturalistically (PN) and the structure of descriptive paragraphs?

- A. Plan the solution to a task, write a main idea and support it all through several paragraphs with single sentences.
- B. Write descriptive sentences about people, places or events, to conform a final text.
- C. Read the task and write the response with descriptive sentences in different paragraphs.
- D. Read the task; plan the response to the receiver: formulate a main idea and develop it with descriptive sentences written in an organized and coherent manner as a whole message.
- E. Write descriptive sentences with the vocabulary and structures learnt, and join them in a format.

9. Regarding the form of the written text (descriptive paragraphs), in the parenthesis before the sentences, mark from 1 to 7 the order in which you consider Practicing Naturalistically, as a strategy, should be applied:

- A.( ) Write descriptive sentences that support the main idea.
- B.( ) Polish the draft so that the receiver understands the whole message and the sender's intention.
- C.( ) Structure the text so that there is an introduction, a development and a closure.
- D.( ) Read an original message and plan how to respond it.
- E.( ) Organize the text so that there is coherence in the message, a logical order and sequence of elements described, and cohesion among the sentences.
- F.( ) Write a main idea related to the element(s) that need to be described.
- G.( ) Consider the element (s) that should be described.

10. In which of the types of descriptive tasks below do you feel you are doing much better?

- A. Describing people.
- B. Describing places.
- C. Describing objects.
- D. Describing activities such as transport, celebrations, commerce, every day activities.
- E. All of them. I feel confident about the language I have acquired by writing naturalistically.

**Appendix J Data Collection Tools–Students Authentic Writings**

Dear Jenny,

Hello! My name is Xxx.



I am 26 years old and I'm from Cali. It is a beautiful city and it's has a nice climate. I like it very much.

But, I'm live in Tabio now. Because I came to live with my boy friend,



We are living in a country house and we are very happy.

For that reason I go to La Sabana University, where I take English class with my teacher Jenny and my classmate Alberto, they are very special persons and they are my friends.



I do not speak English but, I would like to do it someday.

My favorite activities are: skating, cycling, reading and go to the movies on weekends.

This is my life...

Now, I want to know more about you, because I know you as an excellent teacher.

Love,

Xxx!





*Hello my dear Jenny*

*Today I want to tell you how my day begins or better how that people! I get up early everyday because I have to go to the university. My first class is at seven o'clock. This is English. It is really wonderful to be in this room, because I learn new things every day.*

*My teacher is nice and friendly, she has got very much patient and the best of all is that she does the class very cheerful. My classmates also are great. I want to talk to you of each one of them. They are thirteen women and only five men. Their names and like are:*

*XXX and XXX they like playing volleyball, XXX and XXX they like to dance, XXX and XXX they like eating a lot, XXX and XXX they like listening to music, XXX likes reading and XXX hates it, XXX likes playing on the computer, XXX likes to go shopping and XXX loves the chocolate. XXX and XXX they like sports, XXX and XXX they like to travel on vacations but to different places.*



*XXX loves the city because he enjoys very much going to dance with his wife. He is twenty eight years old. He is married. He is average height. He has beautiful brown eyes and he has spiky hair. He is good looking. He is really nice and friendly. He doesn't like shouting.*



*In other occasion I wrote to you of my best friend XXX but I did not tell you that he loves going to Santamarta this is a beach in Colombia. He loves this place because there he met his girlfriend. He always goes to place on vacation.*

*And XXX says that he likes women very much... I don't know why he says this, if he has girlfriend!!! XXX is eighteen years old. He is average height, his face is round and he is not very good looking but he is cheerful and extroverted. He loves his car and he likes to have many friends. He hates doing homeworks. He is fatal but I love him as all of them.*

*We are all in different and semesters but every day in the morning we gather because wanting to learn English.*

*In other occasion talk to you more of them. I also like me that you talk to me of your classmate and the best of all them.*

*Fondly...*

*XXXX*