

Champion Teachers Peru: Stories of Exploratory Action Research

Edited by Paula Rebolledo, Deborah Bullock and Richard Smith



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Foreword

Samantha Lanaway,
British Council Country Director Peru



Engagement with English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals is one of British Council's principal activities worldwide, and Peru is no exception. In late 2015, we worked hand in hand with the Ministry of Education and the National Competitiveness Council to disseminate the National English Policy in many regions of Peru. This gave us the opportunity to dialogue with thousands of English teaching professionals and industry specialists, all doing important work to enhance the opportunities of Peruvians and the development of Peruvian industry through the strengthening of English language teaching and learning.

In late 2016, our first approach to a project called Champion Teachers was rooted in the principle of celebrating excellence in ELT in Peru. Champion Teachers was not new to us. It had originated in British Council's Chile operation, where for four years English teachers had been enhancing their professional skills in the classroom by exploring their challenges and designing action research that would enable them to implement positive change in their lessons. Our first call for participation in Peru shed light into the strategies that teachers are using in their classrooms to improve the delivery of their lessons, in response to various challenges that are part of day-to-day teaching practice in multiple teaching contexts. The response to our first call was overwhelming, and resulted in recognition of teaching excellence for twenty teachers from 13 Regions. This recognition was an important celebration of individual professional excellence, but it was also symbolic of the deep, informed and creative work that takes place in classrooms across the country every day. This laid the foundation for the Exploratory Action Research (EAR) framework that we implemented the following year.

In 2017, British Council in Peru joined forces with the team in Chile to expand and deepen our programme. Thanks to this joint effort we became better acquainted with the work of Dr Richard Smith from the University of Warwick, as well as the work of his counterpart in Chile, Dr Paula Rebolledo. Their work, as well as that of the country teams in Chile and Peru and experienced EAR mentors, has been pivotal in the programme's success.

EAR allows teachers in Peru to implement change in the classroom based on a professional, academic approach that suits their contexts and challenges. It empowers them as agents of transformation in education, taking a main role in strengthening the quality of education and shaping the future of Peru through their work. Empowered teachers foster children's creative, critical and innovative minds, which is essential in the development of prosperous, inclusive and democratic nations.

This collection of reports is the result of rich, diverse and dynamic cross-cultural collaboration across many regions of Peru and Chile. We have chosen a selection of experiences from 2017 which we feel paint a meaningful picture of what these Exploratory Action Research journeys have involved.

We would like to express our appreciation to the teachers from across Peru that trusted in and committed themselves to this initiative. Finally, we also want to express our deepest gratitude to those that support the programme in multiple ways: Head teachers, Ministry of Education officials, and the Peru associate of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL Peru).

For more information about the Champion Teachers programme in Peru, see: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/champion-teachers-peru>

Introduction

Paula Rebolledo, Richard Smith and Ana María Hurtado

Initial Exploratory Action Research workshop in Lima, August 2017.

Sitting at the centre of the group from left to right: Ana María Hurtado, Paula Rebolledo and Claudio Puentes



The Champion Teachers Peru programme

The Champion Teachers (CT) programme started in Chile in 2013 as a professional development initiative conceived by British Council Chile and supported by the Ministry of Education which aimed to empower teachers by promoting autonomy and reflective practice through teacher-research. The approach involved a one-year mentoring process (later reduced to five months) for in-service English teachers to engage in Exploratory Action Research (EAR).¹

Since then, the CT programme has gone from strength to strength. In Chile, it is now in its sixth year with a total of 150 teachers having completed an EAR project. Due to its innovative nature and evident positive impact on professional development and practice, the British Council has recently been expanding the programme's reach to Peru and still further up the Pacific coast, to Colombia and Mexico.

In Peru, the Champion Teachers programme started up in 2016 as an initiative focused on inviting teachers to share accounts of how they approached challenging situations through classroom interventions.² In 2017, however, the British Council offices in Chile and Peru embarked on the design of a more ambitious binational project to support Exploratory Action Research projects according to the timeline (above right). This initiative aimed at strengthening and expanding teacher-research capacity in English language teaching in Peru and Chile and generating a community of teacher-researchers in both Pacific Alliance countries. In 2018, further funds were allocated for the expansion of the Champion Teachers programme once again, to the other Pacific Alliance countries, Colombia and Mexico.

The 2017–2018 EAR-focused Champion Teachers programme in Peru began with an initial three-day workshop designed by Paula Rebolledo (academic advisor and senior mentor) in cooperation with Richard Smith, and carried out by Paula with Claudio Puentes (a Chilean Champion Teacher). A total of 50 English teachers participated in the workshop and, after a selection process, 30 teachers were mentored to carry out their Exploratory Action Research projects according to the timeline above right.

Since the CT programme in Peru was in its first year, experienced former Champion Teachers who had already worked as near-peer mentors in the CT programme in Chile, were selected to mentor their Peruvian colleagues. After two orientation sessions about the Peruvian context, these mentors supported teachers on the basis of their own previous EAR experience and via reflective dialogues online and by telephone, where active listening and constant feedback were essential. Near-peer mentors were in turn supported by the senior mentor while teachers carried out their EAR.

Month	Week	Stage
Sept	1	Notification/Permissions
	2	Initial contact with mentors
	3	Narrowing topic
	4	Refining research questions
Oct	5	Planning exploration
	6	Exploration
	7	Exploration
	8	Analysis
Nov	9	Planning action
	10	Implementing change
	11	Implementing change
	12	Implementing change
	13	Implementing change
Dec	14	Evaluating
	15	Analysis
	16	Reflection
	17	Reflection
Jan	18	Poster preparation
	19	Presentation

One of the objectives of the programme in its current form is to build a community of Champion Teachers across the Pacific Alliance countries. For this to begin, teachers gathered together in Santiago in Chile, in January 2018, for a final reporting session, where they had the opportunity to meet their mentors (in many cases this was their first face-to-face meeting) as well as to interact with Champion Teachers from the sister programme in Chile.



Victor Zamora (Champion Teacher from Chile) presenting his work to his Peruvian colleagues.

¹ For more information about the first year of the programme, see 'Teacher-research as CPD: a project with Chilean secondary school teachers' by Richard Smith, Tom Connelly and Paula Rebolledo (2014), in Hayes, D. (ed.) *Innovations in the Continuing Professional Development of English Language Teachers*, London: British Council, pp. 111–128. For more on the overall approach, see 'Exploratory action research: why, what, and where from?' by Richard Smith (2015), in Dikilitas, K., Smith, R. and Trotman, W (eds). *Teacher-researchers in Action*. Faversham: IATEFL, pp. 37–45.

² For more information see *Champion Teachers Peru 2016: Stories of Successful Interventions in the EFL Classroom*. London: British Council (2017).

English teaching in Peru

To understand the context where these teachers work, it is important to indicate that, except for a few pilot schools, English is not taught in primary public schools in Peru. In 82 percent of public high schools, students are exposed to roughly 80 minutes of English per week. Only 18 percent of public high schools have more than two hours of English language teaching per week.

In this challenging context, it is possible to say that the teachers whose work is presented in the present book are outstanding, resilient and innovative professionals. They work in contrasting socio-economic and cultural contexts where gradual implementation of a national bilingual policy called “English, Gateway to the World” (“Inglés Puertas al Mundo”) is taking place.

Since this policy was launched in Peru in 2015, EFL teachers in public schools have had access to enhanced experiences of continuous professional development, as well as to a learning platform and materials which aim to support the development of communicative skills according to the CEFR standards. The Champion Teachers programme is consistent with these initiatives but also differs from them in the sense that it places teachers at the centre of the decision-making process to solve the pressing problems that arise in their classrooms. It is context-specific and it empowers teachers to become explorers of their classrooms, reflective practitioners and creators of knowledge.

The purpose of this book



A book of stories from the first two years of the Chilean CT programme, *Champion Teachers: Stories of Exploratory Action Research* was published in 2016, for the purpose of providing examples of EAR to other teachers.³ As such, it has been used in orientation workshops for mentor groups not only in Chile and Peru but also as far afield as

India and Nepal, where it has been used in the context of the British Council Aptis Action Research and Mentoring Schemes there. It was also used as main material for a global ‘Electronic Village Online’ experience (classroombasedresearch.weebly.com) in both 2017 and 2018.



In his review of the 2016 book (in *ELT Journal* 72/1, January 2018), Gabriel Díaz Maggioli indicates that, in his view, it provides evidence of “a model that is both contextually relevant, and intuitively appealing to teachers, both veteran and novice. In this sense, we can say that it is a truly innovative endeavour, one that should be communicated more extensively”. The original *Stories of Exploratory Action Research* book has also served as linked material for *A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research*, published in January 2018.⁴

The first *Stories* book, then, has proven its usefulness, and we hope that the present book will serve a similarly useful function for teachers around the world, even though it comes out of a particular context and will be especially useful in providing illustrative cases for teachers interested in teacher-research in Peru, both within and outside the developing CT programme there (see above).

Before we turn to the stories themselves, let us highlight two ways in which this book is different from the first (Chilean) *Stories of Exploratory Action Research* publication. Firstly, more specific information is given about actual data collection methods and tools used by teachers, such as peer-observation guidelines and questionnaires. Serving as examples for other teachers who wish to carry out similar research, the tools used have been included at the end of the different stories in the form of appendices. Secondly, questions for reflection have been provided at the end of each story to help the reader – alone or in discussion with others – to consider more deeply the issues that prompted the stories, the data collection methods used, the interventions carried out and/or what has been gained by means of the research.

³ *Champion Teachers: Stories of Exploratory Action Research*, edited by Paula Rebolledo, Richard Smith and Deborah Bullock, London: British Council (2016).

⁴ *A Handbook for Exploratory Action Research*, by Richard Smith and Paula Rebolledo, London: British Council (2018)

How the teachers wrote the stories and how we edited them

The stories here are all based originally on oral presentations from posters and written narratives submitted as final reports in January 2018, at the time when Champion Teachers from Peru met with counterparts from Chile.⁵

We made a selection from the written reports, and this initiated a process of re-writing in the third person to achieve consistency throughout. The editing process involved asking teachers for clarification and/or more information and asking them to confirm or counter the changes we suggested making, several times. We also asked the report authors to provide supporting images and illustrations. Despite being written in the third person, the stories should of course be viewed very much as 'belonging' to their original authors, given their basis in teachers' own oral and written reporting.

The stories

This publication contains ten stories edited and selected from the narratives teachers wrote at the end of their EAR experiences. The ten stories presented here represent a wide array of realities characteristic of the teaching of English in Peru. The teachers work in regular public schools, public schools for high achievers and private institutions in villages, rural towns and big cities on the coast, in the highlands and in the jungle of Peru. Some teachers (for instance, Noelia, chapter 8) chose as the topic for their EAR a situation that simply needed further understanding, but most wanted to understand an issue for purposes of improvement. The motivation for choosing a particular topic for research is presented at the beginning of each story. Interestingly, despite the variety of regions and teaching contexts represented here, most teachers focused on exploring language skills, primarily writing (five stories focused on this skill) followed by speaking (two teachers) and reading skills (one teacher).

⁵ For more on the kind of writing process engaged in (from presentation to written text), see pp. 120–123 of 'By teachers for teachers': innovative, teacher-friendly publishing of practitioner research' by Richard Smith, Deborah Bullock, Paula Rebolledo and Andrea Robles López (2016), in *English Language Teacher Education and Development (ELTED) Journal* 20: 116–125.



1	Teaching and learning in a safer environment	Angela Huanca	Moquegua
2	Fostering better writing skills	Francisco Butrón	Toquepala
3	Boosting students' speaking	Gabriela Paredes	Lima
4	Developing writing skills in young students	Gregoria Quintana	Lima
5	Reading 4 ur life	Robert Carvajal	Oxapampa
6	Developing students' super writing skills	Katia Yábar	Arequipa
7	Promoting effective use of mobile phones through a class contract	Abdías Román	Lima
8	Writing on the go	Noelia Alvarez	Arequipa
9	The confidence to speak	Alex Pariguana	Arequipa
10	Improving writing skills through scaffolding and collaborative writing activities	Roxana Perca	Tacna

The first story belongs to Angela Huanca. She works in a public school in the south of Peru and, unlike her colleagues who decided to explore language skills, she felt she needed to pay closer attention to students' behaviour. This issue was important for Angela because she experienced disruptions and verbal aggression in her classroom, something she was determined to address.

In chapter 2, Francisco Butrón describes his efforts to boost students' writing abilities. Even though he had already noticed some weaknesses in his students' writing, in his story Francisco describes his exploration as an eye-opening experience where he learned the value of researching his practice and the important role students can have in this process.

The next story (in chapter 3) is based on Gabriela Paredes's exploratory action research with students in a language centre. She focused her research on her students' reluctance to speak. After understanding the situation further, Gabriela came up with an innovative idea to improve the situation. A sample of the materials used by Gabriela is provided in the chapter.

Gregoria Quintana (chapter 4) is the only teacher in the book working with primary students. Her colourful story, which focuses on the development of writing, is filled with pictures and samples of her students' work and provides some insights into how essential her students' voices were, regardless of their young age, in helping her to reflect and look for solutions.

Returning us to secondary level, Robert Carvajal (chapter 5) presents an account which focuses on reading, and particularly on supporting reading for an exam. After looking at students' mock tests, Robert felt the need to know why students underperformed in one particular

section of the exam. Findings from his exploration were revealing about his teaching and his students' learning.

The story in chapter 6 is by Katia Yábar, a teacher from Arequipa. Katia was concerned about her students' writing abilities, particularly after she discovered they felt frustrated when they had to write. Katia then decided to search for more answers before deciding on an action plan.

Abdías Román (chapter 7) started his research with concerns about students' behaviour in relation to the use of mobile phones in class. Whereas mobiles phones at first appeared to be a distraction in Abdías' classes, he came to learn why and how they could be used for learning purposes.

Noelia Alvarez (chapter 8) started her research wondering about writing as a language skill. Her intentions were not to address a problematic issue related to writing but mainly to comprehend how she was teaching it. Noelia learned a great deal in the process, particularly the value of relinquishing control and allowing students to become more autonomous.

The final two stories deal with issues arising in contexts where students are nearing the end of their secondary education or are on university courses. In Chapter 9, we see how Alex Pariguana began his research from a feeling of having failed one of his students and how he used this experience to understand better how to enhance students' confidence when speaking. Roxana Perca (chapter 10), who works in a similar context in Tacna, centred her research on essay-writing after noticing students had difficulties with their assignments. Having engaged in research previously, Roxana's final reflections reveal how she came to view the research process in a different light as a result of this EAR experience.

And the future?

As we write, the Champion Teachers programme in Peru is entering its second year. Due to the experience gained in the first year, this time three Peruvian Champion Teachers from the 2017 cohort – whose stories are included in this collection – were selected as near-peer mentors for their colleagues. Two of them acted as co-trainers with Paula Rebolledo during the two-day initial workshop carried out in Lima and Arequipa in May–June 2018. As in the Champion Teachers programme in Chile, we believe this ‘raising-up’ of former CTs to become mentors helps enormously with the sustainability of the programme and provides one of the reasons why the Chilean CT programme is already in its sixth year. Similar actions are being taken to extend the CT programme and EAR concepts across the Pacific Alliance to include Colombia and Mexico as well, starting in July and August 2018, respectively.

Note on permissions

All the teachers have seen and approved the final versions of their stories, and are happy for them to be included in this collection. In all stories but two, written permission was gained from both students and parents following British Council protocols for use of the photographs of students supplied by teachers. In the two cases where permission could not be gained, students’ faces have not been shown and, in one case, students’ personal information has been blurred out. Teachers’ real names have been used as well as the names of their schools as they have been authorised to include these.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Chilean mentors – Carla Barra, Lorena Muñoz, Karina Vásquez – and Claudio Puentes for his participation in the first workshop. From British Council Peru, the following people have played a leading role: Samantha Lanaway, Ralph Grayson, Ana María Hurtado, Giselle Higa – and from British Council Chile: Katherine Hutter, Isabel González, Deborah Sepúlveda, Pamela Sepúlveda and Gabriel Pena. We also thank the Ministry of Education in Peru (MINEDU) and IATEFL Peru for their continuous support and commitment to the Champion Teachers Programme. Finally, and most importantly, full acknowledgement is due to teacher-researcher-author contributors to this book: Angela Huanca, Francisco Butrón, Gabriela Paredes, Gregoria Quintana, Robert Carvajal, Katia Yábar, Abdías Román, Noelia Alvarez, Alex Pariguana and Roxana Perca.

1. Teaching and learning in a safer environment

Angela Huanca
Moquegua, Peru



The puzzle

Some time before the start of this exploration, Angela had experienced trouble managing one of her 4th grade classes – students behaved disruptively and made inappropriate comments in class. As a result, she had implemented different strategies and over time learners gained routines and in general did the work. However, they didn't seem to be enjoying the lessons and their behaviour still wasn't acceptable or conducive to learning and teaching. So, for this research project, Angela chose to focus on the importance of creating a safe environment to promote learning with these students. At the start there were 25 learners, but later two dropped out, and another two were moved to a different class.

To explore the situation further Angela came up with four questions:

- What do I mean by 'safe environment'?
- Why do I think students behave aggressively?
- How do my students feel about the class environment?
- How is it affecting their learning?

The research tools and how she used them



To clarify what she meant by a 'safe environment' Angela kept a journal and regularly made notes on what she perceived as contributing to or interfering with a safe classroom environment. During the first lesson, she identified, for example, that one student was more involved than the

others, while another insulted his classmates. However, she felt that she needed a more detailed description of such incidents and that she was focussing on the students and not enough on herself as the teacher, so, to learn more about her own performance and behaviour, on the 2nd day she also made an audio recording of the lesson using her cell phone.

To get a more objective perspective of what was really going on and above all to shed some light on why she thought her students behaved aggressively, she asked an experienced colleague to observe her class. She designed a peer observation guide that focused on the students' behaviour (see Appendix 1) and included a diagram of the classroom seating arrangement.

Finally and importantly, to find out what her students felt about the classroom environment, she designed a questionnaire (see Appendix 2). She wanted to know if they noticed such incidents, how they felt about them and how they were affecting their learning. She was also interested to know if they felt she was taking sufficient action when such incidents occurred.

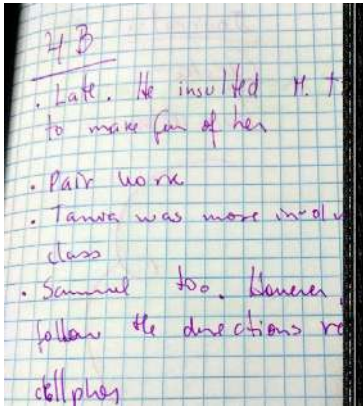


Angela Huanca works at Almirante Miguel Grau Seminario, which is the secondary school with the highest number of students in the Moquegua Region. Most of her students are 4th graders, aged 15 to 17 years and many struggle with family and financial problems. Some of the students work or assume responsibilities such as taking care of their younger siblings. Since their parents are out most of the time because of their jobs, these students are home alone (or with siblings) most of the time. This situation undermines the students' performance in terms of learning and behaviour.

Findings

The findings were revealing.

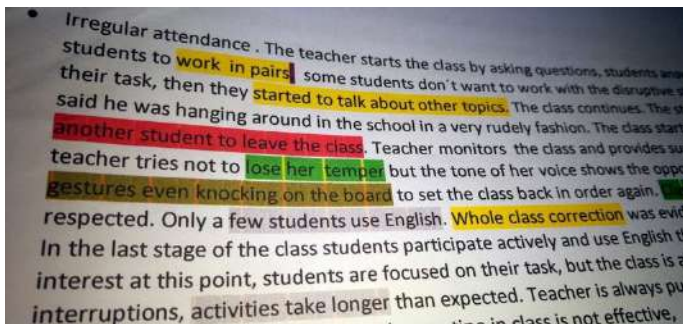
What the class audio recording and journal revealed



From the journal notes and audio recording, Angela felt the students' disruptive behaviour threatened the stability of the class.

During the recorded class the lesson objective was not achieved, due to indiscipline. There was

evidence in the recording of verbal aggression among students: threats, insults, and inappropriate language. There seemed to be no genuine motivation from students to learn and Angela was always pushing them to get the work done. The disruptive behaviour not only affected the students, but also Angela, who spent valuable minutes trying to set the class back in order. What Angela heard in the recording was so revealing that she hardly recognised herself and this made her reflect a lot! She thought neither her students nor she deserved such an atmosphere!



Her journal notes revealed the same. During the first class Angela noted:

“students were late to class, obscene language was used, instructions had to be repeated many times, they insulted each other, constant class interruptions, threats”.

During the second lesson, Angela wrote:

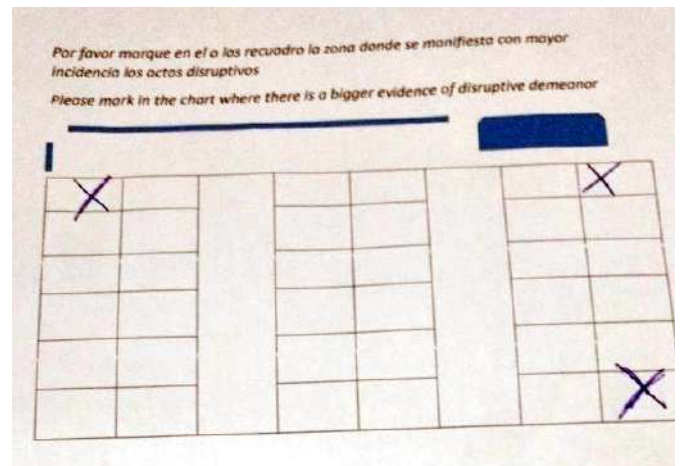
“pair work was evident, students showed rejection against disruptive students, students easily lost their focus, some students were late, students interrupted the class, verbal aggressions, teacher-centred class, there was an evident difficulty to set the class in order. Frequent class interruptions, few students use English, whole class correction, class environment improvement during the last stage of the class. The class interruptions made the activities last longer than expected”.

Her colleague's perceptions

Interestingly, her colleague observed no such verbal aggression or major disruption, although she did make some interesting observations regarding Angela's monitoring of the group. During feedback she reported:

I don't see major disruptive incidents, however, you tend to look to one side of the class and call the same students.

And three specific areas of concern (where disruption occurred) were marked.



Other relevant points included:

- Class routines were sometimes followed.
- Students frequently paid attention and followed instructions.
- Students frequently finished the tasks in the given time.
- The teacher frequently used strategies for class management.
- The teacher frequently got everybody on board.
- The teacher sometimes walked around the class, especially one specific side of the class.
- Teacher talking time was 50%.
- During the observation no verbal aggression was evident.

She recommended that Angela should monitor and interact with the whole class and not leave one side unattended.

Students' feelings about the class environment

What Angela's students reported in the questionnaires was very worrying. All students reported that verbal aggression was occurring, either 'sometimes' (15), 'almost always' (6) or 'always' (3). She also found that only 3 students 'knew and observed the class rules'. The majority (14) reported 'sometimes' following them. And while 23 out of 24 students reported feeling respected – 13 'almost always' and 10 'some of the time' – to Angela, these results were not satisfactory – this didn't constitute what she perceived as a safe environment, particularly in light of the high incidence of verbal aggression.

Classroom environment and learning

The responses concerning how the environment was impacting on learning were also discouraging. Only 3 students reported feeling safe and unthreatened. 12 reported feeling 'almost always' safe and unthreatened, and 9 'sometimes'.

Similar results were reported concerning Angela taking action against acts of indiscipline or respect. 3 reported this 'always' happening, but the majority said that she 'almost always' or only 'sometimes' responded to such acts.

Sadly, all students reported that they experienced interruptions and 16 students claimed the classroom environment was affecting their learning in a negative way.

Conclusions

These findings helped Angela answer her exploratory questions. What she meant by a safe environment was a class where students are able to learn without violence. This was not happening. Instead, there was evidence of threats, insults and inappropriate language which was affecting not only the students but also Angela, the teacher. There was also clear evidence that it was taking time to get the class back in order because of the frequent interruptions. This was affecting the students' learning in terms of difficulties with focusing on the task at hand and the time taken to get the students' attention. She knew she had to be more consistent with the class routine and implementing and internalising the class rules. Her colleague's observations also revealed that she tended to focus on one side of the class, so not all students got her attention or had the opportunity to participate.

Angela recognised and understood that learning is more likely to happen when there is a safe environment. Students and teachers are the ones to promote it, and then enjoy the pleasure of learning and educating.

So, based on her findings and conclusions, she asked herself:

What can I do to promote a safer environment? What can I do to encourage my students to promote a safer environment and therefore make learning happen?

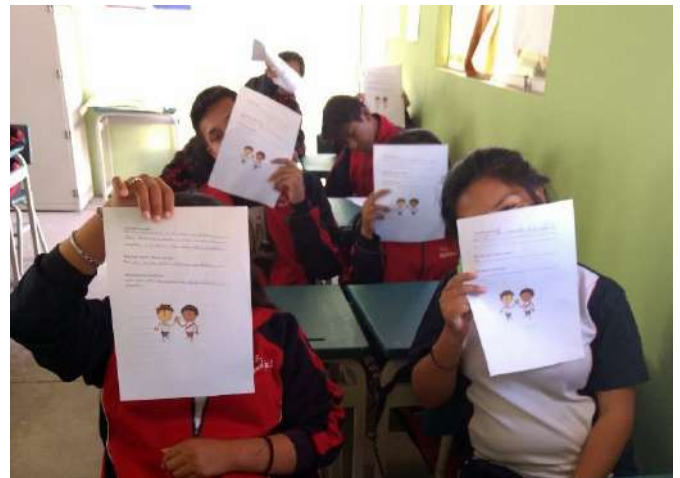
Action plan

Angela planned and implemented the following activities:

Reviewing, ranking and enforcing classroom rules

Students were aware of the class rules and some followed some of them; however, these needed to be reinforced. So, Angela asked students, in groups, to select the three most important rules and explain the reasons for their choice.

Students were also asked to think about and write what their personal contribution would be to making their class a safer place to learn. At the beginning of the next two classes, students re-read and reflected on their commitment, and then again when a disruptive incident took place.





Attending to the whole class

Since Angela tended to focus her attention on one side of the class and leave some students unattended, she marked specific spots around the room to remind herself to monitor the whole class.

To do it she pasted orange paper circles on the desks and walls.

She also prepared a 'glass of fairness', a glass filled with popsicle sticks with the students' names written on them. At the beginning of the class, when reviewing students' previous knowledge, and at the end, when wrapping up the lesson, instead of asking for volunteers she randomly chose one popsicle stick from the glass to give all the students the opportunity to participate and be engaged. This gave her students a sense of anticipation and made them attentive.



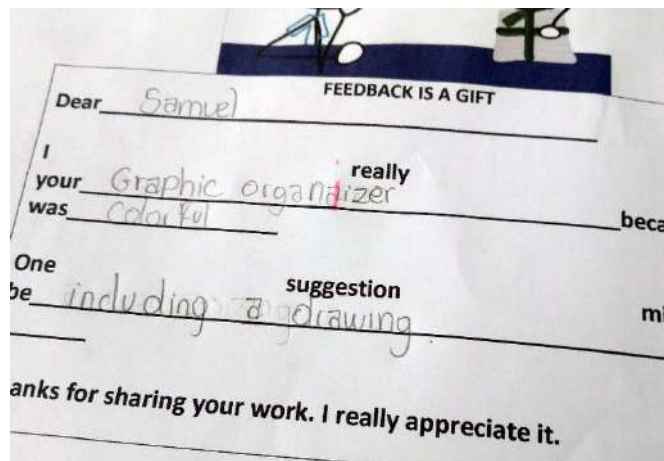
Using non-verbal signs



To get the teacher's attention, Angela encouraged the use of non-verbal signs, e.g. students should raise their right hands rather than call out. Similarly, Angela would raise her right hand to get the students' attention.

Promoting respect

Students in this class needed to learn how to respect each other and appreciate each other's work and of course have the language to do so. Angela shared with them the concept of 'feedback as a gift'. She made sure that students understood the sole purpose of feedback was to help them learn.



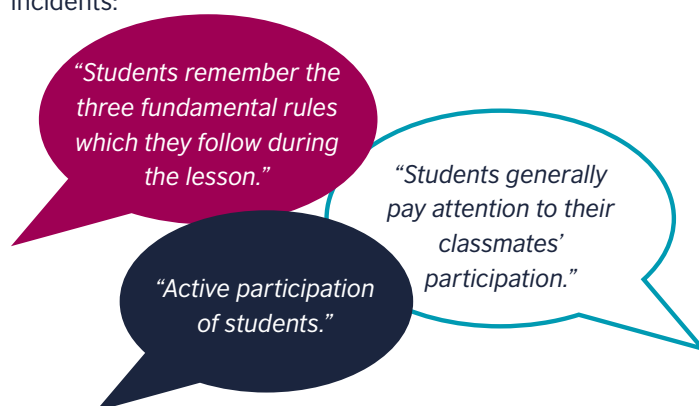
In pairs, they gave each other feedback on writing and speaking activities. To support them, Angela created a frame which included key vocabulary to use. Prompts included positive comments, and suggestions on how to improve. Students then practised using the worksheet to give feedback orally. Learners were also given the opportunity to thank their partner for sharing their work with them. Eventually, students were able to give each other feedback with no support whatsoever.

What were the outcomes?

Angela implemented these actions over the course of six lessons and then evaluated the intervention using a second questionnaire (see Appendix 3) to be answered anonymously by the students, notes from her journal, and a peer observation, this time by the pedagogical coordinator of the school.

What was observed

According to Angela's colleague, the environment was safe. Interactions were respectful and there were no violent incidents:



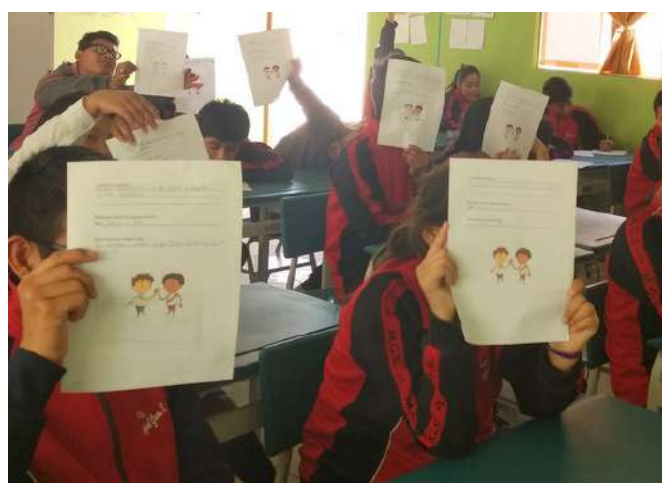
Angela's intervention in terms of constant reminders of the class rules and getting students to commit to them personally kept them engaged. Moreover, students showed confidence and a willingness to participate using the language provided and the majority used an appropriate tone of voice. Students gave each other feedback with respect.



Students' responses to the questionnaire

At the time of the final questionnaire, the number of students in the class was 21. Student responses indicated that the majority of students (15) had learned to appreciate their classmates' achievements. Moreover, the majority of students (14) either 'always' or 'almost always' liked receiving feedback from their peers.

A high number of students (17) also believed that their personal commitment to a safe environment had improved. And finally, students were more aware of their role in maintaining a safe environment – more than half (12) stated that they 'almost always' felt able to improve the classroom atmosphere.



Journal observations

According to Angela's own journal, ranking the class rules and selecting the three most important seemed effective in enabling students to reflect on their role in maintaining a safer environment, and increased their participation.

Angela also noted that getting students' attention by using non-verbal signals and using 'the glass of fairness' were effective strategies to reduce the noise and nominate and engage all the students. Students enjoyed being heard and hearing feedback from their peers, even though giving each other feedback on oral and written work represented a challenge for the students in terms of use of language and expressing appreciation.

Having personal reminders such as the class audio recordings from the first classes and the spots on the wall and desks allowed Angela to monitor more effectively.

All of these actions contributed to a safer environment in which students and Angela could interact respectfully.

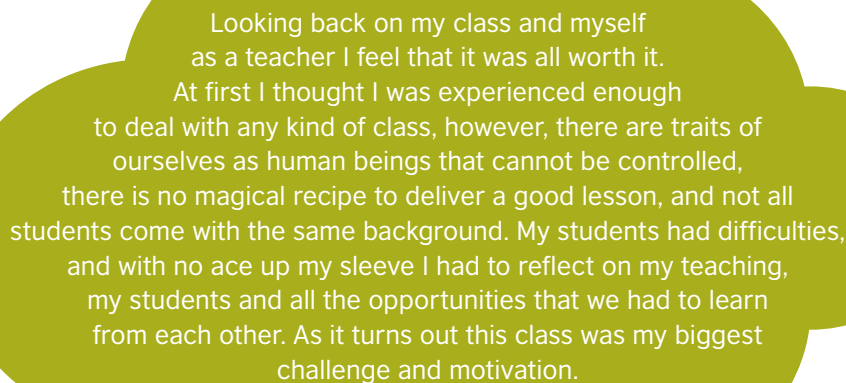
Day 1
During the activity most of the students laughed at the beginning. As the activity was taking place they started to reflect, [and] their laughs became an opportunity to reflect on what was happening in class.

Day 2
Students felt nervous when giving each other feedback – the feedback frame was useful.

Day 3
Students seemed to like the feedback activity; they smiled to each other and supported each other during the activity, students followed their classmates' advice to improve their graphic organisers. Some of them included more drawings or added more colour to their work.

Reflections

At the end of the whole experience, Angela reflected as follows:



Looking back on my class and myself as a teacher I feel that it was all worth it. At first I thought I was experienced enough to deal with any kind of class, however, there are traits of ourselves as human beings that cannot be controlled, there is no magical recipe to deliver a good lesson, and not all students come with the same background. My students had difficulties, and with no ace up my sleeve I had to reflect on my teaching, my students and all the opportunities that we had to learn from each other. As it turns out this class was my biggest challenge and motivation.

And what has Angela learned from this first EAR experience?

“This experience has been one of the most meaningful lessons I have had during my career. I learned to be more patient in terms of not anticipating answers or actions before listening to my students’ needs. I have also learned that it is not necessary to implement complex changes in class to make learning happen. Actually, simple actions like marking a wall, using popsicle sticks or just giving students a means of showing appreciation can go a long way to make a big difference.”

Above all I learned that teachers can do research in class. I don’t need to be an actual researcher to propose solutions or alternatives that might be used by other teachers. Besides, only a teacher can give you true evidence of what you actually need because he or she has lived through all of these experiences. Every teacher is a champion!”

Reflection questions

1. Many teachers have problems with student behaviour and discipline at times. What kind of issues do you have with student behaviour? What have you tried in order to address these issues? Could you try any of the actions Angela implemented, e.g. reviewing and ranking rules with learners, marking spots around the room, a ‘glass of fairness’, promoting respect via peer feedback etc.?
2. Angela used her cell phone to record what was happening during the lesson in addition to keeping a journal, inviting a colleague to observe and a student questionnaire. Which of these do you think gave Angela the most useful information during her exploration? Which of these do you think would be most useful to you if you were to investigate student behaviour in your classroom? Why?

Appendix 1 - Observation Guide

Observer's name _____

Observation date and time _____

Observations	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Frequently
1. Is there a clear routine in the classroom?				
2. How many students don't follow the routine?				
3. Do they pay attention and follow the instructions?				
4. Are the instructions completed in time?				
5. The teacher uses strategies for class management.				
6. Does the teacher walk around the class?				
7. Does the teacher get everyone on board?				
8. What is the estimated amount of time when the teacher speaks?	100%	75%	50%	25%
9. Is there any verbal aggression among the students?				
10. Does the teacher give positive reinforcement during the class?				
11. Does the class development get disrupted by some of the students' behaviour?				
How:				
12. How do the students react to verbal aggression and disruptive behaviour?				
13. Are the activities carried out individually?				
14. Are the activities carried out in pairs?				
15. Are the learning activities carried out in groups?				

Appendix 2 - Initial Questionnaire

Dear students, this questionnaire is meant to obtain your opinions regarding the class atmosphere.

Please answer the following items with an (x) in the blank that mostly reflects your opinion.

Age: _____

Gender: Male () Female ()

Date: ____ / ____ /2017

Feelings about classroom environment	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
1. I feel respected inside the class				
2. I know and follow the class rules				
3. My classmates and I respect each other				
4. There is some verbal aggression in my classroom				

Class environment and learning	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
1. The atmosphere allows me to get along with security during classes. I don't feel intimidated				
2. My teacher takes the necessary actions regarding acts of indiscipline or disrespect				
3. I am able to listen to my classes without any interruptions				
4. My overall performance is better when I work individually				
5. My overall performance is better when I work in pairs				
6. My overall performance is better when I work in groups				
7. I feel the classroom atmosphere is affecting my learning				

What would you like to improve regarding the environment? Why?

Comments and /or suggestions:

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix 3 - Second Questionnaire

Dear students: This questionnaire is meant to obtain your opinions regarding the class atmosphere.

Please answer the following items with an (x) in the blank that mostly reflects your opinion.

Age: _____

Gender: Male () Female ()

Date: ____ / ____ /2017

Feelings about classroom environment	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
1. I feel more committed to my classroom atmosphere				
2. Reading and reflecting frequently about my commitment reminds me I can also improve my classroom atmosphere				
3. Our teacher makes us participate in all sorts of ways				
4. I feel my classmates and me are more integrated as a whole				

Class environment and learning	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
1. The atmosphere we have inside the class favours learning				
2. Prioritising our classroom rules and writing down our commitment has helped us to be more integrated				
3. My classmates and me follow the activities in an orderly and respectful fashion				
4. Giving each other feedback has helped me wonder how I can help my classmates and appreciate their achievements				
5. I love listening to positive things from my classmates and everything I could be better at				
6. I think about my words very carefully before giving somebody my feedback, because I know it's a way to grow mutually				

Do you think the classroom atmosphere has improved? Why?

What do you think about the experience of giving your classmates feedback? How did you feel?

Comments and /or suggestions:

Thank you for your cooperation

2. Fostering better writing skills

Francisco Butrón

Toquepala, north of Tacna, Peru



The challenge

Francisco decided to focus his research on his 3rd grade students – a group of 17 boys and girls aged 14 to 16 – who attended four 90-minute English lessons a week and had achieved a lower-intermediate (A2-B1 CEFR) level. The students had made good progress in English speaking thanks to classroom activities that boosted in-class student speaking time; however, their writing was weak, consisting of simple informal sentences, and needed to be improved.

Due to time constraints, classroom management, student level and other factors, Francisco considered he was not teaching writing as well as he could. However, in reflections he wrote about this, he showed that he was all too aware that it is one of the most difficult skills to develop:

It's a productive skill which needs proper input and planning to have a proper output.

It's challenging to teach writing as a process.

It entails developing many sub-skills, such as brainstorming, structure planning and organisation of ideas, register, use of cohesive devices, proof-reading and feedback.



In the South of Peru, four hours away from the southernmost Peruvian city Tacna, there is a mining community, Toquepala (3000 metres above sea level). People living and working in this community send their children to Mariscal Ramón Castilla School, which serves a population of more than 200 students who live in the community all year round. Students here have the opportunity to study English for up to eight hours a week.

Francisco Butrón has been teaching in this remote context since 2011, and teaches English to students ranging from 11 to 16 years old and from A1 to B2 CEFR level. Generally, his students are interested and keen to learn as much English as possible, and strive hard to reach at least B1 level by the time they finish their schooling.

He committed himself to focusing on writing as a process, regarding it as the next important step on the way to making his students not only communicatively competent, but empowered citizens of the world!

In order to do this, Francisco needed to know more about his students' writing and how he was developing this skill, so he began by asking the following questions:

- What strategies do I use to teach writing?
- How do my students feel when they have to write in class?
- What kind of support and feedback do I provide to my students during the process?
- What are the main difficulties my students experience in writing?

Data collection process

To collect information to help him answer these questions, Francisco used three tools – a student questionnaire, an observation guide and a focus group interview.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire he designed had four clearly separated sections, each of which related to one of the four exploratory questions (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was in Spanish and given to the whole group. Students wrote their answers anonymously.

Peer observation

He also designed a peer observation guide, again to address his exploratory questions (see Appendix 2). In advance of the observation, he informed his colleague of the aim of the observation and gave her time to familiarise herself with the questions and prompts. She then took notes on student and teacher behaviour throughout the whole of a 90-minute class.

Focus group interview

Finally, Francisco decided to hold a focus group interview in Spanish because he felt that he could elicit more information from his students in an informal setting (with their peers, not individually), and that giving them the opportunity to express themselves using their own language would guarantee they could get their meaning across. To select the four students, two male and two female for this interview, he randomly picked four names. Then, focussing on the same four categories included in the questionnaire, he wrote prompts on small cards. The focus group took the form of a 15-minute discussion, which Francisco recorded using a cell phone placed at the centre of the table.



Analysing the findings

After the data collection stage was over, it was time to analyse the findings.

What strategies do I use to teach writing?

Results from the questionnaire showed that students used two strategies when preparing for a writing task – brainstorming followed by planning of the text. However, while peer observation feedback also showed that Francisco used some brainstorming with the whole class, it revealed that he relied mostly on oral instructions during the planning of the text, and did not provide any written prompts or support.

How do my students feel when they have to write in class?

Interestingly, Francisco assumed that having to write in English might make his students nervous so he was expecting to find negative feelings associated with writing. However, responses to the questionnaire, and during the focus group interview revealed that the main feelings students experienced when writing in English were to be challenged or eager to communicate – a surprising and positive finding!

Students did report being nervous or stressed to a lesser extent though, and Francisco understood that working on rapport was still needed. Another interesting finding from the peer observation was how much support students seemed to need when writing. His colleague noticed that they often tended to raise their hands to ask for help.

What kind of support and feedback do I give my students during the process?

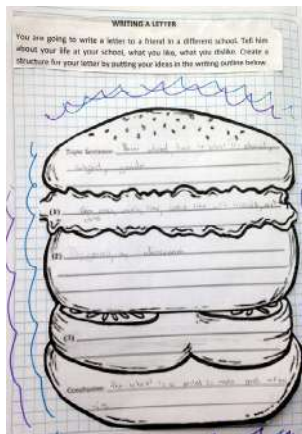
A key discovery for Francisco was that he wasn't providing enough feedback. His colleague observed that it was only students who finished first or early that got feedback. In addition, responses to the questionnaire revealed that most students wanted to be shown their mistakes so they could correct them. Francisco recognised that he needed to optimise opportunities for feedback during each lesson so that every student could receive it effectively and at first hand. Another observation was the use of Spanish–English translation as an aid to learning English words. Students would persistently use the phrase:

How do you say... in English?

What are the main difficulties my students experience in writing?

Data from the focus group interview, peer observation and questionnaire highlighted the following:

- Lack of vocabulary, i.e. not knowing a word or how to express ideas, was of concern to most students when writing in English. Students considered vocabulary as key to effective writing, and found it hard when they couldn't express their thoughts.
- Lack of structures and the need for support with grammar was also an issue.



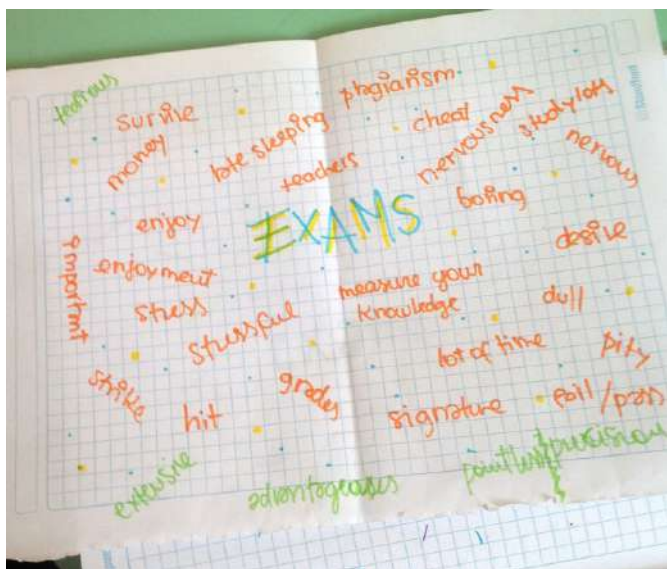
Time for action

Francisco reflected on his findings and implemented some ideas to foster better writing skills using six strategies.

To provide students with more written or visual support during planning, Francisco introduced writing frames, e.g. the so-called 'hamburger model' (a visual

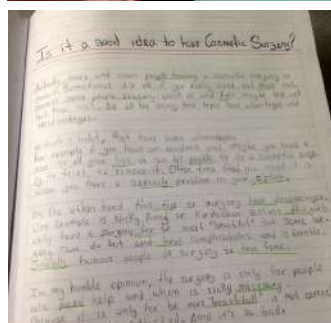
organiser that supports students in structuring their essays by outlining key components of each paragraph).

To address their perceived lack of vocabulary, he continued to brainstorm with the whole class and got students to create mind maps for different topics.



To foster independence and discourage students from persistently raising their hands to ask 'How do you say...?' he introduced bilingual dictionaries.

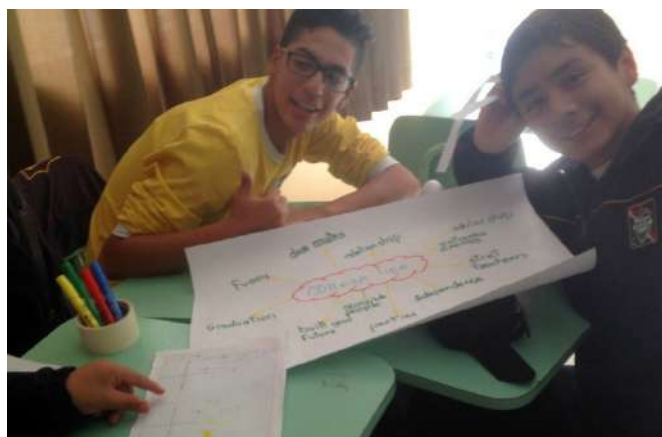
He also provided more opportunities for feedback by introducing self and peer feedback, e.g. students exchanged texts and commented on them.



To respond to their desire to feel challenged when writing, he introduced word limits and time frames instead of allowing students to write at their own pace.

And finally, to build rapport and reduce nervousness, Francisco played relaxing background music when writing took place, and used fun and lively warmers to break the ice and create a good classroom atmosphere.

Francisco implemented his action plan during each of eight lessons over a period of three weeks.



Time to evaluate

To evaluate the impact of his action plan, Francisco used the same three tools as he had in the exploratory phase and compared the results with the initial findings. Thus, he used a final questionnaire, peer observation and a focus group interview implementing them in the same ways as before.

Findings and conclusions

Students' feelings about writing

Responses to the questionnaire and comments during the focus group interview revealed that students' feelings about writing in English had changed. In particular, students reported feeling less stressed and more motivated and confident – they felt more 'prepared to write'.

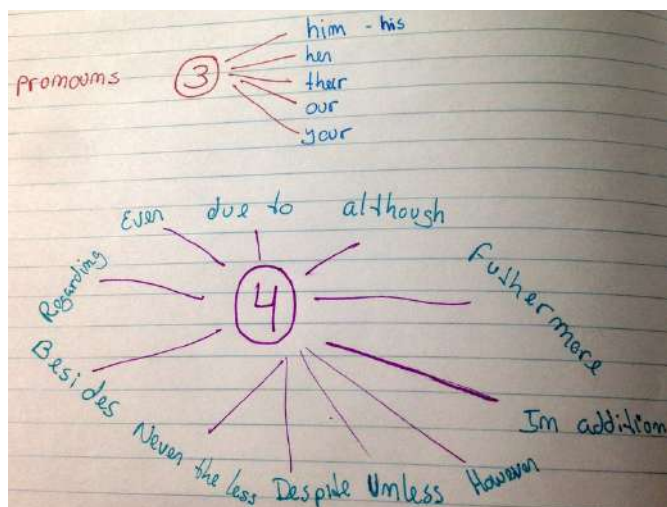
Support and feedback

Francisco's colleague noted that the need for continual teacher support had decreased and students were working more autonomously, e.g. his students were no longer continually asking "How do you say in English...?" but using the dictionaries. His students additionally commented that they were able to work on their own quickly and easily to clarify vocabulary doubts using the dictionaries. His colleague also observed how feedback was more immediate and noted how willing his students were to give and receive peer feedback.

Strategies

During the focus group interview, students reported finding the strategies useful, especially brainstorming and the use of writing frames. Francisco's colleague noted that all students used the 'hamburger model', too.

To sum up, Francisco's students had found brainstorming using the mind maps useful to enrich their vocabulary. They had also learnt to rely on dictionaries for new words they might not know. The 'hamburger model' had helped them to plan the writing in a more organised way and the classroom atmosphere had become more relaxed with the help of the background music. And finally, thanks to the introduction of self- and peer-feedback, students felt more supported and confident.



Reflections

Francisco had never before done research in his classroom and is convinced that it has had an important impact on his teaching practice. He finds that his writing lessons are enriched, and he caters to his students' needs using relevant scaffolding activities rather than just asking them to write. He has become more reflective and process-oriented as a teacher, stepping out of the idea that teaching decisions come only from him, but moving towards the idea that they can come from the proper collection of data involving students and colleagues. He appreciates how he was taken from the position of a teacher to that of a learner, seeing his lessons and planning not only from a teacher's perspective but from his learners' perspective too. From this point on, he believes that it will be very important to try to get his students involved in exploratory action research too, to create a richer learning and teaching experience for both his students and himself.

I will add to my teaching practice the following phrase: To really know, explore because I now believe that it is through exploration that a teacher can know what is really happening in her or his class.

Francisco also values the eye-opening experience of having been mentored during this project:

"I cannot emphasise enough how supported I felt through the entire experience by my mentor. I truly believe that teachers supporting teachers make the EAR process successful as there is no one better than a teacher to understand a teacher."

And he acknowledges that his experience has also enabled him in some small way to contribute to the development of better practice.

I can feel that what I have learnt and applied in my classroom, if shared, will become useful to other colleagues interested in not only writing skills, but getting involved in researching as well.

So what is Francisco's plan now that this project has come to an end?

"Exploratory action research is a tool that can be used in our daily practice and now that the first project has come to an end, many new research topics have come out which are worth exploring. This EAR project may be over, but there are many more to come."

Reflection questions

1. Francisco implemented six strategies to foster better writing skills. Do you use any of these with your students? How useful are they? Are there any that you haven't used that you think could be useful? Which would you like to try? Why?
2. Francisco decided to hold a focus group interview (rather than individual interviews), in Spanish, because he thought an informal setting and not requiring his students to use English would encourage them to open up and express themselves more freely. How would you feel about organising a focus group interview with your learners? What would you be interested in finding out? How would you decide which students to involve?

Appendix 1 - Writing Questionnaire

Age: _____

Gender: Male () Female ()

Date: ____ / ____ /2017

STRATEGIES	(X)
1. When I have to write in English I: (Check all the ones that apply)	
Brainstorm	
Draft	
Plan the structure of my text	
Review vocabulary	
Review models	
Use dictionaries	
Rearrange my ideas	
Use internet resources (dictionaries, translators)	
Read what I wrote	

FEELINGS	(X)
3. When I write in English I feel: (Check all the ones that apply)	
Nervous	
Confident	
Not well prepared	
Stressed	
Excited	
Bored	
Challenged	
Well prepared	
Other:	

STRATEGIES
2. According to your answers to question 1, list from 1 to 5, (1 being the most important activity and 5 the least important when writing in English):

FEELINGS
4. According to your answers to question 3, list from 1 to 5 (1 being the feeling that you identified with the most and 5 the feeling that you identified with the least when writing in English):

Appendix 1 - Writing Questionnaire (contd).

SUPPORT AND FEEDBACK	(X)
5. When I write in English I : (Check all the ones that apply)	
Need constant support from a teacher	
Can work autonomously	
Prefer to work in groups	
Like receiving feedback on my text	
Like sharing my text with my classmates to get feedback	
Like seeing my mistakes and correcting them	
Other:	

CHARACTERISTICS	(X)
6. To write in English I: (Check all the ones that apply)	
Think in Spanish	
Think in the appropriate grammar	
Need translation	
Have to review vocabulary	
Other:	

Appendix 2 - Classroom Peer Observation Guide

Note: The aim of this peer observation is to only answer the following Exploratory Action Research questions.

EAR QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED:

1. What strategies do I use to teach writing?
2. How do my students feel when they have to write in class?
3. What kind of support and feedback do I provide to my students during the process?
4. What are the characteristics and most common mistakes of my student's writing?

I. DATA

Teacher: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Observer: _____ N° Ss: _____ Time: From _____ to _____

II. ABOUT STUDENTS (Make comments about)

1. Are instructions clear enough for students when doing a writing task?
2. Is the writing task presented in clear steps?
3. During the writing task, tick all activities and kinds of support that apply. Do students?
 - Follow the teacher guidelines
 - Draft ideas
 - Use dictionaries
 - Need support for grammar
 - Need support for vocabulary
 - Do pair work
 - Work independently
 - Rearrange ideas
 - Waste time

III. ABOUT TEACHER (Make comments about)

1. Regarding the teacher and the writing task, tick all that apply. There is presence of:
 - Time to present the task
 - Time to model the task
 - Time to provide support for students
 - Time to check students' work
 - Effective stages during the lesson
 - Balance between presentation, practice and production PPP
2. What kinds of support/feedback are present during the writing session?
 - Teacher's oral feedback
 - Board
 - Use of notebooks
 - Dictionaries support
 - Grammar support
 - Vocabulary support
 - Group support
 - Individual support
 - IT support (Google, online dictionaries)

3. Boosting students' speaking

Gabriela Paredes
Lima, Peru



A worrying situation

In general, most students at Basic level, i.e. B1–B12, are reluctant to speak and Gabriela noted that the students in her B5 group were particularly reluctant or unable to speak in English.

The 24 students in this class were mostly high-school students aged 14 to 17 although there were also a few in their twenties who attended university or work. Even though English is taught at high school, many parents feel that their children learn little or nothing and need extra tuition. In the case of the adults, they may never have studied English at school, or they want to improve their level.

Gabriela noticed that most of these students would answer using single words or monosyllables, and struggled to elaborate. Some seemed shy or reluctant to speak with their classmates too. While Gabriela recognised that this could be partly due to the fact that at ICPNA students change class and teacher every month, she also felt that, since they had already been studying English for four months, they should have a basic knowledge of the language!

Gabriela was worried and frustrated. She needed to explore the situation and try to find out more.

Focussing on language use

She decided to look into her students' use of language when speaking and came up with some questions:

1. What kind of language do my students use in class (e.g. classroom language, Spanish, English, “Spanglish” [i.e. mixing Spanish and English])?
2. How often do my students speak in English only?
3. What kind of speaking activities do I plan? Which ones do my students enjoy?
4. How do my students feel when they speak in English?



Gabriela Paredes has been teaching English, mainly to secondary and university students, at ICPNA (Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano) in Lima for five years. The English programme consists of three phases – Basic, Intermediate and Advanced – and Gabriela teaches Basic and Intermediate Phases. Within each phase there are 12 cycles (months) and each cycle students attend sixteen 90-minute classes followed by a final evaluation.

Collecting data

Observations

In order to find some answers to questions 1 and 2, Gabriela designed an observation guide (see below under 'From the observations'). She used this guide to note her own observations while watching a video recording of a lesson. Then she invited one of her colleagues to observe her class on a different day and note her observations, so that she could compare the two and draw some conclusions.

1st questionnaire

To find the answers to questions 3 and 4, she developed a questionnaire (see Appendix 1). This was given out at the end of the third lesson and all 24 students completed it anonymously.

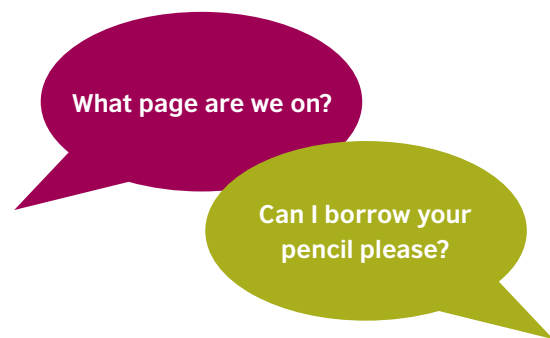
What Gabriela discovered

The findings were surprising!

From the observations

With regard to language use and, specifically, the use of English in the classroom, Gabriela and her colleague both noticed that:

- Students often used classroom language when they talked to the teacher, but not among themselves
- Students did not use Spanglish
- Students always tried to speak in English during the development stage of the lesson using the prompts or sentences in their books, but when they were done or when they needed to borrow something from a classmate, they used Spanish.



■ Gabriela's observations ■ Her colleague's observations

QUESTIONS					COMMENTS
1. How often do students use classroom language? (E.g. How do you say _____ in English? Can you lend me your ___? May I go to the restroom? Etc.)					Students do use classroom language for permission, etc. Students use classroom language with the teacher but not among themselves.
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
2. How often do students speak in Spanish?					I could see that students rarely speak Spanish due to the fact that Gabriela monitors students constantly. I observed that when students are done with the activity, they start talking about other things but in Spanish.
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
3. How often do they speak in "Spanglish"?					I couldn't hear any "Spanglish". I saw a couple of students inventing words. It seems to me that they were just having fun doing this after they had finished with the activity.
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	
4. How often do they speak in English only?					Students speak in English most of the time, but they make some grammar/pronunciation mistakes. When students talk to the teacher or during the activity they use English, but not among themselves.
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	

When does speaking happen during the lesson?

(Mark with + the moments of most interaction and – the moments with less)



When do students participate more?



What strategies does the teacher use when presenting speaking activities? How often does she use them?

I could see that Gabriela always writes prompts on the board. Before having the students speak in pairs or in groups, she models the activity with one or two students.

I always use prompts and model the activity; besides that, I use many pictures on the projector so my students have something to talk about when they run out of ideas.

Is the time allotted to the speaking activities enough when beginning, developing and closing the class?

She presents pictures or short videos as warm-up in order to get students involved in the activity, sometimes this takes too much time, so there is not enough time when closing the class. I could also observe that Gabriela demands that students provide extra information or details, so the practice time takes a lot of time; consequently, there isn't much time for the closure.

I feel that I did not have enough time to close the class.

Gabriela noted that students spoke in English during the activities but when they were done, a few spoke in Spanish. Her colleague did not hear any Spanish, although she thought that perhaps the presence of a stranger may have made the students feel shyer than usual.

An additional useful observation made by both Gabriela and her colleague was that the pictures or short videos used to get students involved in the activity and the practice stage were taking up a lot of time; consequently, there wasn't enough time for the closure.

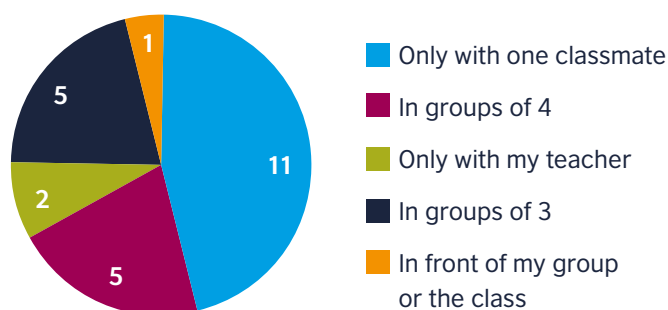
From the questionnaire

The responses to the questionnaire provided Gabriela with some insight into two of her initial exploratory questions: 1. the type of speaking activities students enjoyed, and 4. how they felt when they spoke English.

Regarding the question asking students about the activities they enjoyed, it was very clear that the majority of students did not enjoy giving individual presentations (18 ranked this activity the lowest), and a large majority of the students ranked interacting with their classmates during pair work, group work, role plays and class mingles as more enjoyable.

Looking more closely at their interaction preferences, Gabriela found that pair work was their favourite, followed by small group work. In fact, only one student enjoyed presenting alone to the class!

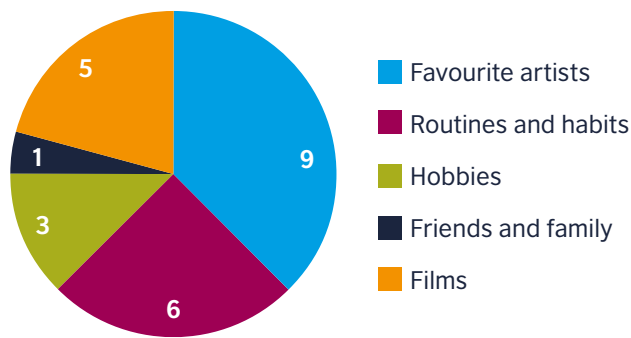
In class, who would you rather speak to in English?



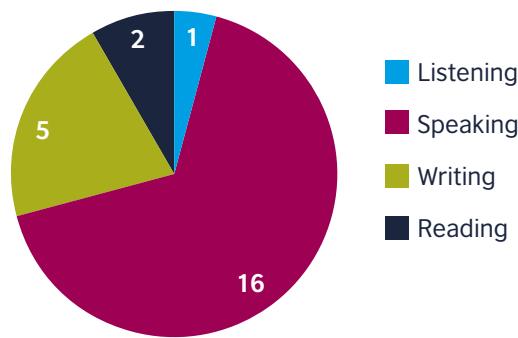
With regard to how students feel when they speak English and why, one finding that Gabriela didn't expect was that 14 students felt nervous. That really surprised her because they didn't seem nervous at all! And the principal reasons were that they lacked the vocabulary to express their ideas and were afraid of making mistakes with grammar and pronunciation. On a positive note, nine students reported feeling confident because they felt they had the vocabulary to express their thoughts, and only one student felt frustrated.

Gabriela also discovered some useful information concerning what they preferred to talk about in class – their favourite artists, their habits and routines, and films. And she was delighted to find that no fewer than 16 students considered speaking the most important skill, her main concern, so she felt that they were all on the same path!

What would you prefer to talk about in class?



What skill do you consider the most important?



Action plan

Reflecting on the results from the questionnaire and the surprising discovery that the majority of students felt nervous when speaking, Gabriela was convinced of the importance of creating a positive and relaxed atmosphere. To this end, she decided to focus on interactional language, and in particular communication for social interaction and 'small talk', by which she means short exchanges that usually begin with a greeting, move to back-and-forth exchanges on non-controversial topics such as the weekend, the weather, work, school, etc. and often conclude with a fixed expression, such as 'See you later'.

Gabriela felt such a focus was appropriate to her teaching context because the students had different classmates each cycle, and she also felt it would help with promoting the use of classroom language and the use of English even when they had done with the activities.

Creating a leaflet

Gabriela decided to create a leaflet to support her students which would contain many useful fixed expressions to start and finish small talk. She took some of these from the textbook and googled others. Based on her classroom experience, she selected what she felt would be the most useful classroom language. The leaflet would also contain expressions that reflected the role of an active, interested and supportive listener. Basically, the leaflet would provide students with a reference tool to support them during small talk activities.

<p>CLASSROOM LANGUAGE TO USE WITH THE TEACHER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sorry teacher, I'm late. May I come in? - I have a question. Could you come please? - May I go to the restroom? - How do you say ventilador in English? - What does acquaintance mean? - Excuse me teacher, may I be excused for a minute? - How do you pronounce eyes? - How do you spell beautiful? <p>CLASSROOM LANGUAGE TO USE WITH MY CLASSMATES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you lend me your eraser, please? - Can I borrow your pencil please? - Can you repeat please? -What page are we on? - What is your answer in number? 	<p>GREETINGS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hi / Hello. - Good morning / afternoon / evening - Hey, what's up? - Hi, what's going on? - How's everything? -How are things? <p>😊 A: Hi, _____. How's it going? B: Fine. / OK. / All right. / Pretty good. / Not bad. How about you? A: I'm fine.</p> <p>☹️ A: Hi, _____. How are you doing? B: So-so. / Not so good. A: Really? What's wrong? B: I'm (a little) worried. / I'm (kind of) tired. I have a big test tomorrow.</p> <p>FAREWELLS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bye-bye. / Good bye. - Good night. - See you later. / See you soon. - See you next time. - It was nice to talk to you. - Have a nice day. 	<p>EXPRESSIONS TO SHOW YOU ARE LISTENING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uh-huh. • Wow! • That's interesting. • Oh, I see. • Right. • Really? • Wow! That's amazing! • That's incredible! • No way! • You're joking! <p>EXPRESSIONS WHEN YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't understand. • Could you repeat that? • Could you say that again? • What do you mean, exactly? • I'm not sure what you mean. • Can you explain that?
--	--	--



In order to personalise the leaflet, Gabriela also created spaces for students to stick on pictures, e.g. of their favourite artists. These pictures would be aligned to the topics and grammar structures of the textbook and lesson, e.g. Unit 1 – simple present/3rd person singular – favourite artist.



Implementation

Gabriela introduced the leaflet on day four of the cycle, when she drilled the fixed expressions and modelled use of the expressions in the leaflet before asking students to repeat in pairs. She repeated this process for five days, that is, during the first five minutes of each lesson, students engaged in small talk with one classmate whom they did not usually work with. Then for the remainder of the cycle the students performed the activity independently while Gabriela observed and monitored.



<p>UNIT ONE : PERSONAL INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What's your name? - What do you do? - Where were you born? - What is your email address? - How many languages do you speak? - What do you do for fun? <div style="border: 1px solid purple; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>STICK A PHOTO OF YOUR FAVORITE ARTIST</p> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What's his/her name? - What does he/she do? - Where was he /she born? - What is his/her email address? - How many languages does he/she speak? - What does he/she do for fun? - What does he/she look like? 	<p>UNIT TWO: PRESENT CONTINUOUS - FEELINGS</p> <div style="border: 1px solid purple; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>STICK A PICTURE OF PEOPLE DOING DIFERENT ACTIVITIES</p> </div> <p>What are they doing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is he/she doing? - How does he/she feel? <p>UNIT THREE: COUNT – NON COUN NOUNS</p> <div style="border: 1px solid purple; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>STICK A PHOTO OF YOUR BEDROOM, KITCHEN. LIVING ROOM OR DINING ROOM.</p> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What things do you have in your <i>bedroom</i>? - What things do you need? 	<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  </div>
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Time to evaluate

2nd questionnaire findings

Having implemented the action plan, Gabriela asked her students to complete a 2nd questionnaire so she could compare their feelings about speaking from the first days of classes with how they felt after the implementation. However, this time Gabriela wanted to know a little more about why students felt more confident (if they did) and how useful the leaflet had been in supporting them to speak (see Appendix 2).

Gabriela was happy to learn that 23 out of the 24 students reported that the expressions and vocabulary in the leaflet had given them confidence to talk in English. She felt hopeful since she thought that the more confident the students felt, the more they would participate and speak in class. She also felt so rewarded to see that all the students found the expressions and vocabulary used in the speaking activities quite useful for handling a short conversation outside the classroom!

Even though half of the students reported feeling confident when speaking, sadly the other half still felt nervous ... but not for the same reasons. They were no longer afraid of making grammar or pronunciation mistakes, now they were nervous due to their lack of vocabulary. Rather than see this as a negative outcome, Gabriela interpreted this concern as something positive since it meant they wanted to speak more and more, and they had realised that in order to speak more they needed a wider range of vocabulary. Moreover, the majority of students (21) felt they were speaking more than the first days of classes.

Another interesting finding was related to students' interaction preferences. At the start of the cycle, 12 students expressed a preference for pair work, but after the implementation just six students said they only wanted to work in pairs, preferring group work or whole class mingles. Gabriela took this as an indication that students now felt less shy to interact with different classmates during speaking activities.

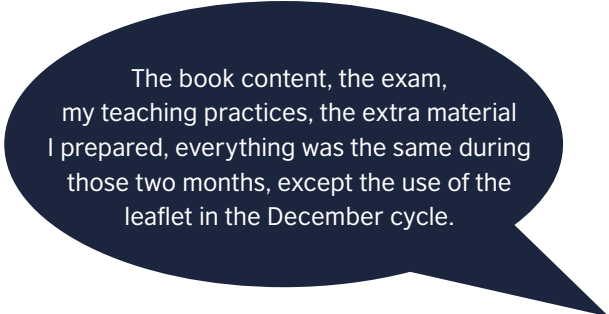
Observation findings

On the last day of classes Gabriela's colleague came again to her classroom and observed her students while they were speaking. Afterwards she commented on how much more confident and comfortable the students seemed when they were talking with the teacher. She observed how they referred to the leaflet when necessary, and how they used the question 'How do you say ... in English?' when looking for new vocabulary. In fact, they even used that question among themselves! She also said she hadn't heard any Spanish during the class.

Something Gabriela reflected on was how she had puzzled over the students' silence at the start of the cycle, wondering whether they hadn't even learnt the usual classroom language expressions or greeting phrases in earlier cycles. Now she could be confident that they no longer had an excuse to remain silent or use Spanish since they could refer to the leaflet.

Improved exam results

Gabriela also noticed that this group did way better in their final written exams compared to her previous B5 class. For example, in the previous month, 11 students scored 0 (0 = 58% or under), while in the month following her intervention, this number fell to 3 out of 24! Gabriela believes this may have been due to the use of the leaflet and accompanying speaking activities in which students used and practised the target language. As she is keen to point out:



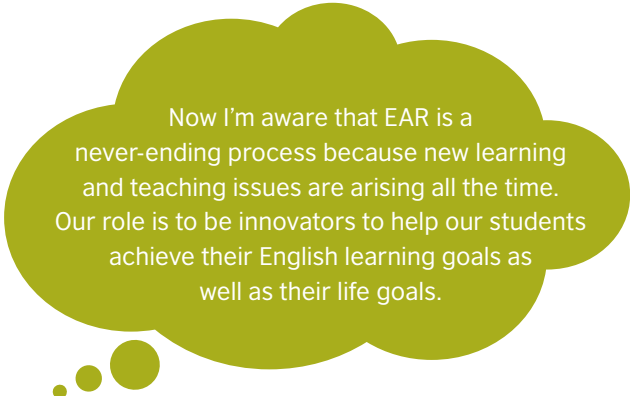
The book content, the exam, my teaching practices, the extra material I prepared, everything was the same during those two months, except the use of the leaflet in the December cycle.

Reflections

Being part of this project and experiencing Exploratory Action Research has given Gabriela a broader view of the things that were going on in her teaching and with her students:

"I've realised the importance of involving my students in their learning process. The things they said in the questionnaire shattered many misconceptions and assumptions I had. For instance, I hadn't noticed the nervousness of my students and the impact of this on their language production. To help my students learn better, it's vital to see things from their perspective. I've also experienced the rewarding feeling of seeing my students speak more and succeed in their evaluations."

And how does she feel now that the project is over?



Now I'm aware that EAR is a never-ending process because new learning and teaching issues are arising all the time. Our role is to be innovators to help our students achieve their English learning goals as well as their life goals.

Reflection questions

1. Do you have students who find it difficult to speak /are reluctant to speak in English in the classroom? Do you think a leaflet like Gabriela's could help? What kind of phrases would you include? Gabriela included space for her students to stick on pictures to make them more personalised. How could you personalise your leaflet?
2. To learn more about her students' use of language, Gabriela video-recorded a lesson, watched it and noted her observations, and then compared these with her colleague's observation notes. Could you do this in your context? How could you collect more information about your students' language use?

Appendix 1 - 1st Questionnaire

Dear student, please answer the following questions with all honesty and provide all the details.

1. How do you feel when you speak and answer questions in English?	(X)	Why?	(X)
When I speak English I feel...		because...	
Confident		I lack the vocabulary in English	
Nervous		I'm afraid of making grammar and pronunciation mistakes	
Frustrated		I'm afraid my classmates will laugh at me	
		I'm afraid of not being understood	
		I manage the vocabulary to speak my mind	

2. What kind of speaking activities do you enjoy? Number from 1 (the activity you enjoy the most) to number 5 (the activity you enjoy the least).	
Talking in pairs, the same partner during the whole class	
Talking in groups of ____ members	
Role plays: prepare a conversation in pairs or groups and then present it in front of the class	
Talking to different partners: stand up, mingle and talk to many classmates	
Giving an individual presentation	

3. How do you prefer to talk in English during classes?	(X)	4. What kind of topics do you like to talk about?	(X)
Talk to the teacher		Favourite artist	
Give an individual talk to small groups or the whole class		Hobbies/spare time activities	
Talk to one classmate only		Movies	
Talk in groups of ____ members		Friends and family	
		Routines and habits	

5. Which language skill is the most important to you?	(X)
Listening	
Speaking	
Writing	
Reading	

Appendix 2 - 2nd Questionnaire

Dear student, please answer the following questions with all honesty and provide all the details.

1. How do you feel NOW when you speak and answer questions in English?	(X)	Why?
When I speak English I feel...		because...
Confident		
Nervous		
Frustrated		
Other:		

2. How do you prefer to talk in class?	(X)
Only to one classmate	
In groups of ___ people	
To many classmates (stand up and mingle)	

3. During classes, how much do you speak in English?	(X)
I speak a lot more than the last week	
I speak a little bit more than the last week	
I speak as much as the last week	
I speak less than the last week	

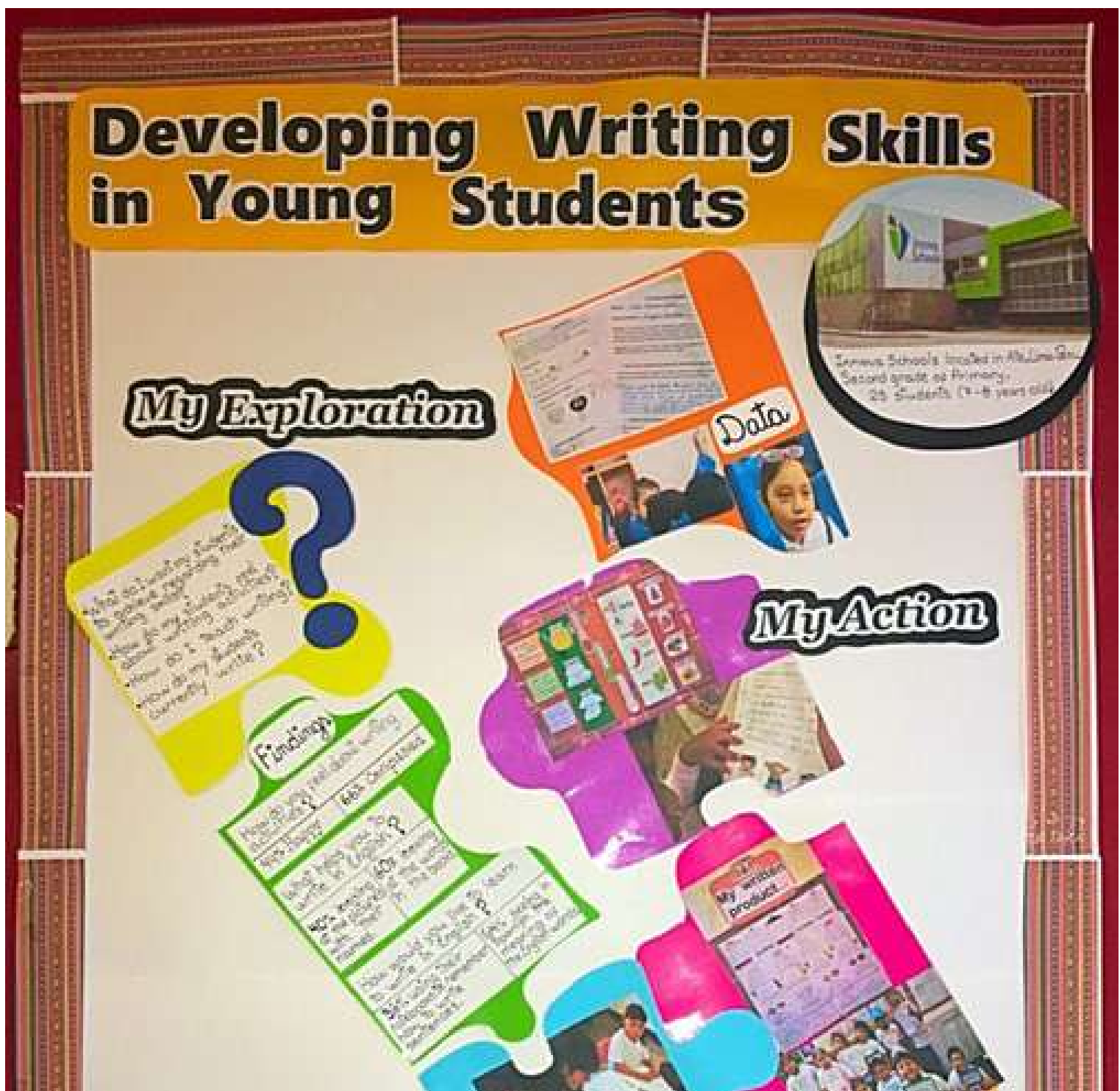
4. The expressions and vocabulary in the leaflet are _____ to be used in conversation outside the classroom.	(X)
Very useful	
Pretty useful	
Not that useful	
Not useful at all	

5. The expressions and vocabulary in the leaflet give me _____ to talk in English.	(X)
A lot of confidence	
A little confidence	
No confidence	

4. Developing writing skills in young students

Gregoria Quintana

Santa Clara city, Ate district of Lima, Peru



Being part of the Champion Teachers Programme gave Gregoria the opportunity to research an issue that she had observed in her classroom to do with writing. The specific topic she chose was ‘developing writing skills in young students’ because she noticed that for her students writing was a complicated skill to develop, and they didn't feel confident about it. She also perceived that they appeared to try very hard to memorise words and felt frustrated whenever they misspelt or couldn't remember how to write phrases and sentences during writing activities.

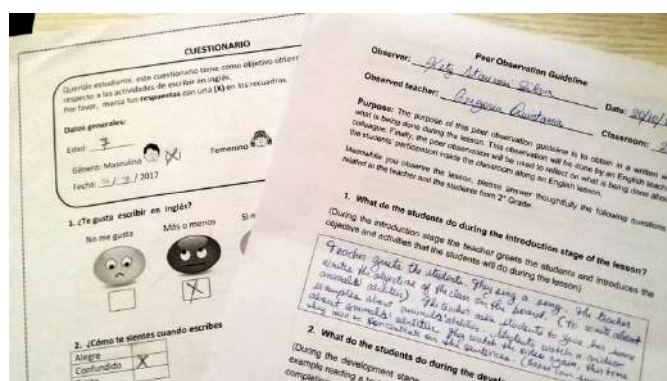
New beginnings

Gregoria wanted to encourage her students to progress in their writing abilities as well as to reflect on her teaching methods. Just as she wanted something new for her students, so she was looking to do something new in her teaching.

To do that she needed to start on her exploration, in which she considered the following questions:

1. What do I want my students to achieve regarding their writing skills?
2. How do my students feel about writing activities?
3. How do I teach writing?
4. How are students currently writing?

In relation to questions 2 and 3 she devised a colourful and child-friendly questionnaire (see Appendix 1) to know how the children felt about the writing activities and what they considered useful to write in English. When she handed it out, she supported the children by asking them to help her to answer it first.



She also designed a peer observation guide (see Appendix 2) and invited a colleague, in this case the academic coordinator, to conduct a peer observation to help her gain a different perspective on her teaching performance.

And, finally, she organised a group interview to find out how her students would like to learn to write in English. The interview took place in the classroom during the lesson and lasted about 20 minutes. 13 children took part (those whose parents had given consent for photographs to be taken) and Gregoria took notes when learners gave their opinions, also noting the number of children who agreed with these.



Gregoria Quintana works as an English teacher in a private institution (part of the Innova Schools) located in Santa Clara city, Ate district of Lima Province. She teaches Primary level Grade 2, and there are 25 students in her class aged 7 to 8 years old. They mainly come from middle class backgrounds and the majority of parents are professionals who work long hours. Despite this, many parents try to make time to support their children with English at home, though others don't because they say they don't know English.

She planned to use feedback from all her data to help her plan a series of lessons.



Initial findings

Q1: What do I want my students to achieve regarding their writing skills?

Keeping in mind that the English Curriculum standard for writing at Grade 2 suggests students ‘can produce short sentences’, Gregoria wanted her learners to produce sentences that are grammatically correct and that make sense, in other words, to be able to communicate clearly.

Q2: How do my students feel about writing activities?

What Gregoria found from responses to the questionnaire was:

- 14 out of 25 students felt confused when they had to write in English. They said they didn’t understand the words and did not remember how to write them.
- 15 students said “looking at the words in the book” helped them write in English, and 10 said “looking at the pictures with their names”.
- 24 students thought it was important to learn to write in English and when asked “Why?” they replied:



During the group interview Gregoria’s students told her how they would like to learn writing:

- 5 students said they would like to use their notebooks to remember how to write sentences.
- 8 said they would like to see the meaning of the English words in Spanish.
- 4 students said the teacher shouldn’t teach long sentences.
- 2 said the teacher should teach from easy to difficult.

Q3: How do I teach writing?

In the peer observation feedback, Gregoria’s colleague pointed out she was not helping students understand words from context nor providing students with any support or guidance such as prompts for them to write sentences. At this point, Gregoria realised that her students would not be motivated to write sentences if they hadn’t understood the meaning of the words in a meaningful context and didn’t have the scaffolding required to construct sentences. She needed to make learning more meaningful.



Q4: How are students writing?

Based on her own observations and analysis of her students’ writing, Gregoria noted that her students wrote incomplete sentences with spelling mistakes. This confirmed her

colleague’s observation that learners needed prompts to support them when writing sentences and paragraphs.

Gregoria’s action plan

Based on these findings, Gregoria decided to plan lessons differently to how she had usually planned them when it came to developing writing skills. She prepared six lesson plans and started her action.

The following chart shows the strategies she planned to use in response to her findings, in particular in relation to Exploratory Question 2 about students’ own preferences:

FINDINGS	STRATEGIES
Students feel confused when they have to write in English.	Introduce the vocabulary with pictures and words, and recycle the vocabulary from previous classes.
Students respond to the question What helps you to write in English? with “looking the words in the books”; “looking at the pictures with their words”	Use or create a picture dictionary.
They would like to use their notebook or their book to remember how to write sentences.	Students practice with broken sentences. Design writing activities using sentences stems. Model how to write sentences step by step.
They would like to see the meaning of the English words in Spanish.	Stick the English words with their pictures on a mural.





Evaluating effects of the action plan

To evaluate the effects of her action plan, Gregoria used the following methods:

- **Observation:** Gregoria observed how the strategies she implemented impacted on the children's behaviour during activities.
- **Students' written products:** After each session she reviewed their work and checked their progress.
- **Group interview:** At the end of the implementation phase, Gregoria asked a group of 14 learners to express their feelings and opinions about the new approaches to learning how to write in English.

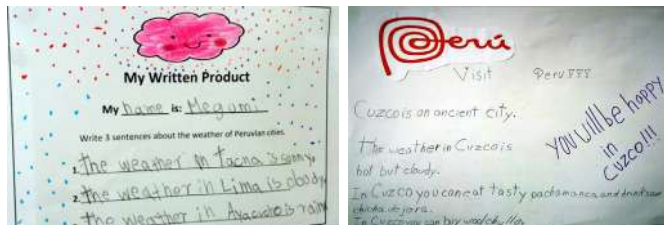
Interesting developments

Gregoria was really satisfied with the findings.

Based on her observations in the classroom, she could see her students' confidence and independence when writing. She realised that the images with words on the mural were like an open book that the students had regular contact with and which was introduced in a progressive way.



In the same way, creating a dictionary of images with her students was also very useful for them; it was an immediately available reference tool for writing. So, there was no need for students to keep asking Gregoria: 'How do you write...?'



When she checked their work, she also noticed how modelling sentences had been effective scaffolding for the students because it allowed them to have in mind the grammatical structure of a sentence, and they could also create new sentences.

Gregoria felt that the strategies she had used had promoted more meaningful learning, and that she had facilitated students to develop their writing skills more than before because they now had the tools to do it.

Findings from the informal group interview confirmed Gregoria's impressions. The students said:

"I felt better than before during writing activities because I could make more sentences."

"I feel happy writing because I did not have to memorise the words to write."

"The folder helped me write because it had everything I was learning."

"We have practiced writing more than before. I would like to continue writing in that way."



And:



As a teacher Gregoria felt satisfied for giving her students the tools to create a written product. It was gratifying to know their opinions before and after the research because they expressed their thoughts and feelings freely. She felt that their student–teacher relationship improved with the approach and her desire to listen to them.

All of this positive feedback made Gregoria want to continue to develop writing skills and activities in the same way.

It was the first time I had felt like this. It was a new kind of experience.

Reflections

As a result of this experience, Gregoria determined to continue to consider the needs and interests of her students for learning writing skills. She also resolved to keep in mind that she has to give learners constant support by giving them tools so that they have a base from which they can express their ideas in a particular way.

My learning and reflection allowed me to put myself in the place of my students, I should not forget to understand how they want to learn. Forcing them to memorise is not very helpful for them because what is memorised today is forgotten tomorrow, but what is built with them – the Picture Dictionary, for example – is more meaningful learning.

Gregoria also learned that when students realise that the teacher is interested in knowing what they feel during learning, a climate of confidence is created that increases their motivation to learn. Considering their “voice” enabled her to know the problem, to know the clues for the solutions and to know whether the strategies applied worked or not.

Finally...

“When knowledge and reflection are generated from my own actions in the classroom, this enriches my learning as a teacher and increases my spirit of research in the field where I work, with actors like my students and me. Thanks a lot Exploratory Action Research programme!”

Reflection questions

1. Gregoria introduced a number of strategies, for example, picture dictionaries and the wall mural, to support her primary learners in writing. Have you tried any of these strategies with your learners? Which ones were the most effective? If not, are there any you would like to try?
2. Gregoria organised two group interviews with her young learners, initially to find out how they wanted to learn writing, and later to find out how they felt about the new approaches to learning writing. On reflection she concluded that considering their “voice” enabled her to know the problem, to know the clues for the solutions and to know whether the strategies applied worked or not. Do you think at that age students are able to express their opinions and feelings? What questions would you ask your primary learners during a group interview? What do you think they would say?

Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

Dear student, this questionnaire aims to obtain your opinions regarding the writing activities in English.

Please mark your answers with an (X) in the boxes.

Personal information:

Age: _____

Gender: Male  () Female  ()

Date: ____ / ____ /2017

1. Do you like to write in English?	(X)
-------------------------------------	-----



No, I do not



More or less



Yes, I do

2. How do you feel when you write in English?	(X)
---	-----

Happy

Confused

Sad

Why?

3. What do you write in English?	(X)
----------------------------------	-----

I write only words

I write words and sentences

I write words, sentences and questions

4. Is it difficult to write in English?	(X)
---	-----

No, it is not

More or less

Yes, it is

5. What English writing activities do you like to do?	(X)
---	-----

Dictation

Writing pictures' names

Writing just words

Writing sentences

Writing questions and answers

Doing the "written product"

6. What English writing activities do you NOT like to do?	(X)
---	-----

Dictation

Writing pictures' names

Writing just words

Writing sentences

Writing questions and answers

Doing the "written product"

7. What helps you to learn to write in English?	(X)
Building words with letter cards	
Looking at the pictures with their names in English	
Looking in the book the words that I am learning	
Other:	

8. Do you think it is important to learn to write in English?	(X)
YES	
NO	
Why?	

9. Tell Miss Gregoria how you would like to learn to write in English.

Appendix 2 - Peer Observation Guide

Observer: _____

Observed teacher: _____

Classroom: _____

Purpose: The purpose of this peer observation guide is to obtain in a written way what is being done during the lesson. This observation will be done by an English teacher colleague. Finally, the peer observation will be used to reflect on what is being done about the students' participation inside the classroom during an English lesson.

While you observe the lesson, please answer thoughtfully the following questions, taking into account the notes in parenthesis, related to the teacher and the students from 2° Grade.

1. What do the students do during the introduction stage of the lesson?

(During the introduction stage the teacher greets the students and introduces the objective and activities that the students will do during the lesson)

2. What do the students do during the development of the lesson?

(During the development stage, students do the main activities of the lesson, for example reading a text and answering some questions; or listening to an audio and completing a task related to it; working in pairs to discuss about a specific topic, etc.).

3. What do the students do during the closing stage of the lesson?

(During the closing stage, students answer a question orally or written related to the topic of the class, or complete an activity to sum up the content of the lesson).

4. What does the teacher do to get the students participate during the lesson? To answer this question read the definition used to understand the concept of participation.

Participation is the fact of taking part, as in some action or attempt, for example, answering questions by raising hands, completing the tasks on their notebooks or handouts, going to the board to give their answers, and working in pairs/ groups when asked.

5. What does the teacher do to get the students' attention during the class?

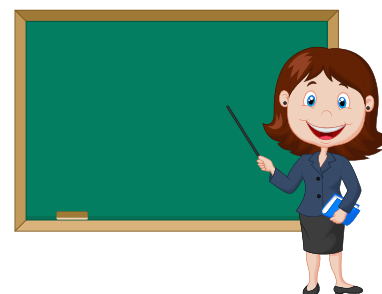
6. What are the teacher's words, instructions or signs that students' respond better to to participate during the lesson?

7. In what ways does the teacher ask the students to participate during the lesson?

8. How many times does the teacher ask the students to participate along the lesson?

9. Who are the students that participate in the class? Please cross out the students' desks

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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10. Write any other relevant comment about what you observed of the students' participation.

5. Reading 4 ur life

Robert Carvajal
Oxapampa, Peru

Reading 4 ur life



- ✓ Colegio de Alto Rendimiento Paso
- ✓ 24 Kids (5th grade of Secondary)
- ✓ They speak indigenous languages (some)
- ✓ Remote place of Peru
- ✓ Do the Diploma Programme
- ✓ Struggles with reading (Papers)

SO I ASKED MYSELF...

1. What reading strategies do I promote in the classroom?
2. How do my students feel when scanning a 300-word text?
3. What additional reading strategies am I promoting in the class?
4. To what extent do my students use the reading strategies I teach them?



DATA COLLECTION

- ✓ I do promote reading strategies, but kids were not using them appropriately.
- ✓ 80% ss couldn't infer the meaning of the words due to the complexity of grammar
- ✓ I didn't give any instruction before a reading activity. Feedback took no place
- ✓ Students feel in a hurry. Test C was difficult. 90 mins was not enough (in Paper 1)
- ✓ 50% they pass the questions and come back 15 mins time
- ✓ 45% they read the text quickly to find the answer.



CLASS OBSERVATION

WHAT ACTIONS?

- ✓ I would give instructions before any reading activity.
- ✓ I would teach my kids how to effectively use three reading strategies.

SIX-SESSION IMPLEMENTATION

HIGHLIGHTING

- ✓ 58% of the kids highlight key words and ideas in a text.
- ✓ Which one helped you the most?

DATA COLLECTION

What's going wrong with Paper 1?

To practise for the exam, Robert gives his learners mock tests, but he was surprised to learn that his students were not doing well at all in Paper 1 (the 90-minute, 5-text reading test).

They actually failed to understand the texts. He then started to wonder what he was missing:

Was it the lack of reading strategies?
But which ones?

He had taught his students so many reading strategies, he couldn't work out what was going on. He felt bewildered and frustrated. But there was definitely something going wrong.

Research was of the essence and in order to collect more information, he asked himself the following questions:

1. What reading strategies do I promote in the classroom?

2. How do my students feel when scanning a 300-word text?

3. To what extent do my students use the reading strategies I teach them?



Robert Carvajal works up in the jungle of Peru, in Oxapampa, at a boarding school located in one of the three provinces of the Department of Pasco. The school welcomes 300 scholarship students from different provinces of Peru, all on a Diploma programme, sponsored by the Peruvian government, and all in the final two years of their compulsory schooling, i.e. grades 4 and 5.



Robert teaches 24 5th graders (aged 15). Their level of English is B1 and they hold the Cambridge PET (Preliminary English Test) certificate. Since these students are on the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme, they need to be able to read a range of authentic and non-authentic texts, express their opinions and answer questions based on those texts in their final exam.

Let's find out

To answer these questions, Robert used three data collection methods.

- A reflective journal in which he would note what happened in the classroom.
- A questionnaire given to all 24 students in order to know their perceptions when it came to Paper 1 texts. The questionnaire asked students to select strategies they actually used in Paper 1 tests from a list that Robert provided, indicate which types of questions they found most difficult and why, and say whether they found Paper 1 easy or difficult, and why.
- Peer observation in order to know more about his students' and his own behaviour when it came to handling the texts in Paper 1. The questions he asked his colleague included:
 - How do I give instructions before a reading activity?
 - What pre-reading activities do I do before asking the students to read the texts from Paper 1?
 - What is the students' attitude towards the pre-reading activities I promote? Do they participate actively? Do they engage in them?
 - How do I tackle the new vocabulary and grammar presented in the text from Paper 1? What strategies do I use so students can better understand the texts?
 - What reading strategies do I promote in the classroom? How do I promote them?
 - What reading strategies do students think they have used during the exercise? Do they work for them? What are their responses?

What he found

Reading strategies

The data collected showed that Robert did indeed promote reading strategies:

- 'breaking down of words' whenever students didn't know a word
- inferring meaning based on context to get the gist
- the use of students' prior knowledge for better understanding
- highlighting of keywords in texts
- narrowing down of options in multiple-choice exercises.

However, what his journal revealed was something he had never realised – although he was training students to pass Paper 1, he wasn't teaching them strategies to deal with this.

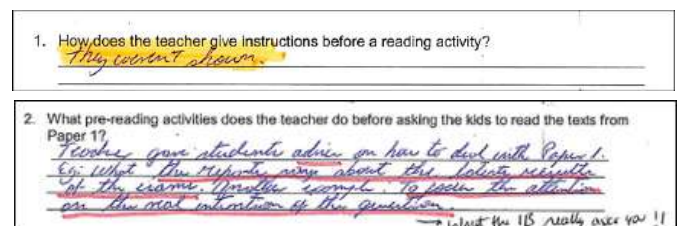
In fact, the questionnaire findings and peer observation notes supported this realisation, indicating that students weren't actually using the strategies that Robert thought he had taught them. In questionnaire responses, for instance, 12 students claimed they couldn't infer the meaning of words due to the complexity of grammar in the texts, and seven said inferring was actually a hindrance because it took up time – in fact, 19 students claimed 90 minutes was not sufficient time to complete the reading tasks. They also admitted, to his surprise, to not really knowing how to highlight key words.

Results on the reasons why paper 1 is difficult

Q	Why it's difficult	N° of students	%
A	I only have 90 minutes	19	79
B	The texts are very long	4	17
C	The vocabulary is complex	9	38
D	I don't understand the grammar	7	29
E	I don't have strategies	5	20
F	Others	0	0

His colleague made an interesting observation too. He noticed that Robert didn't give any instructions before reading activities, and neither did he make sure learners were using the strategies appropriately. He noted that Robert only suggested that the students should use them – and Robert just took it for granted that they could, and would!

Peer observation notes



In addition, his journal notes revealed that rather than focusing on which reading strategy could work best, his main focus was on getting 'grammatically correct' answers.

Journal extract

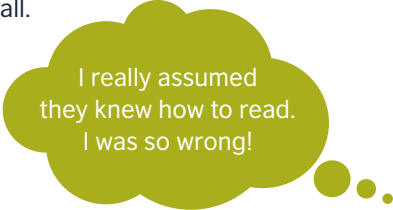
October 6, 2017

Today was the last day of classes. Final exams are happening next week. We checked the reading we did yesterday. We clarified some doubts they had. I pointed out the importance of answering the questions correctly. Answers must be grammatically correct. Since the IB accepts other answers with the same explanation, we checked some other possibilities. I had to explain to them the importance of answering that correctly. I also pointed out the importance of prior knowledge when dealing with texts. As an illustration, we focused on the word 'hardcore' to infer 'energetic'. Kids took a little test in which they applied the reading strategies we've learnt. They seemed to be happy with the results. After that, I had them highlight the new words so they could look them up in their virtual dictionaries. I still feel there's some kids who can't do the activities successfully due to the time. I asked some kids about that and they claimed vocabulary is a hindrance for them. I also got the chance to ask the kids about the strategies they use when dealing with a specific kind of question.

But not everything was bad news; Robert did promote other strategies such as:

- looking up complex words in a dictionary as a follow-up activity
- spending 18-20 minutes on each text.

Nonetheless, the journal notes confirmed that Robert was only advising students to use strategies, rather than teaching them how to use them. Moreover, there was no feedback at all.



What to do about it?

So, based on the data and the answers he now had to his exploratory questions, Robert decided to work on an Action Plan focusing on two simple but relevant points:

1. Instructions

He would give instructions before any reading activity. Those instructions would be clear, short and modelled by Robert and a learner so that everybody understood what to do.

2. Three strategies

He would teach the students how to effectively use three reading strategies over the course of six sessions, i.e. one every two sessions:

a) How to highlight key words and phrases.

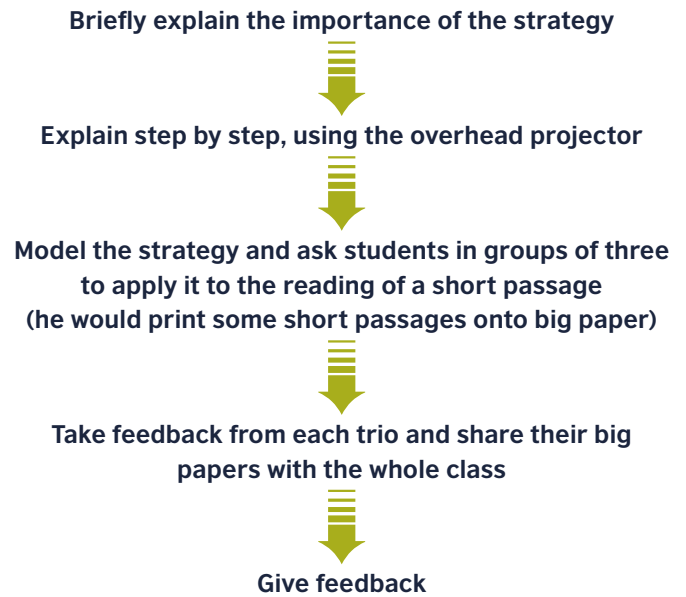
b) How to infer the meaning of words depending on the context.

c) How to narrow the options in multiple-choice exercises.

Action plan schedule

Schedule			
November 20	November 21	November 22	November 23
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving instructions Reading strategy 1: HIGHLIGHTING (modelling and activity Text D) Checking (Text B, May 12) 		
November 27	November 28	November 29 (1st Observation)	November 30
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving instructions Reading strategy 2: INFERRING (modelling and activity) Checking (Text C) 	
December 4	December 5 (Questionnaire)	December 6	December 7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving instructions Reading strategy 3: NARROWING the options (modelling and activity) Checking (Text C) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection Data analysis and conclusions 	

He decided to do this by following these simple steps:



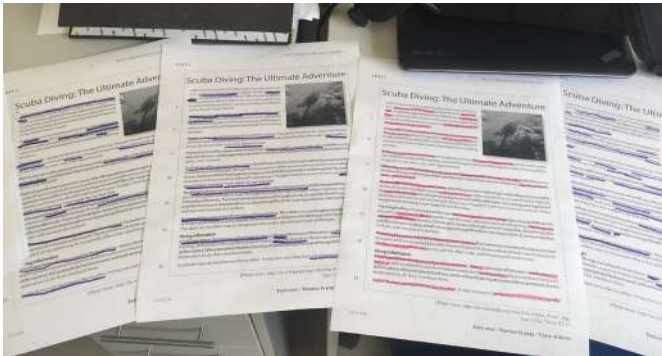
What happened?

The six sessions went ahead according to plan; and in order to check the effectiveness of the action plan, Robert used the same methods again to collect data: his reflective journal, a peer observation, and a questionnaire slightly adapted to find out how useful his students found the three strategies (see Appendix).

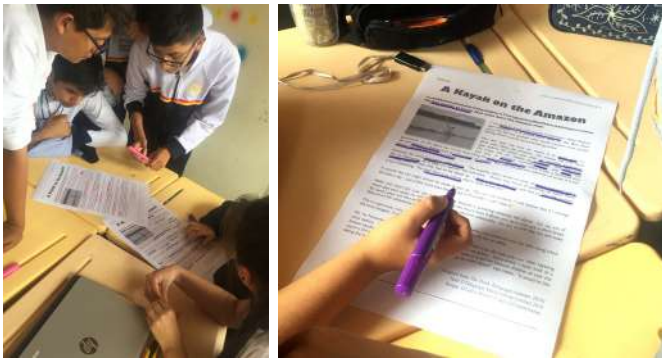
Reading strategies

Results differed a lot from the initial exploration.

Questionnaire responses now indicated that 14 students highlighted key words and ideas in a text when they did Paper 1.



Students also claimed that this was the strategy that helped them the most (15) compared to 10 for inferring and 8 for narrowing. These findings differ from the exploratory phase results in which half claimed they only passed over the questions and then went back to them if there was time, and 11 said that they only read quickly to find the answers.



Robert had also conducted whole-class feedback sessions in which students reflected on the importance of the reading strategies and the steps they had taken to reach their objective, i.e. comprehension. When they realised highlighting, narrowing and inferring worked, they claimed they would use those reading strategies in some other Diploma subjects such as biology or literature (in Spanish of course). They also said that they would use the reading strategies in their university lives!

After the final observation, Robert's colleague pointed out how he had promoted reading strategies by modelling them, and showing learners how to use them. He also noted that Robert gave instructions before any reading activity, and even asked some students to retell the instructions for better understanding. He also observed that Robert made sure the students used the reading strategies appropriately, i.e. he checked answers with them and encouraged their participation to see how well they were doing.

Final observation notes

1. How does the teacher give instructions before a reading activity?

The teacher gave the instructions clearly, he highlighted what they had to do in order to reach their goal. The teacher modelled the strategies to use to complete the task.

4. How does the teacher ensure the students are using the strategies appropriately?

By asking them to do the task and after that checking if they have got the strategies. The teacher encouraged participation to see how well they were doing it.

Notes in Robert's journal during the implementation of the action plan also painted a very different picture from the exploratory stage. He noted that students' perceptions towards the three strategies were positive – they helped them to better understand a text – very different from what he found in his exploratory notes, in which he didn't even ask them about the effectiveness of the strategies he was promoting!

Extract from journal during implementation

November 21st, 2017

STRATEGY #1: HIGHLIGHTING

This was the first time implementing my Action Plan. Classes went quite smoothly. I explained to them that we were going to work on three strategies that aimed to boost their reading strategies. They felt very interested in taking part in those. *Most students came up to me at the end of the class and told me that highlighting helped them better understand the text now.* I started explaining the importance of highlighting and why we should do that. I saw some kids taking notes which was great since I knew they were paying special attention to what I was saying. We came up with some definition and key questions when highlighting (*What do I need to remember?*). *I projected Text A from a random past paper 1 and I started modelling the activity. I read aloud and highlighted key ideas. Kids participated a lot and engaged in the activity.* I kept asking them the question *'What do I need to remember?'* all the time.

By reading and reflecting on his journal notes, Robert could clearly see how he had planned and given instructions before reading activities, explained the strategies and even projected all the readings so as to model how to use the strategies – definitely different from his initial notes where he only told students to use the strategies and nothing more. It gave him great pleasure to know that the Action Plan was working.

Extract from journal during implementation

December 4th, 2017

STRATEGY #3: NARROWING

Class started with students recalling what the other reading strategies were about. I asked them in which situations they would use those. *They claimed they'd use when reading novels, articles, poems and even jokes.* I showed some new slides and strategy 3 was presented. *A little introduction and importance of narrowing was given. I had the opportunity to ask them why they thought narrowing was important. Was it? Student shared their ideas with the whole classroom. Lots of them said it'd help them spot the answer more quickly and it'd be easier for them since they only have 90 minutes for Paper 1.* I then projected them the questions of a random text C. I modelled the activity by teaching them what to narrow in (inference) questions. We then worked together. Students and I narrowed some other questions.

It was time for them to do the activity. Instructions needed to be effectively given. *I set them and then asked a kid to reread them so everybody could understand. Everybody did it.* I gave them some other questions. They needed to work alone. They did. I monitored all the time checking they were really narrowing the questions. After that, they compared their answers. They needed to support their answers. *To make sure they did a great job, I projected the questions and asked some kids to come in front and narrow the questions and alternatives. We discussed the answers and reached some shared-narrowing answers.* It was surprising to notice that kids were also using the highlighting and inferring strategies as well.

At the end of the class we run a feedback session. I asked them how much the narrowing strategy helped them understand the questions. All students agreed that it was such a great strategy to deal with time and get rid of distractors. They also claimed that all three strategies we studied over the last 2 week were highly interwoven to deal with any text.

The question of time

Another interesting finding was students' changed perceptions of what made Paper 1 difficult. Before the implementation of the Action Plan, 19 students claimed that only having 90 minutes was the main reason for this paper's difficulty. After the implementation, this number dropped to 12. More surprising was the fact that not one student claimed not to have the strategies to deal with the reading paper, compared with five initially.

Final questionnaire results on the reasons why paper 1 is difficult

Q	Why it's difficult	N° of students	%
A	I only have 90 minutes	12	50
B	The texts are very long	4	17
C	The vocabulary is complex	9	38
D	I don't understand the grammar	0	0
E	I don't have strategies	0	0
F	Others	0	0

Reflections

The application of his Action Plan had an impact on Robert's daily teaching. During those six sessions he came to understand the importance of giving instructions and modelling activities. He recognised that he had assumed that his students knew how to infer, highlight or narrow the options in multiple-choice questions. He came to understand that doing little things really does have long-term results, and the effectiveness of his action plan will definitely have an impact on future projects he has in mind.

"From now on, my teaching will be more learner-focused. Teachers sometimes, and I'm no exception, take things for granted. I assumed kids knew how to read. I was so wrong. In my future teaching, I will (1) focus more on the instructions of the activity, (2) model the activity so my students understand how to do something and (3) stop and take my time to teach something that has not been internalised. I feel there should always be this constant 'research tickle' in every single teacher since we want our students to succeed."

And what does Robert think about teachers researching their classrooms?

I would like to say that this experience opened my eyes to something really different. I never thought we could do research in the classroom. 'It's only for scientists' I would have said. ... Looking back on my exploration, I must say that we should never take things for granted. Every single group of students is different in terms of abilities and needs. It is our duty to meet those, find the real problem and tackle it using the most appropriate solution. The effectiveness of my Action Plan has awakened this 'research tickle' in me for future projects. I believe that education is one of the greatest tools to develop a country. Thus, we need educator researchers committed to the betterment of a more well-rounded society.

Reflection questions

1. Do you have to prepare students for reading tests or exams? Do you experience any of the problems that Robert faced? Is there anything in Robert's action plan e.g. strategies, which could be useful for your students, and which you could try?
2. Robert's journal notes revealed things about his teaching that he had never realised or considered, e.g. the fact that he had not really been teaching strategies, just telling students to use them. Have you ever kept a journal? If not, would you like to try it? What do you think your journal notes might reveal?

Appendix - Getting to better know your reading ‘personality’ once again questionnaire

Dear student, thank you for taking time to complete this very short questionnaire once again. The purpose is to collect data about your perceptions of the activities I implemented these past days. The results will provide me with valuable information for improvements. I highly appreciate your time and thank you.

1. When I'm reading any of the 5 texts in Paper 1, I (select all that describe what you do)	(X)
Highlight key words and ideas in the text	
Read slowly to better understand the texts	
Read the text first for a general idea and then I answer the questions	
Narrow the answers in multiple-choice questions	
Infer the meaning of words I don't know	
Other:	

2. What strategy the teacher taught helped you the most? (Select all that you do)	(X)
Highlighting	
Inferring	
Narrowing options	
Why?	

3. I now think Paper 1 is EASY because...	(X)
I organise my time for every single text	
I highlight all key words and ideas	
I infer the words I don't understand to answer the questions	
I narrow the options in multiple-choice exercises	
I apply reading strategies effectively	
Other:	
DIFFICULT because...	
I only have 90 minutes for 5 texts	
The texts are very long	
The vocabulary is complex	
I don't understand the grammar	
I don't have reading strategies	
Other:	

4. In general terms, which of the following methods that the teacher used helped you better understand the three reading strategies? (Select all that apply)	(X)
The way the teacher gave instructions	
The way the teacher modelled the strategy in front of the class	
The way the teacher explained what the strategy was about	
The practice you had after the explanation	
Other:	

6. Developing students' super writing skills

Katia Yábar
Arequipa, Peru





Why writing skills?

Katia chose to focus her classroom-based research on her 22 grade 3 secondary students (aged 14 to 15) whose level of English was A1 or A2. She describes them as perseverant, critical and collaborative and observed that most of them were visual and auditory learners, working better with reading and speaking than writing and listening.

She decided to concentrate on the development of writing skills because writing is a skill that isn't focused on during the face-to-face lessons. So, whenever students were asked to write a text based on the virtual lessons, they preferred not to do it. Writing, it seemed, was one of the most challenging skills for her students due to their lack of ideas and information, and limited grammar and vocabulary. They weren't achieving, results were poor, and Katia was unable to finish lessons on time.

At that point some questions came to mind:

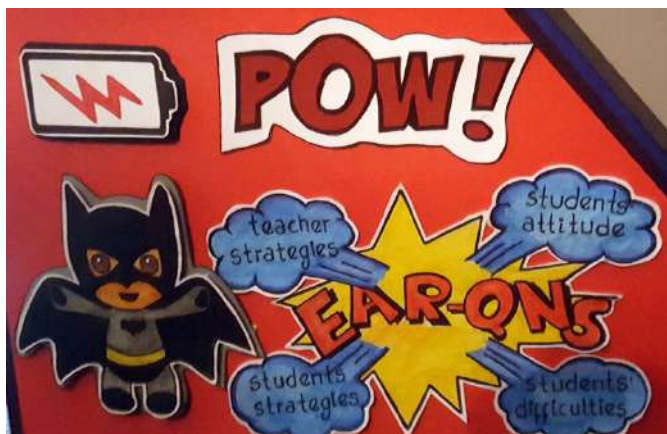
- What are my students' attitudes towards writing?
- What difficulties do they have when they write a text?
- What strategies do they use when they write a text?
- What strategies do I use to teach writing?

To get some answers, Katia designed a student questionnaire to find out more about their attitudes to writing, the strategies they use and the difficulties they experience (see Appendix 1). She also organised for a colleague to peer-observe a lesson and created a form for her to use (see Appendix 2). In addition, Katia video-recorded a lesson and kept a journal in order to note down questions that occurred to her, and observations about her students' behaviour.



Katia Yábar teaches English at 40172 Villa el Golf school, a public primary and secondary school in the district of Socabaya in Arequipa. There are 420 students, who mainly come from middle class backgrounds and who live in nearby areas. Some of the girls, however, live in a protective home shelter, run by a non-profit organisation named Paz Peru.

Students attend school from 8am until 3.30pm and have five hours of English per week (three hours face-to-face, and two hours virtual, that is, students practise the content of the face-to-face lessons in the computer room).



What did she learn?

After using these tools and analysing the findings, she was able to draw some conclusions.

What Katia discovered about how she taught writing from the video recording and the peer observation

On a positive note, Katia realised that the way she taught writing was, firstly, characterised by asking questions about the topic in order to engage students, and this really worked well.

However, even though she pre-taught some vocabulary and grammar using PowerPoint presentations, some students didn't use these in their texts because they couldn't remember them, or used them incorrectly. She also noted that even though she encouraged students to use dictionaries to avoid translation, some of them refused because they found it too difficult to look up words. She also found that giving instructions orally using body language and gestures wasn't working as some students didn't understand what they had to do and asked for explanations and clarifications over and over again. Moreover, the templates she used to guide students' writing were not clear enough, and how she corrected texts was not clear to students either.

As a consequence most of her students had a negative attitude towards writing because they felt confused, nervous, bored and sad and their writing level was poor.

What Katia learned about her students' use of writing strategies from the questionnaires

Katia was glad to learn that most of her students did put into practice some writing strategies.

She noticed that they participated a lot at the brainstorming stage because they found the topics interesting and fun. They also used the writing templates as a guide for writing their texts. They also thought that Katia's feedback and error correction helped them to improve their writing, but they had problems correcting their own mistakes. Other strategies they used included drafting and checking

content relevance, that is, they usually asked classmates or Katia to check their drafts and they then re-wrote their texts on another piece of paper before handing them in.

What to do about this?

Finding a possible solution was a challenge. First, Katia reflected a lot on her questions and findings. Then, she created an action plan.



Katia's action plan

The action plan consisted of five lesson plans. The first three lesson plans, divided into three stages (presentation, practice and production) were designed

to teach vocabulary and grammar so that students could write one paragraph by the end of each lesson (creating a total of three paragraphs).

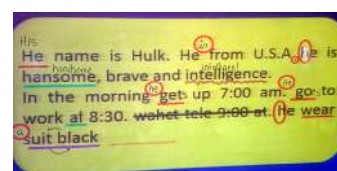
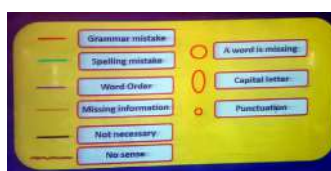
For the presentation stage, PowerPoint presentations and visual organisers were used to brainstorm and record new vocabulary. In addition, Katia got learners to work in pairs and use dictionaries to look up the meaning of new words. Grammar was taught using grammar charts, colour-coded grammar and grammar in context. Katia also incorporated instruction-checking questions (ICQs) after giving instructions in order to check the understanding of difficult aspects of each activity.



For the practice stage, she gave students worksheets to do to reinforce the vocabulary and grammatical structures. For the production stage, students had to answer some questions about the writing topic. Then, a template was given to them and the activity was modelled so that students could complete it using the answers from the questions. Finally, students wrote their paragraphs.

During the three stages, the learning process was monitored and positive feedback was provided.

In lesson 4, the students wrote their final text, including and linking the three paragraphs they had written in lessons 1 to 3. Katia also explained the correction code and colour coding for correcting mistakes.





Lastly, in lesson 5, students worked alone or with a partner and used the correction code to identify and correct their mistakes.

They then wrote the final version of their text, shared it with their partners, and provided positive feedback in the form of small badges.



What effects did Katia's action plan have?

After the implementation of her action plan Katia was keen to see the effects on her students' writing skills. For that purpose, at the end of the intervention she used the student

questionnaire again – this time with three added questions in order to find out how effective her instructions were, which vocabulary activities learners preferred, and which grammar explanation was easiest to understand. During the implementation she had also video-recorded another lesson. She had continued to make notes in her journal throughout.

Students' attitudes to writing

When she compared the results of the students' responses in the initial and final questionnaires, it was clear that their attitudes towards writing had changed. At the beginning 10 students had negative feelings when they wrote a text but after the intervention this number decreased to 4. What was even more satisfying was that before the intervention 2 students thought they had a good writing level but after the intervention that number increased to 21!

Students' difficulties with writing

Additionally, before the intervention most students had difficulties with vocabulary and grammar, but with the help of visual organisers for recording new vocabulary, bilingual dictionaries, and worksheets students remembered and used the vocabulary provided better than before.

Useful writing strategies

The activity students enjoyed most for learning vocabulary, was matching pictures with words, and they also found learning about grammar in context the most useful. They considered the context, examples and pictures great resources in helping them deduce concepts, and making it memorable. While watching the video recording of her lesson, Katia noticed that the use of the PowerPoint slides and ICQs worked well because most students found the activities easy to do and because the instructions were clear, modelled and easy to follow.

In the final data an increased number of students reported using brainstorming, dictionaries, a template, drafting, feedback and correcting their own mistakes.

Finally, the use of the colour correction code for self-correction was successful as students used it properly. It was a challenging and rewarding activity that students enjoyed because all of them considered that their learning experience was more memorable, and they felt proud of being able to self-correct. They said that they learned a lot doing this. One student remarked:

This is the first time that I really understand English. I thought it was difficult but now I know that I can do it. Thank you teacher, you're a great teacher.

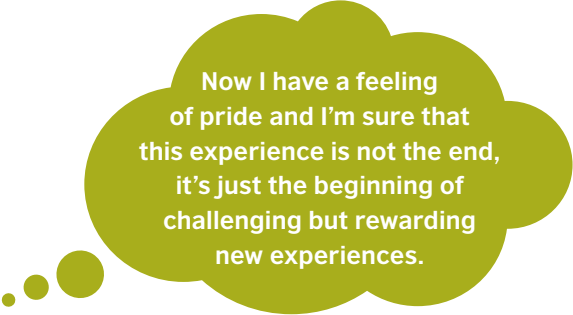
Reflections

Based on her experience and her findings after implementing her action plan, Katia resolved to change the design of her lesson plans for developing productive skills by incorporating the PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) approach. She determined to continue to scaffold activities, reinforce the way she gives instructions by using ICQs, accompany students in their learning process by providing positive feedback, modelling activities and giving students the opportunity to be responsible for their learning by correcting their own mistakes.

"Something that surprised me was the way my students got involved in the activities. At first some of them (those who struggle with understanding and learning English) weren't able to achieve the tasks because they didn't understand or they considered themselves not good enough to write a text. However, with the implementation of my action plan, they started to write faster and faster without problems. When I talked to them about the results, they said that the templates helped them a lot because they were easy to understand and follow. During the following lessons, I noticed that they had a better attitude towards writing and a sense of achievement."

What Katia learned from this experience is how important it is to persevere. She recalls how at the beginning things were somewhat difficult to understand and there was a moment when she believed that she was not good enough to see this project through to the end. However, she didn't quit. She learned that there is no success without pain and sacrifice. Thanks to this experience she had the opportunity to test herself and see how far she could go.

"Thanks to this experience of Exploratory Action Research the way I teach improved a lot. Now I know how important it is not to make assumptions about my teaching. As the saying goes: Don't make assumptions. We look for things that confirm our beliefs but what if they are wrong? Keep an open mind and ask when in doubt ... From now, I will keep an open mind and collect evidence before coming to a conclusion and a possible solution. I will also implement changes and verify if these really work. Finally, I will share the findings with my colleagues in order to engage them in the EAR process."



Now I have a feeling of pride and I'm sure that this experience is not the end, it's just the beginning of challenging but rewarding new experiences.

Reflection questions

1. Katia introduced a correction code and trained her learners to self-correct, in addition to getting them to give positive peer feedback in the form of small badges. How do you correct your students' work? Have you tried using a correction code, self-correction or peer feedback? If not, would you like to try? What do you think the advantages of self-correction and peer feedback might be?
2. Katia designed an attractive questionnaire, which included a mix of closed and open questions to get information about her students' attitudes, preferences and difficulties with writing. Could you use a questionnaire like this with your learners? Do you think it is useful to include some open questions? Why / Why not?

Appendix 1 - Student Questionnaire

Please answer the questions as honestly as possible. For each statement please tick one of the boxes.



Students' Writing Strategies	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
I brainstorm ideas before writing					
I need some samples of writing first before I start writing my text					
I think in Spanish then I translate my ideas into English					
I use a bilingual dictionary					
I only use the grammatical structures and vocabulary I know well					
I write a draft and then I revise and correct it					
The error correction and feedback help me to improve my writing					
I check if the content is relevant to the topic					

Students' difficulties and attitude towards writing

1. In your opinion, your writing level is:	(X)
Excellent	
Good	
Low	

2. Rank these skills in terms of difficulty (Use numbers from 1 – 4)	
Listening	
Speaking	
Reading	
Writing	



3. What does writing mean to you?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
A way of expressing my ideas and thoughts					
A way to communicate with others					
An obligation to get a good grade					

4. What do you write?	(X)
Sentences	
Descriptions	
Personal experiences	
Other:	

Appendix 1 - Student Questionnaire (contd).

Please answer the questions as honestly as possible.

5. How much time do you need to do your writing task? _____

6. Do you need your teacher's help while writing? YES NO

Why?

7. Do you prefer writing: in class at home

8. How do you feel when you write?	(X)
Relaxed	
Happy	
Nervous	
Other:	

9. Do you have some difficulties while writing? YES NO

If yes, what difficulties do you have?	(X)
Grammar	
Vocabulary	
Punctuation	
Lack of time	
Fear of making mistakes	
Other:	

10. Do you like the writing topics? YES NO

Why?

Appendix 2 - Peer Observation Guide

Dear Colleague

Purpose: The purpose of this peer observation guide is to get a description of what is being done by the teacher and students during the process of writing a text. Please, read the questions carefully and write as many details as possible.

1. **What is the students' attitude towards the topic of the writing task? Positive Negative**
How many students don't like the activity? What do they do and say?
2. **Are the instructions clear enough for the students? YES NO**
How many students ask for clarification?
3. **What kind of resources do students use in order to write their texts?**
4. **What do the students do after the given instructions?**
5. **How many students ask for support? What kind of questions do they ask the teacher or their partners while they are writing their texts?**
6. **What kind of difficulties do students have while they are writing their texts?**
7. **Is the given time enough for the students? YES NO**
How many students accomplish the writing task at the given time? What do the other students do?
8. **What does the teacher do to give instructions?**
9. **What does the teacher do while students are writing their texts?**
10. **Does the teacher provide support during the writing task? How? YES NO**
11. **Write any other relevant comment about what you observed of the students or teacher during the process of writing a text.**

7. Promoting effective use of mobile phones through a class contract

Abdías Román
Lima, Peru



For this project, Abdías chose to carry out his research with the 21 students in his 5th grade class, all about 17 years old, whom he taught for 90 minutes twice a week. The main reason for his choice was that, even though they were fifth-graders, their level was still elementary – a common situation in secondary public schools in Peru and partly due to the shortage of lessons, resources and facilities. Most students come from poor families in Santa Anita and the neighbouring district Ate Vitarte, and about 50% of their parents originally come from the Andean regions of Peru. Generally, these students have a low level of English and they are commonly described as ‘apathetic’ or ‘irresponsible’. Abdías certainly teaches in difficult circumstances!

Deciding on a focus

While classroom resources and facilities may have been lacking, what were not lacking were mobile phones! And students loved to use them during lessons, even though they weren’t supposed to!!!

Abdías was facing lots of challenges with his students – lack of motivation, lack of resources, and lack of engagement, but what he noticed most of all was that students were engaging with their mobile phones – in his class, and others’ too, despite school regulations. So he thought to himself:

If that is the natural way of interacting for them in present day society, why don’t we think about exploring an alternative and effective way of teaching English that takes advantage of that engagement instead of prohibiting their use in class?

That was the beginning. Abdías had identified his puzzle. What Abdías was interested to know was:

- what his students did with their mobile phones in his class
- what they felt about the prohibition of mobile phones in class
- how often they engaged with mobile phones in class
- what his reaction was when they engaged with their mobile phones.



Abdías Román teaches English at IE 1211 Jose María Arguedas Altamirano, a public secondary school in the Santa Anita District of Lima Province. The school is located in an urban area close to an industrial zone and during this research project Abdías held his classes in a wooden structure provided by parents and the Ministry of Education because the original school building had been declared at risk of sinking in 2017.



Collecting initial data

Abdías decided on three data collection techniques to find some answers.

The first was peer observation. A colleague, in this case his principal, would observe a 90-minute class focusing on two aspects: students' activities and teacher's activities, to provide answers to questions a, c and d. He wanted to know whether students had mobile phones, what they did with them, how often they got engaged and his reactions to this, so he created an observation guide (see Appendix 1).

The second tool he used was a brief survey (it would take about 15 minutes to complete), where he wrote a series of questions focused on exploring students' perceptions, thoughts and feelings about the use of mobile phones in class (see Appendix 2).

Finally, he chose to keep a class journal using his tablet, where daily he made notes and reflected on the students' use of mobile phones and his reactions to this.

What did he learn?

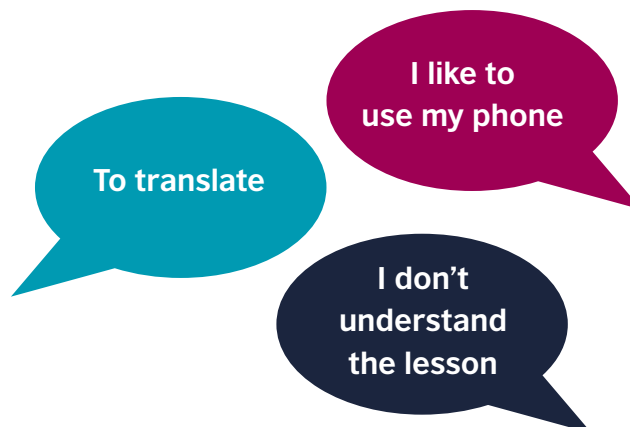
Abdías's exploration of what his students did in class with their mobile phones showed him that they usually used their mobile phones to check and interact on Facebook, WhatsApp and Facebook messenger and some of them liked to listen to music in class too (using headphones). A few also used them to translate, check the time or use the calculator.

At the same time, the majority of students (14) thought mobile phones should not be prohibited in class because they argued mobiles are useful for translation and for finding information they need to complete tasks.

Regarding how often they engaged with their mobile phones, Abdías found that only a minority – 6 out of 22 students – said they 'usually' engaged with their mobile phones in his classes. Furthermore, the students who 'usually' liked to use their mobile phones in class were always the same 6, who did so every class – although they didn't recognise this. And what was really interesting to Abdías was that they thought they used their mobiles 1 to 3 times a lesson whereas according to his observation notes they used them as much as 8 times! And there were some others who used headphones while they were in class although they didn't acknowledge this.

Something else which he began to realise was that even though only a minority used their phones, because the classroom was so small and crowded, the distraction caused by their use spread to the 3 other classmates sitting closest to the user. It was as if, therefore, 18 students were engaged with the phones, not 6!

Finally, and importantly, Abdías learnt why they used mobile phones.



And that faced Abdías with a big challenge!

Looking at his reflection notes in his journal, Abdías also realised that he usually set rules, including rules about the use of mobile phones, at the beginning of the term and from time to time reminded students of those rules, but not every lesson. He also recognised that when he caught a student using her/his mobile phone during activities, he only stared at them till they realised they were getting distracted. Sometimes this worked, but sometimes it didn't.

Action plan and implementation

Based on findings from the exploratory phase, Abdías devised an action plan aimed at encouraging effective use of mobile phones in English classes by means of a class contract that would involve communicative tasks to practise English.

What he thought was that a class contract about mobile phone use could encourage students to use their mobile phones effectively in English classes and improve their skills of oral expression and production of texts.

Abdías organised his action plan over the course of seven lessons. In the first lesson, he negotiated a class contract based on statements, consequences and compensations. Also, every lesson would incorporate one or two activities that required the use of mobile phone apps identified from the data collection, e.g. WhatsApp. This meant that students should not use mobile phones at other times and, if they did, there were consequences that involved hard work. All students kept a copy of this contract in their English notebooks to refer to.

Statement – facts	Non-observance Consequences	Compensation for rule-observance
Mobile phones are always off or on silent mode during classes.	If mobiles ring in class: – Make a call to the teacher and say 2 sentences about the class topic	2 extra points per class (contributing to final grade)
Mobile phones are only used to achieve a class activity: show evidence	If used for other purposes: Extra task for the class such as: – Write a sentence on the board – Explain an idea in front of classmates – Guide a choral reading/ pronunciation activity – Read a text in front of classmates – Monologue: introduction/narration – Simulation: interview/conversation	
Social network or any other entertainment apps must not be logged onto	If logged onto (for the first time): – Create a WhatsApp group including all students who have WhatsApp (and the teacher) where Spanish messages are not allowed If logged onto (subsequent times): – Describe in English what he/she is doing with the mobile phone	
Use of headphones during class engages and distracts you	If they are used: – Sing a piece of the song he/she is listening to – Tell in English what the song is about – And explain why she/he is listening to it in class	

How did Abdías set out to integrate the use of mobile phones?

Well, during the second class, after the contract had been agreed, students were asked to plan and perform a conversation using: How many ____ are there ____? and to record this using the voice recorder on their mobile phones. What was interesting to Abdías was how, on their own initiative, they listened back, deleted and re-recorded until they were happy with it, and only then sent him the final version using Bluetooth. He noticed how confident and at ease they were doing the activity this way. Following that experience, which the students clearly enjoyed, integrating the mobile phones increasingly developed to using WhatsApp audio, chat (discussions around an image), and camera to present writing tasks.

Parallel to the implementation, i.e. over the course of the seven lessons, Abdías applied the same three data

collection tools as he had during the initial phase to monitor any changes. However, he modified the items in the survey since he was now more interested to know how his students were using their mobile phones during the activities to learn English (see Appendix 3). Similarly, the observation guide focused more on the activities which integrated the use of mobile phones and how students behaved and reacted to this 'new' practice.

Whereas the observation guide and questionnaire consisted of mainly closed items, in his journal he continued to make more 'open' observations to gain a broader understanding of what was happening.

At the end of the seven lessons, Abdías analysed the information and compared the findings with those from the exploratory phase.

So, were mobile phones used effectively during the intervention?

How students used mobile phones in class

In response to Question 2 in the survey – Currently, how do you use your mobile phone during English classes? – students reported using voice recording (11 students), text writing (7), chat via WhatsApp (6), and dictionary/translation (5). They also commented that Bluetooth is a good alternative to sharing and presenting tasks off line.

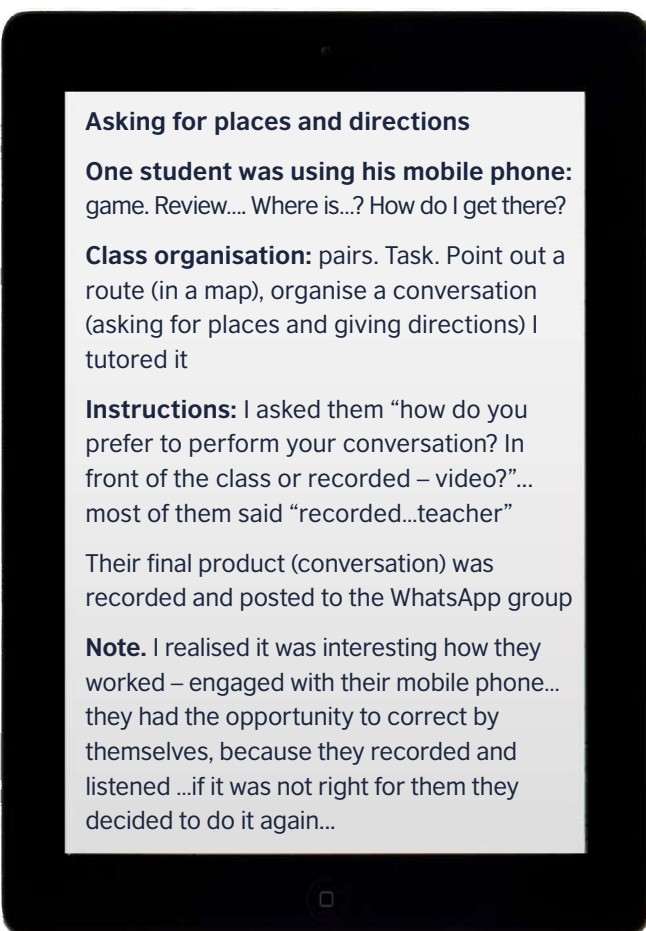
An unexpected benefit of mobile phone use

Observation feedback and reflection notes showed that students were more engaged while doing tasks using their mobile phones, as was probably to be expected, but surprisingly the use of phones also encouraged self-correction of mistakes. As Abdías noted after the 2nd lesson, students re-recorded their conversations until they were 'happy' with them. This self-correction continued to occur, and not only with voice recordings, but also with chat and text writing.

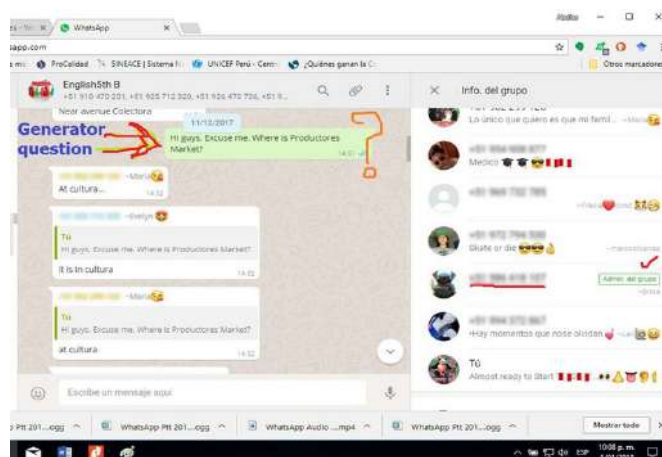
Journal extract

Excerpt taken from the coding process in my class journal (written on a tablet).

Lesson 7. Thursday, December 14th 2017

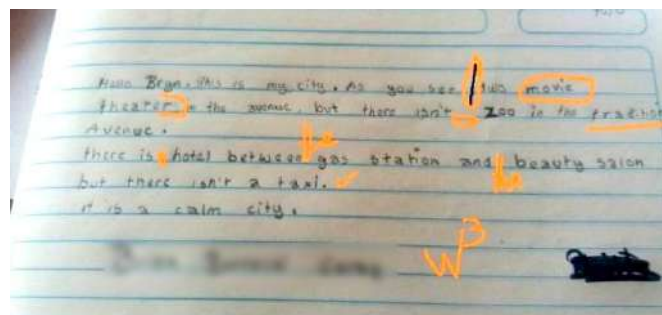


Screenshot taken from the history chat on WhatsApp, which shows how students overcame mistakes by repeating or re-doing the task immediately on their own initiative.



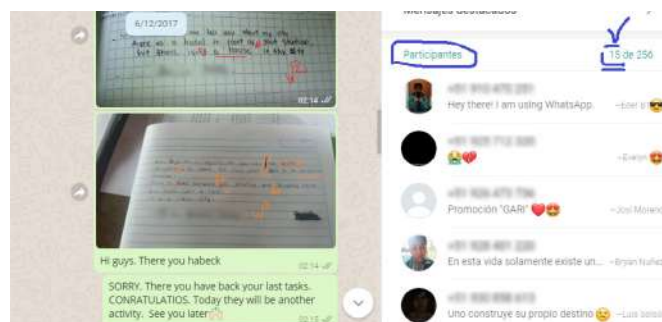
The mobile phone camera

Even though use of the camera was not referred to in the questionnaire, it was relevant to the classroom and particularly useful in the handing-in and correction of written texts. Students usually wrote texts in their notebooks but since there was no space to store these in this cramped and provisional classroom, Abdías had the idea that students could photograph their texts and send them, immediately after completing them in the classroom. He would then check them digitally and send them back using WhatsApp.



And did the class contract work?

Most of the students (13) expressed a sense of commitment and respect for the rules. They were aware of the possible distraction of using mobiles and Abdías observed how they took on joint responsibility for regulating the use of mobiles during class activities.



Student responses to final survey question 5

Q5-Regarding to the use of mobile phones in the English classes, have you observed all the class contract items agreed?

	No. of students	%	Why	Categories
YES	13	62	Because I respect to the teacher; Because I respect the agreement we did in class; Because I see it in necessary moments; I don't almost use Mobile phone in class; Because I like to respect....; I should concentrate; I only use it for exclusive uses in English; Because I don't take my phone without any purpose; Because I use it when the teacher says...; I fulfil the agreement; We only use mobile phone for WhatsApp; I don't use it in class.	Respect: to the agreed rules Self-commitment
NO	8	38	I haven't got a mobile phone, I only use it when someone lend me one; Sometimes I need it; I feel bored; Sometimes I forget we agreed something; I haven't got; It is boring; Because sometimes I feel I want to listen to music;	Lack of discipline Feel bored
TOTAL	21	100%		

Reflections

Abdías no longer views students engaging with their mobile phones during his classes as a waste of time, but rather as an opportunity to regulate their use and integrate mobile phone activities into his lessons. In addition to motivating and engaging students, he noted that the use of mobile phones also contributed to the development of writing and speaking skills during the implementation phase. As a result, undertaking this research drove him to plan and carry out activities such as recording short conversations in pairs instead of performing them in front of the class, using WhatsApp chat for writing, and even using the camera to collect and check students' written texts using Bluetooth or WhatsApp, which helped him to optimize time.

Abdías succeeded in finding an alternative and effective strategy to deal with distraction generated by mobile phones in class. Next year, he plans to implement an innovative longer-term project based on the findings from his research,

where he will incorporate learning activities and tasks using mobile phones, regulated by a negotiated agreement that students will keep in mind every class. This project will result in providing him with a bank of activities and products from his students as evidence of their learning achievement.

And what did Abdías learn from the project?

"First, I learnt to reflect more systematically on my own practice and analyse my actions to improve them. Coding information is great!

Second, I have identified the process of exploratory action research as a strategy to improve teaching. Everybody can do it by exploring and analysing her/his own teaching actions.

Finally, I am aware technology can be a useful tool or instrument to achieve meaningful learning, especially English learning."

Reflection questions

1. At the start of his exploration Abdías recognised that it is probably better to explore ways of exploiting mobile phones to teach English rather than prohibiting their use in class. Would you agree? What is the policy on using mobile phones in your context? Do you think a class contract like Abdías's would work in your context? Why / why not?
2. Abdías designed a short questionnaire to explore his students' perceptions, thoughts and feelings about the use of mobile phones in class. Could you use the same questions to survey your students' views? What adaptations would you need to make? What do you think your students' answers would be?

Appendix 1 - Initial observation guide

PURPOSE: This Observation Guide is aimed at finding answers to these exploratory research questions:

- 1) What do my students do with their mobile phones in my class?
- 2) How do my students feel about prohibition of mobile phones during a class?
- 3) How often do my students get engaged with their mobile phones during my class?

Dear colleague: Please answer these questions while you observe the English class. Tick “YES” or “NO” and provide detailed information for open questions.

The purpose of this class observation guide is to provide information for classroom-based research and it is not aimed to evaluate the teacher.

I. OBSERVATION ABOUT STUDENTS

1. Students are using mobile phones when the teacher enters the classroom. YES NO

How many students are using mobile phones? _____

How do students (who are using mobile phones) react when the teacher enters the classroom?

2. Students use their mobile phones according to the teacher’s instructions at the beginning of the class. YES NO

How many students do that? _____

How do students react to the teacher’s instructions?

3. All students get involved and participate during class activities or tasks. YES NO

How many students seem to be engaged in doing guided activities? _____

What do students who do not follow the teacher’s instructions do?

Appendix 1 - Initial observation guide (contd).

4. Students use their mobile phones in class discretely. YES NO

How many of them are engaged with their mobile phones during the class? _____

How do students react when the teacher tells them off for being engaged with mobile phones in class?

5. The frequency with which students use their mobile phones during the class interrupts the lesson development. YES NO

How many times – average? _____

How do students who use mobile phones work and fulfil class activities?

II. OBSERVATION ABOUT THE TEACHER

1. Teacher sets up instructions for everybody about the use of mobile phones during class. YES NO

What instructions does he give?

2. During the class, if the teacher sees a student using their mobile phone, he tells them off or gives instructions to put them away. YES NO

What instructions or actions does he do?

How does the teacher realise that students are using their mobile phones instead of doing the class activities?

3. The teacher does activities that involve the use of students' mobile phones. YES NO

What activities?

Appendix 2 - Initial questionnaire

Dear student, provide an answer to each question honestly:

1. Have you got a mobile phone at your disposal? YES NO

2. Do you use your mobile phone during the class? YES NO

If yes, what class?

_____ _____ _____ All Classes

3. Do you use your mobile phone to do something related to the English class? YES NO

If yes, what do you use it for?

4. How many times do you check your mobile phone during an English class?

1 – 3 4 – 7 8 – 10 10 – more

5. What do you do most when you check your mobile phone during an English class? (Write 1-4 according to the most frequently used)	
Checking Facebook	
Chat on Facebook-messenger	
Checking WhatsApp	
Chat on WhatsApp	
Other(s):	

6. Why do you use your mobile phone during an English class? (Write 1-4 according to the reason that you agree with the most)	
Class is boring	
I do not understand it	
I love to use my mobile phone	
Nobody told me about a restriction	
Other(s):	

7. Has someone (teacher) told you off for using your mobile phone in class? YES NO

If yes, how do you feel when it happens?

Angry Surprised Sad Embarrassed It does not matter to me

Other: _____

8. Do you think mobile phones must be prohibited in class? YES NO

Why?

9. If you were allowed to use your mobile phone in class, what do you think it would be used for in an English class?

Appendix 3 - Final questionnaire

Dear student, provide an answer to each item. Be honest.

1. Have you stopped or reduced the use of your mobile phone for something other than learning English in classes?

YES. Why?: _____

NO. Why not?: _____

2. Currently, how do you use your mobile phone during the English classes? Check the activities you do:	
To record voice messages in English	
To write texts in English	
To record videos in English	
To chat in English	
To look for new words/dictionary	
Other:	

3. How do you feel when you use your mobile phone for learning English? You can check two options:	
Surprised	
Bored	
Motivated	
Satisfied	
Nervous	
Uncomfortable	
Other:	

4. Since the introduction of the class contract for mobile phones use, do you think your academic achievement has improved for production of texts and oral expression activities?

YES. Why?: _____

NO. Why not?: _____

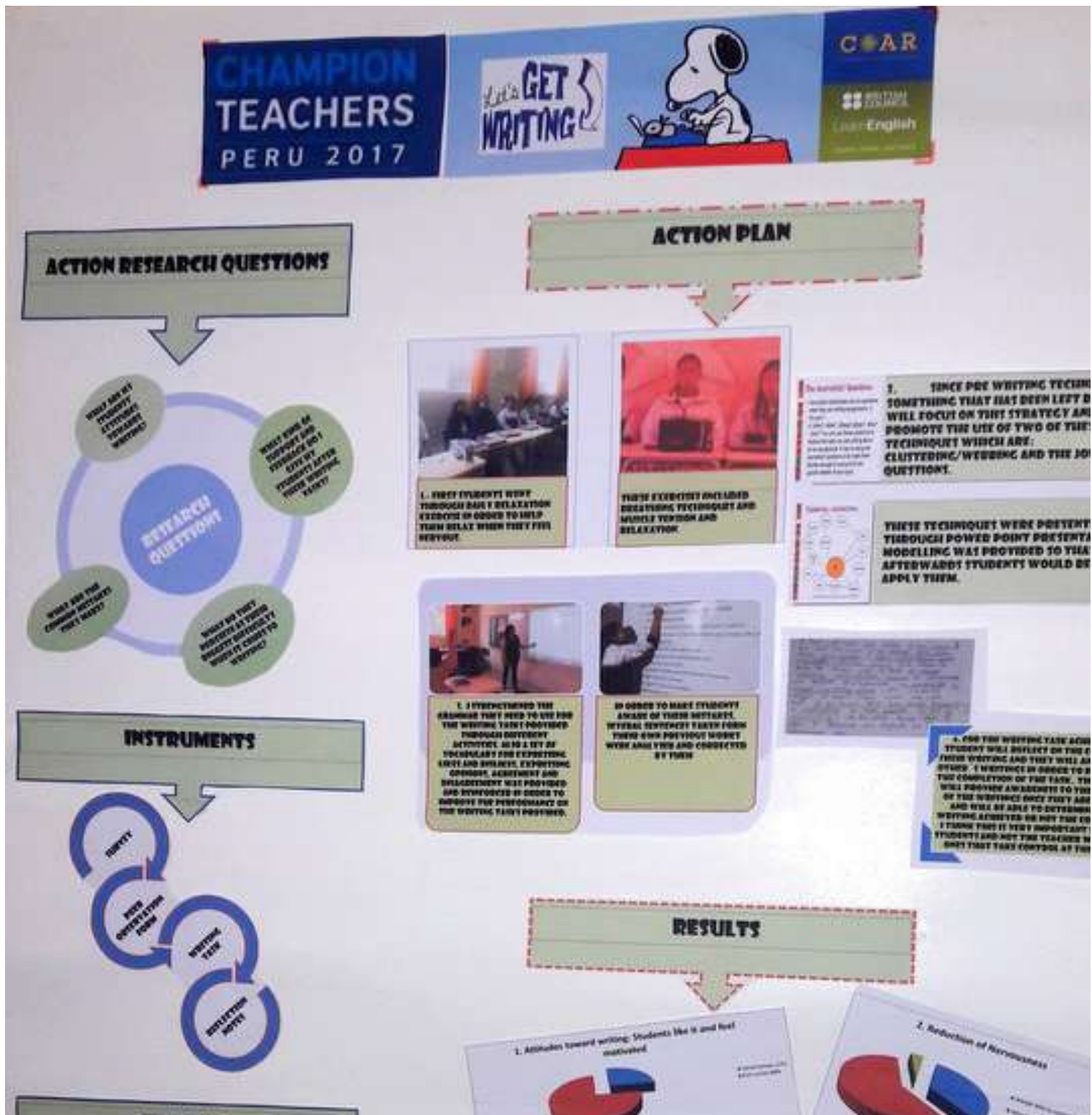
5. Have you complied with the class contract in relation to the use of mobile phones during English classes?

YES. Why?: _____

NO. Why not?: _____

8. Writing on the go

Noelia Alvarez
Arequipa, Peru





Issues with writing

Noelia decided to focus her exploratory action research on her 4th grade students. These learners study English 10 hours per week and one of the biggest issues they face is interference from the mother tongue, especially when it comes to writing. Since they are high-performing students, generally the writing process goes smoothly. For example, they are familiar with the different formats of the writing tasks required for the IB exams, as well as for the PET. However, to write effectively, it is also important to use grammar and spelling correctly to convey ideas clearly, which will not only improve their exam marks but also equip them for their academic lives.

Noelia is very concerned about her students' progress. She admits that writing was not something she had paid a lot of attention to in the past, focusing more on boosting speaking skills and reading comprehension. But when she started working at COAR Arequipa and became acquainted with the school's educational model, she was quite shocked at the quantity and type of writing required of the students. This changed her perspective and caused her to reflect upon her own practice, and pay more attention to the writing skill.

To begin with, Noelia formulated her exploratory research questions, which were:

- What are my students' attitudes towards writing?
- What do they perceive as their biggest difficulty when it comes to writing?
- What kinds of support and feedback do I give my students on their writing tasks?
- What are the common mistakes they make?



Noelia Alvarez teaches at COAR Arequipa in the south of Peru. COAR Arequipa is one of several High Performance Schools created for high-performing 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students to enhance their academic, artistic and sports potential.

Among the many subjects that these secondary learners study on the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme is English as a High Level subject, which means that students should reach B2 level by the final year of the programme. In addition, in the 4th grade, they sit the Cambridge Preliminary English Test (PET). Given the fact that many students come from different backgrounds, their English level may vary and some of them may struggle.



The data collection tools and process

Noelia designed a questionnaire which contained three sections:

Feelings – how motivated, confident or nervous were they?

The process – do they identify the purpose and plan, and have the necessary vocabulary and grammar in their writing?

Feedback – do they review their work and check for mistakes? Do they ask for help when they have difficulties? Do they understand the teacher's corrections/feedback?

In addition to these closed questions, where students indicated how often they felt like this or did these things, Noelia included one final open question: How do you think you could improve your writing?

Noelia also asked a colleague to peer-observe a lesson and take a look at some writing samples. She asked him to focus on three areas: how Noelia gave feedback, students' common mistakes, and how she supported the writing process in class (see Appendix).

Once Noelia had gathered information about her students' attitudes toward writing and their biggest difficulties, she gave students a PET exam mock writing task in which they had to write a letter of about 100 words in response to a prompt.

Writing task

Question 7

- This is part of a letter you receive from an English penfriend.

I always go shopping with my friends at the weekend. What do you like buying when you go shopping? What kind of shops are there near where you live?

- Now write a letter answering your penfriend's questions.
- Write your **letter** on your answer sheet.

Noelia analysed the findings from the questionnaire, the peer observation feedback and the students' writing samples, and looked for answers to her questions. With the 23 writing samples, she looked for mistakes and categorised these into: omission of subject, verbs followed by '-ing' or infinitive, and completion of the task.

What Noelia found

Students' attitudes and difficulties

Noelia was able to find interesting answers to her exploratory research questions. For instance, she learned from her colleague that there was a good classroom atmosphere and that her relationship with her students was good in terms of communication and rapport. From the survey responses, she also discovered that students had positive attitudes towards writing, but she was somewhat surprised to learn that 22 out of 23 said they sometimes felt nervous when they had to write.

According to the survey results, all the students reported that they used pre-writing techniques. In addition, over half the students (12) almost always found it easy to use the appropriate grammar and vocabulary when writing, but 11 students responded sometimes. This information appeared to confirm what Noelia had discovered from her analysis of students' writing; some students failed to use the correct grammar or vocabulary. As a result, she felt it would be necessary to address this in her action plan.

Support and feedback

When she focused on what kind of support and feedback she gave, Noelia found that she gave support before she got students to write. For example, she checked if they understood the format of the task and the vocabulary needed. If not, she modelled the task and gave them the vocabulary they would need. Her colleague confirmed that she also gave feedback after the task, and the majority of students said they read the feedback and checked their writing to identify and correct mistakes. They also reported that in most cases they could understand the corrections Noelia made – although her colleague suggested her handwriting could be clearer!

So how did Noelia give feedback after the task?

“What I usually do is call the students who have completed the task (while the others are still working on it) and provide personal feedback. I underline the words or phrases that may be wrong or are not expressed well and they come up with the answer – that is one way. The other way is when I collect the papers in and, besides correcting or circling the parts they might improve, I also write some remarks or questions so that they are more aware of their mistakes. I believe giving feedback is an important part of the learning process because it helps students to realise their mistakes and strengths while promoting independence, and so I feel that I should emphasise this more and reinforce these behaviours.”

Common mistakes

Last but not least, from the analysis of her students' writing, Noelia noted that common mistakes students made were related to sentence structure, e.g. omission of the subject, and verb patterns, specifically verbs followed by '-ing'. She also noted that 8 students did not cover all the points required in the writing task. These findings were consistent with survey results which related to pre-writing techniques, understanding the writing task and what is required, and grammar and vocabulary.

Noelia recognised that she would need to help students improve in these three areas. By reflecting on her findings, she realised that she had taken for granted pre-writing techniques, assuming students did them, and so had barely developed these during her lessons. While it was true that students were familiar with some techniques, these needed to be reinforced more thoroughly.

Noelia's action plan and implementation

Bearing in mind her findings, Noelia proposed and implemented an action plan over the course of five 90-minute lessons.

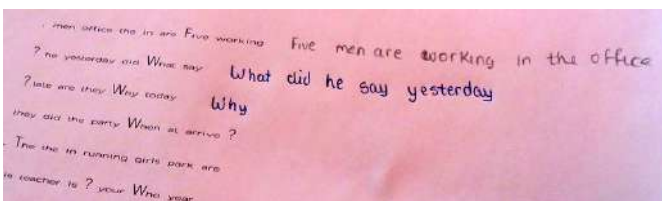
1. Firstly, she introduced daily relaxation exercises in order to help students relax when they felt nervous. These exercises included breathing techniques, and muscle relaxation.



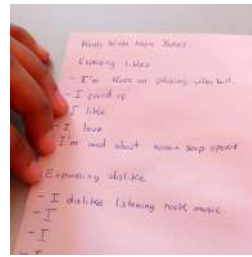
2. Since pre-writing techniques had been relatively neglected, Noelia focused on these and promoted the use of two techniques – 'Journalist questions' (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?) and 'Webbing' i.e. using mind maps.

These techniques were presented via power point slides, and modelling was provided so that afterwards students would be able to apply them.

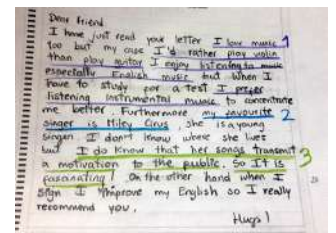
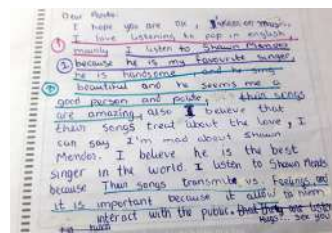
3. Noelia practised the grammar students needed for the writing tasks using different activities, e.g. using some worksheets on the use of '-ing' and infinitives, unscrambling sentences, etc.



She also provided vocabulary/phrases for expressing likes and dislikes, opinions, agreement and disagreement, and she reinforced this in order to improve writing task performance. In addition, to raise students' awareness of their mistakes, several sentences were taken from their writing samples, and analysed and corrected by them.



4. Before handing their work in, students reflected on the content of their writing and analysed each other's texts in order to raise their awareness of completion of the task. Noelia considered this very important since it allowed the students, and not the teacher, to take control and become more independent.



Time to evaluate the impact of her actions

In order to evaluate the impact of the action plan, Noelia repeated the survey but changed the 3rd section. Instead of focusing on Feedback, she focused on Actions implemented to find out how useful students had found these. She also gave students another writing task so she could check for any improvements.

Example of student writing task

Writing Task

A pen friend has written a letter to you:

Everybody loves Christmas in my town we do have a lot of customs and traditions here. Do you enjoy Christmas? Why or Why not? How do you celebrate Christmas in your town?



19th December

Dear Brysida,

I love Christmas, because it is very funny. So it is the familiar time. Sometimes I think about the situation of the poor people because they don't have money but their love is the most important.

Such as, in my family we have a Christmas dinner and we give some gifts. But in my town all the people go to the church for the Christmas eve, we celebrate the arrival of Jesus in the world, while we are singing we are listening Christmas Karols.

On 25th December we sing Christmas Karols while we are seeing fireworks in the sky.

In the afternoon my family go to the cinema and watch films.

Always in my town, we wish a merry Christmas.

Bye, Xia

And she decided to organise a focus group interview to get more feedback from her students. For this she selected six students of varying level and ability (good, fair and poor). She prepared questions in advance, conducted it in Spanish so that her learners could express themselves freely, and recorded the discussion so she could listen carefully later.

Focus group interview questions

- What is your opinion about the problems you encounter when you write and the activities I introduced to solve them?
- In what way do you believe that the activities have helped you improve your writing skills?
- In your opinion, which activities have been the most significant and why?
- Would you recommend these types of activities to be used for other skills? Why? What was the outcome?

Students' attitudes

Responses to the survey suggested that students' attitudes towards writing had improved since initially only 4 students had said they liked and felt motivated to write, and this number rose to 11. This could be because the students felt that their main writing difficulties had been tackled. Happily, students also felt less nervous about writing. 8 said they could always control their nerves, 4 almost always and 1 sometimes – so the relaxation and breathing exercises appear to have had a positive effect on helping students to feel more relaxed.

And were the actions Noelia implemented effective and useful?

The pre-writing techniques also appear to have had a positive impact. The number of students who almost always or always used them rose from 3 to 22! And the number who never used them fell from 4 to 0! Noelia thinks this part of the action plan had a very positive impact on students' writing practices.

There was also a marked improvement with regard to identifying the purpose of the writing task. 22 students responded that they could always or almost always identify the purpose, compared with 13 initially.

Additionally, Noelia had added a new item in the final survey:

3. *Now I notice the mistakes I make when writing.*

And 13 students reported that they always did this, and 9 that they almost always did so.

Noelia believes that this finding is a result of the way she encouraged students to read and correct each other's work, which promoted reflection and raised awareness of writing. In fact, 19 students felt that this exercise always helped them to be more aware of the process.



The final writing task evidenced that there were fewer mistakes regarding subject omission, and with verbs followed by '-ing' or 'to + infinitive'. On average, the frequency of such mistakes dropped by 50% or more. Moreover, 21 students accomplished the task, which means that they had included all the information they were supposed to!

Focus group findings

To sum up, the feedback from the focus group interview showed students were very satisfied with the results and they said that the activities they liked the most and found the most useful were correcting mistakes in their own and their classmates' writing because this encouraged them to reflect and take an active part in the process. In fact, they suggested that these kinds of activities would be useful not only for English but also for other subjects!

Reflections

As Noelia mentioned at the start of her story, writing was not something she devoted much time to. On reflection, she acknowledges now that there are certain things that as teachers we can take for granted, and in her case it was pre-writing techniques, which she assumed students already knew.

Most important of all, she thinks that teachers can sometimes tend to centralise everything – and want to correct every single paper and mistake. Now, she believes that empowering students in certain areas and, for example, letting them be the ones to correct their own work encourages them to participate actively and responsibly in the process, and so become more aware of their own learning.

And, how does Noelia feel about her experience of exploratory action research?

“For me, it has had a big impact on my practice to stop, think and analyse in detail the many things that might be going on around the classroom, and to be able to propose solutions based on factual analysis. Even more, being able to see the results encourages me to keep on going with other aspects of the teaching-learning process that might need attention.”

I have learned that we as teachers are perfectly capable of analysing and providing solutions to the different situations that may arise as a part of the teaching-learning process – we only need to become more aware, and reflect upon our own practice by asking our colleagues, our students or anyone who is involved in our everyday teaching.

Most importantly, I do not think I could have realised this fact without having participated in this programme. It has really helped me to open my eyes and make myself aware that research is something that can be done by all of us, it does not have to be complicated as many of us may think.”

Reflection questions

1. To reduce stress, Noelia introduced daily relaxation exercises including breathing techniques, and muscle relaxation. Do you think that your students ever feel nervous or stressed? Have you ever tried relaxation exercises? If not, would you consider it, and in which situations do you think it could help them?
2. Noelia analysed her students’ writing samples in order to identify and categorise common mistakes. As a result, she was able to focus her teaching on specific language needs. How do you identify areas of difficulty for your students in order to address their specific language needs?

Appendix – Peer observation guide

1. From your point of view, do you think the way I correct students' pieces of writing helps them to improve their writing? If so, can you specify what I do? What are some aspects you consider may be improved?
2. What are the common mistakes in the students' writing samples?
3. Please rate the following items from 1 to 4, where 4 points is for items which are fully evidenced while you observe the class.

	1	2	3	4
The writing task is clearly stated by the teacher				
The teacher pre-teaches or reviews grammar and vocabulary necessary for the task				
The teacher makes sure students know the format of the different writing tasks requested				
The teacher provides constant feedback and support to students				

9. The confidence to speak

Alex Pariguana
Arequipa, Peru



Why focus on confidence in speaking?

What inspired Alex to undertake this research was an incident which happened two years previously.

“At the end of the month, after receiving their final grades, one of my students in Intermediate 5 approached me and asked to talk with me in private. What he said was:

Teacher, why can't I speak English like some of my classmates? We are in the same class but I feel that I do not belong in this level.

That is a day I will never forget. I felt useless. It was the end of the course and I could no longer help my student to improve his speaking skills. If only I had paid more attention to my student's feelings and performance from the first day of classes, he would have felt included and been part of the class as other students.”

Alex reflected that although students may be placed in the correct level according to their ability in other skills, if they aren't able to speak at that level, this can lead to frustration. Those students will be reluctant to participate in speaking activities because of a lack of confidence, and also a lack of opportunity to practise inside and outside the classroom. This problem can result in divisions in the class between those who perform at a high level and those who lack the communicative ability to express their thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, the learning environment can become far from inclusive, with learners who are less confident or able to communicate becoming excluded or left behind.



Alex Pariguana teaches university students from different faculties and professional programs at San Agustin University, Arequipa in the university's Language Center.

He teaches elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate and advanced students. In the Language Center, students remain with the same teacher for a month, and then move to a different class with a different teacher.

Alex describes himself as a teacher committed to making the lessons relevant and inspiring to his students. He loves integrating technology, but recognises that it has limitations when it comes to communication and interaction.



Focus of exploration

Alex decided that looking into this area would not only help him to improve as a teacher, but it would also promote an inclusive environment and help his mixed-level students find the confidence to interact and express their feelings and thoughts. He also hoped that perhaps his story could help other teachers to be more aware of students' feelings towards certain speaking activities.

"Confidence is the foundation of success and our work is to inspire students by encouraging them."

The mixed-level class that Alex chose to focus his research on consisted of 18 learners aged between 16 and 50. Their lessons were 1 hour 45 minutes long and took place every day from Monday to Friday. To start, Alex formulated three questions:

AREAS OF EXPLORATION	EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS
Exploring students' perceptions	How do my students feel and think when they have to speak?
Exploring behaviour	How do I teach my students to speak or express their thoughts effectively? What are the characteristics of my students' speaking performance?

Collecting evidence

Alex recognised that students play a very important part in exploratory research, and should be given the opportunity to actively participate and express their feelings and opinions about the learning process. To this end he designed an initial anonymous questionnaire to learn more about their confidence and motivation levels (see Appendix 1).

In addition to wanting to explore how students interact during lessons, Alex also realised that it would be essential to get objective feedback on his own performance. He decided that it would be useful to have two colleagues or critical friends to peer-observe – one to evaluate his performance and particularly the strategies he used (see Peer Observation Form 1 in Appendix 2), and the other to observe the learners interacting and note their abilities in speaking (see Peer Observation Form 2 in Appendix 3). He was lucky to have two colleagues willing to observe for him in this way.

Finally, he had the idea that, at the end of each lesson, he could get some immediate feedback from his students on how involved or included they felt by means of a simple feedback slip. Ten minutes before the end of every session, students would fill in a feedback slip before they left the room. This not only gave Alex useful information on students' perceptions of the lesson, but also helped him to involve them in the project and be part of the process.

Feedback slip

what did you like about the class?

Could anything have been done differently?

Comments or suggestions

What did Alex learn?

Students' feelings about speaking, and their actual performance in class

What Alex found out from the questionnaire responses was that the majority of students had negative feelings about expressing their ideas and thoughts in front of the class. They felt frustrated, nervous, or unable to say anything when asked. Moreover, they reported feeling that other students were critical of them, and that they were being assessed by the teacher, and they felt intimidated as a result.

On a positive note, students did feel more confident when working and performing in small groups. However, the reasons they gave in the feedback slips for choosing to work alone at times or opting not to participate, was their lack of confidence due to difficulties with vocabulary and grammar.

These findings were confirmed by his colleagues after the peer observation, who noted:

- Students do not feel confident at the moment of speaking.
- Students do not have enough language structures and vocabulary to express their ideas.
- Students have some problems during certain exercises. This is because pair work and group work is not cohesive and collaborative.

The second observer also noted the following characteristic student behaviours:

- Interaction and fluency is affected by a lack of vocabulary and language structures.
- More than half of the students appear to struggle with confidence.
- Although some exercises are inclusive, they do not have the desired impact.
- Some of the students do not talk because they do not seem to feel part of the class.
- Very good students tend to dominate.
- Students talk when they are supposed to talk, but most of the time this is not voluntary.
- Students' speaking is affected by the teacher's and classmates' criticism or negative feedback.



Alex reflected on all of this and concluded that 'publicly' exposing students was probably inappropriate at times when he needed to assess and give feedback, and that this would negatively affect performance and confidence. He also recognised that rather than encouraging participation, he was provoking negative habits. He understood that he had to guide his students to real participation by fostering rapport in his class and respecting the different language learning preferences students had expressed in response to the questionnaires. He recognised that it was very important to regain students' confidence by promoting appropriately challenging activities.

Feedback on Alex's performance from his peers

Feedback from the peer observations confirmed the students' responses. His colleagues pointed out that he did not encourage or promote much participation. Instead, he tended to focus more on the book and the exercises. Also, student interaction dropped when the teacher forgot to model.

Alex reflected on this feedback and acknowledged that his focus should be on encouraging more student participation. He also recognised that some activity variations he had tried did not have the intended effect, i.e. they did not foster rapport or inclusivity – the learners were still not all involved, making his class unintentionally exclusive.

However, Alex was also doing some things right. One observer mentioned that when he did model before activities this seemed to make students feel connected and included.

Feedback from the students' slips

Regular feedback from these simple slips helped Alex to identify appropriate strategies and activities to use. For example, students pointed out that they would feel more confident if they had the vocabulary they needed or could practice paraphrasing when they couldn't remember the exact word they were looking for and they said that it would be good to have some suggestions of what to do if they froze while speaking. There were also many requests for Alex to model activities more. This was feedback that Alex could immediately use in planning the next sessions, and led him to modify his plans in response.

Action planning

Alex took all the feedback on board, and accepted that he would need to design different lessons and activities which were well-linked in order to promote ongoing interaction. He set about creating an action plan based on his findings, which would involve focussing on five strategies.

1. **Pre-teaching vocabulary** – While pre-teaching, Alex would focus on pronunciation too and create a context for using the vocabulary by means of different activities.
2. **Modelling** – Since his performance hadn't had the desired effect, he would need to change his approach. After all, as he put it, 'How can I expect a change in my students' performance if I do not change too? He would introduce some expressions which they could use, then show them an incomplete conversation on the board so that they could figure out when and how to use these expressions. Students would then be ready to perform their own conversations, and create new ones and expand on these using a wider range of new vocabulary.

3. **Interaction** – In an effort to promote interaction, Alex decided to reposition the furniture and arrange seating so that learners would be encouraged to interact and collaborate. In addition, he took on board a suggestion from one of his peer-observers to try grouping students into multi-level groups, and to regularly re-group.



4. **Collaboration** – Alex felt, was the key to helping low-level students. Alex planned for them to be able to reflect on their performance together with others.

5. **Variety of activities** – Alex took into account the learning preferences expressed in response to the questionnaire and in feedback slips, and planned to introduce role-plays, presentations, short conversations and other interactive activities such as describing and comparing pictures and giving opinions on controversial topics.

Alex then created six lesson plans with clear learning outcomes, taking into account the five strategies listed above.



And was the action successful?

To find out the effects of his new actions, Alex used the same data collection tools as he had done during the exploratory phase – student questionnaire, peer observation, and the feedback slips throughout the implementation phase. And after analysing the data, he evaluated the impact of the intervention.



Students felt confident enough to express their ideas and thoughts effectively. They interacted with each other and there was a high level of inclusion, one of his main concerns at the beginning of his research. Activities had fostered interaction and a collaborative atmosphere in the class.

The number of students who now felt calm and safe had risen a lot, from 3 to 11, and levels of frustration and nervousness had decreased. Additionally, students felt they had acquired more vocabulary and learnt more expressions to use in discussion of specific topics or conversations. All students reported feeling motivated to speak and also indicated that they had sufficient opportunities to speak in a safe and interactive environment. The results showed that with the introduction of a variety of activities and strategies their speaking participation had greatly improved.

Alex also found that, although students were a little surprised at first with his regular re-grouping, they soon became used to this and higher-level students collaborated well with lower-level students. His colleagues also noticed how the lower-level students seemed more committed to participating actively during role plays when working in mixed-level groups. Alex remembers how one student who really struggled with speaking persuaded her group not to write out a particular dialogue, and that after lots of spoken practice this resulted in a very natural and original conversation!

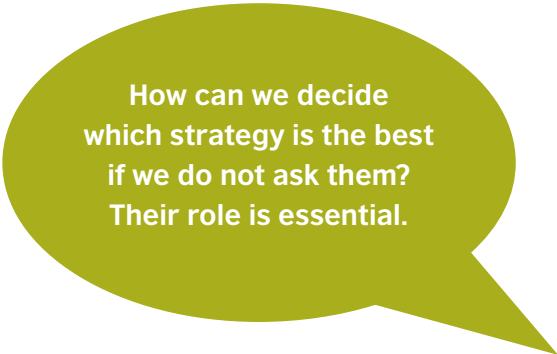


Alex also felt that his performance as a teacher had improved. He became more aware of his students' needs and made appropriate modifications to his lessons in order to

involve his class and make it more inclusive. He also focused more on giving personalised feedback, for example using post-it notes to congratulate students on good points with some tips on what to watch out for – something he hadn't felt he had time for before, but now realised was important. With each new session he noticed how students had started to correct themselves while speaking, something which really encouraged and motivated him during the project.

Reflections

Alex believes that undertaking exploratory action research has given him the opportunity to push himself to give his best in the classroom. He now recognises that all the available approaches, methods, strategies, techniques and activities are useless to teachers if they do not recognise the issues confronting them and have clear goals to address them. He also understands the important role that students have to play in the teaching/learning process.



How can we decide which strategy is the best if we do not ask them? Their role is essential.

"I learned that we (teachers) are responsible for their failures as well as their successes. If they fail, we fail. If they succeed, it is also our success. It's been a long time since I had this feeling of self-satisfaction of doing a great job in class. I haven't had this rewarding feeling since I was just learning to teach. I couldn't help that student a couple of years ago who felt he didn't belong in the level, the man who motivated me to undertake this project. I wish I could go back to that time, but I can't, I can only go forward."

And how does Alex feel he has benefited from the project overall?

"This has been the most reflective professional experience I have ever had. The whole experience has taught me to be aware of my students' needs first and not to take things for granted. Typically, as teachers we can feel that nothing really changes after attending seminars, workshops or other educational events, but as a Champion Teacher, I can testify that the key to a successful class is in our classrooms, like laboratories, where we like scientists, together with our students are trying to achieve excellence. And it is important to share such experiences and take the opportunity to inspire others. I am so excited to see that the future of education is still in our hands - in our classrooms."

Reflection questions

1. To create a more inclusive classroom, Alex realised he needed to think more carefully about grouping, seating arrangements and collaboration. Do you teach multi-level groups? How do you ensure all your students participate and feel included? Are there any strategies in Alex's action plan that you could use? How do you think they could help?
2. At the end of each lesson, Alex collected immediate feedback from his students on how involved or included they felt by means of a simple feedback slip. What do you think are the benefits / disadvantages of getting immediate feedback like this from your students? What other ways of getting immediate feedback have you used / could you use? What kind of information would you like to collect?

Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

Dear students, this questionnaire is to collect your opinions and perceptions about your communicative abilities. Please, answer the following questions with a check () in the answer that best applies to you.

General information:

Age: _____

Gender: Male () Female ()

Date: ____ / ____ /2017

1. Read the statement and choose if it is true always, sometimes or never	Never	Sometimes	Always
I have enough vocabulary or phrases to express my ideas with confidence in class			
My teacher motivates me to express my ideas and opinions in class			
I have enough opportunities to participate actively in class			

2. Order according to your preference. How do you prefer working during speaking exercises in class? From 1 (the highest score) to 3 (the lowest score)	
Group Work	
Individual Work	
Pair Work	

3. Order according to your preference. What abilities do you think are the most difficult when you have to speak English in class? From 1 (the highest score) to 6 (the lowest score)	
Use of vocabulary	
Use of language structures	
Pronunciation	
Accuracy	
Fluency	
Interaction	

4. How do you feel when you speak English in the class?	(X)
Confident and sure of my abilities	
Nervous of making mistakes	
Frustrated because I do not find the correct words and phrases for my speech	
I cannot say anything when I have to answer or ask some questions	

5. What affects me more negatively when I speak English in class?	(X)
My teacher's opinion and assessment	
My classmates' opinion	
A and B	
Other, please, mention it:	

Thanks for your collaboration

Appendix 2 - Peer observation form 1

FIRST OBSERVER FEEDBACK – learning outcomes, structure and content plus class management

Indicate with (✓) if the criteria are met or (✗) if they are not met.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF SPEAKING ACTIVITIES	MET	Feedback
Good balance of speaking activity types which support a range of learner preferences		
Speaking activities support previous vocabulary acquisition or language structure		
Speaking activities are clear and inclusive		

TEACHER PERFORMANCE	MET	Feedback
Tasks are set up efficiently and inclusively to ensure every learner can follow instructions and engage in the speaking activities		
Teacher ensures all students have equal opportunities to engage in all the speaking activities		
Teacher engages students in feedback following speaking activities		
Teacher models structure for the students		

MOTIVATION	MET	Feedback
Contributions from students are acknowledged and valued. Praise is given		
Teacher promotes individual work, group work, pair work in the speaking activities (How effective are they?)		
Students feel motivated to participate actively in the speaking exercises		

Appendix 3 - Peer observation form 2

MONITORING THE CLASS – Please evaluate the students’ participation and performance during the speaking activities. This will be compared with the teacher’s evaluation. This will help to identify the low-level students during the process. You can assess with marks between 0 and 20.

The speaking skills to evaluate are:	
Use of vocabulary	Accuracy
Use of language structure	Fluency
Pronunciation	Interaction

10. Improving writing skills through scaffolding and collaborative writing activities

Roxana Perca
Tacna, Peru

IMPROVING WRITING SKILLS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE SCAFFOLDING LEARNING

EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

- ✦ WHAT'S MY OBJECTIVE WHEN ASKING STUDENTS TO CONSTRUCT TEXTS?
- ✦ HOW DO I SUPPORT MY STUDENTS TO WRITE THE ASSIGNMENTS?
- ✦ WHAT DO MY STUDENTS THINK ABOUT OUR WRITING ACTIVITIES?

EXPLORATION

IMPLEMENTATION

- ✓ VOCABULARY MIND MAP
- ✓ GROUP ACTIVITY
- ✓ STRATEGIES
 - ↳ ASSIGNING ROLES
 - ↳ PEER REVIEW
 - ↳ CHECKLISTS

FINDINGS

The collage includes a thinking emoji, a map of Peru, a school building, a 'Vocabulary Mindmap' diagram, and a hand-drawn diagram titled 'THE 100'.

What was Roxana interested in?

Roxana's research focus was on improving essay-writing skills, a topic she chose due to students' difficulties in organizing their writing properly, something she had observed when evaluating their assignments.

What she noticed was:

- their writing lacked cohesion and coherence, e.g. students didn't use discourse markers
- supporting ideas were disjointed and/or unspecific
- students copied text from the internet.

Roxana decided to undertake exploratory action research to understand better how her teaching of writing was really going, how her students perceived her approach, and how she could improve on it.

She came up with three exploratory research questions to clarify the situation:

1. What are my objectives when asking students to construct texts?
2. How do I support my students to write the assignments?
3. What do my students think about our writing activities?

Collecting and analysing information

To find answers to her first question, Roxana kept a teacher journal to understand her decision-making. She also analysed how she was evaluating her students' essays. She made a list of the elements she would like to see in a paragraph and in paragraph organisation, in addition to desirable grammatical, punctuation and vocabulary features. She turned these elements and features into a writing rubric, and this helped her develop her insights further.

To gather information for questions 2 and 3, she analysed her lesson plans and handouts, and in addition created a short questionnaire, which consisted of two sections. In the first section she asked for students' views on the activities she did with them to prepare for a writing task. In the second section she wanted to know how students felt about the writing topics, instructions, and difficulty level (see Appendix 1).

She gave out this questionnaire after completing one full writing cycle, i.e. preparation, drafting and writing of an essay. She did this during lesson time and students responded anonymously.



Roxana Perca has been teaching English at CEID Jorge Basadre Grohmann National University - Language Center (CEID), in Tacna, in the south of Peru near the Chilean border for around five years. She teaches students at a range of levels from basic to upper-intermediate.

For this exploratory action research project Roxana chose to work with 10 students from different university faculties and public schools who were aged 14 to 22 years old. According to the institution cycle-system, they were placed in the low-intermediate level class, which follows the curricular content of the American English File course book. They attended a 1 hour 40 minute English class every day from Monday to Friday.

Some answers

After collecting and analysing the information, Roxana was able to find some answers to her questions:

1. What are my objectives when asking students to construct texts?

The rubric Roxana developed showed her priorities as follows:

I. ARGUMENTATION SEQUENCE	3	2	1
1.1.- Introduction paragraph			
1.1.1) ... has a lead sentence that hooks the reader effectively			
1.1.2) ... introduces the text giving effective background information			
1.1.3)... thesis statement is written correctly and it is the last part of the paragraph			
1.2.- Organization			
1.2.1)... has a logical order (beginning, middle and end)			
1.2.2) ... follows 4 paragraph format			
1.2.3) Paper has appropriate paragraph divisions between new thoughts			
1.2.4) There is an appropriate amount of details (not too many, not too little)			
1.2.5) Paper is appropriate length (not too long, not too short)			
1.3.- Supporting paragraph			
1.3.1) ... has at least three transition words per paragraph or makes smooth transition			
1.3.2) ... has one topic sentences (1 best reasons) for each paragraph 1 and 2			
1.3.3) ... includes at least 1 supporting experience/detail/fact for supporting paragraph 1 that is relevant to the topic			
1.3.4) ... includes at least 1 supporting experience/detail/fact for supporting paragraph 2 that is relevant to the topic			
1.3.5) ... includes at least one explanation of how the evidence (details/facts) support the thesis statement			
1.4.- Conclusion paragraph			
1.4.1) Thesis statement is restated effectively in the conclusion paragraph			
1.4.2) The reasons are summarized effectively in the conclusion paragraph			
1.4.3) There is an effective call for action in the conclusion paragraph			
II. GRAMMAR FORMS	3	2	1
2.1) ...has a variety of sentence structures/patterns (complex & compound)			
2.2) Consistently correct subject-verb agreement and correct noun, pronoun and verb form			
2.3) Paper has correct capitalization, punctuation, and spelling with few errors			
2.4) There is at least 1 use of each of the grammar forms studied (second conditional, present perfect/ for and since, passive voice, used to, might)			
2.5) There is a varied used of adjective, nouns and adverbs related to fears			

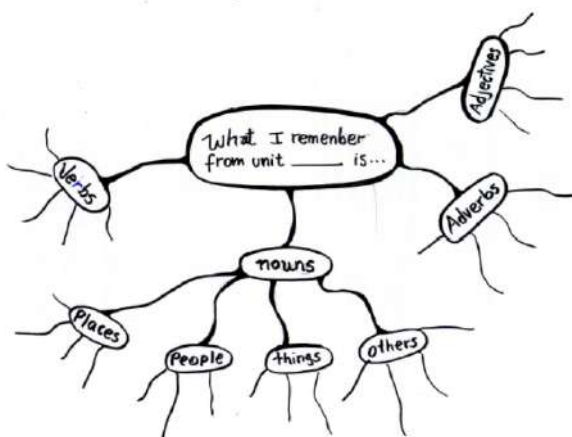
Creating the writing rubric helped Roxana to realise, more so than before, that her main overall objective was for students to learn to communicate through writing, using appropriate English – taking into account grammatical, semantic and discursive aspects.

2. How do I support my students to write the assignments?

Roxana found that she supported students by setting them different tasks to develop vocabulary, redaction (editing and publishing), essay organisation and language awareness.

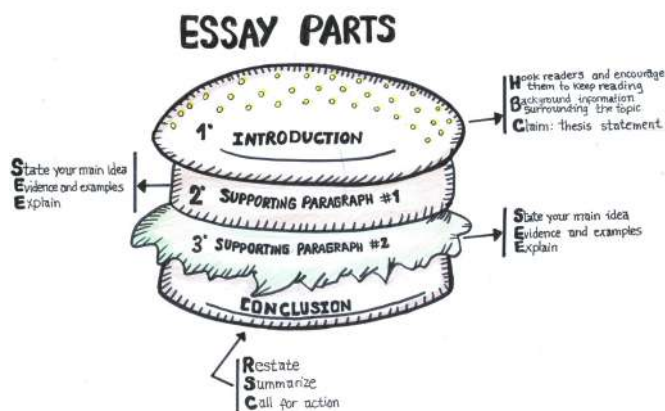
She attempted to develop **vocabulary** by means of mind maps, using words and phrases from texts in the course book and additional content related to the essay topic.

Vocabulary Mindmap



Redaction (editing and publishing) was developed by means of group and individual writing activities such as individual short narratives or collective poems.

Essay organisation was developed using group essay writing following a four-paragraph essay format, and following the so-called ‘hamburger’ model (see Francisco’s story for a brief explanation of this model).



During the group writing, students would work on main ideas together, then take responsibility for developing one paragraph each, and work alone.

Language awareness was developed using an activity which required students to order paragraphs of an essay by paying attention to connectors and transition phrases.

Overall, students had been trained to follow a five-step writing process: brainstorming, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. After going through this process once in groups, students had been asked to do so individually for a piece of assessed writing.

3. What do my students think about the writing activities?

Responses to the questionnaire revealed that of all the activities, students found essay writing in groups the most useful; in fact, it was a bit of a shock for Roxana to learn that four students felt afraid when they were asked to write individually! The second most useful activity was the vocabulary mind mapping – and it was interesting that students considered acquiring vocabulary a priority. What they found most difficult was drafting and text revision.

From her journal notes, Roxana noted that students found this first full writing cycle interesting and important. However, performing the cycle individually was considered hard work and made them feel stressed. Moreover, she herself felt that the time given to complete the activities in class and her guidance and assistance were insufficient.

Drawing conclusions

After the exploratory research stage, Roxana understood that students enjoyed working on the writing cycle in groups much more than doing it alone. However, if she was to increase the amount of writing in groups she felt that each member of the group would need to take a specific role to ensure all students fully participated in constructing the texts. It would be necessary to modify some steps in the writing process too, in order to give more responsibility to those students who were more advanced and encourage them to lead and support the others.

She had also gained a better insight into how students would need to improve the way they developed and organized ideas. Specifically, according to her rubric, they would need to learn better how to give examples, choose a range of appropriate vocabulary and organise ideas using correct grammatical structures, as well as achieve paragraph coherence with the use of discourse markers such as ‘however,’ ‘for instance,’ ‘in addition,’ and others.

Implementing an action plan

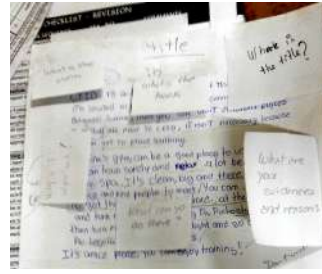
Based on her findings, Roxana took the following decisions:

- To continue with vocabulary mind maps for recording and organising new words.
- To continue with the pre-writing activities i.e. brainstorming using collaborative mind maps, and drafting paragraphs using templates to support organisation, because they were working well and the students reported them as 'useful'.

- To encourage peer review and introduce further resources during revision and editing, e.g. sticky notes (with questions) and a checklist (with essay elements).



Collaborative mind map (brainstorming stage)



Sticky notes (revision stage)



Checklist (revision and editing stage)

- To make the group writing process the main activity instead of the individual writing process.
- To assign roles, for example editor, photographer, scribe, resource manager and director during group writing and publishing.

ROLE	NAME	TASK	MATERIALS
Director		(1) Organize the activities considering the special skills of his/her colleagues (2) Supervise the completion of the final work on time (3) Edit minimum details in the text	Cellphone WhatsApp
Writer		(1) To type the final paper (2) To edit minimum details	A computer Word program
Photographer		(1) To take a real picture about the topic (2) To edit the picture	A camera or a cellphone
Proofreader		(1) To edit minimum details in the typing (2) To print and present the paper	A printer A computer

Roxana implemented these actions over the course of five lessons and then evaluated the impact.

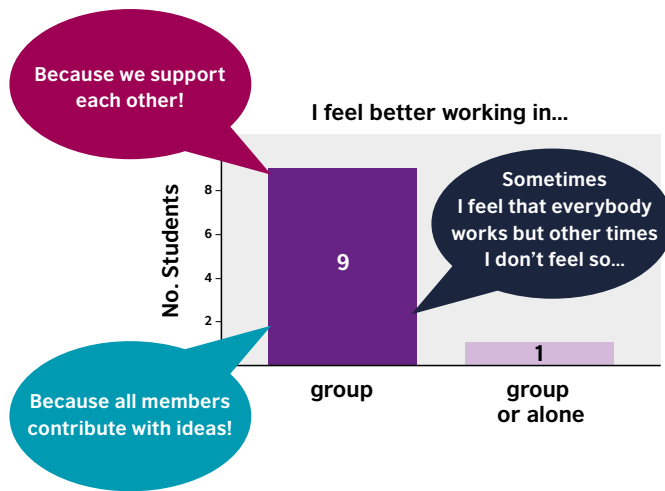
Action plan impact

To understand the impact of the action plan, Roxana used the same tools as during the exploratory phase: a survey, which included different questions to find out how students viewed the changes she had implemented (see Appendix 2); notes in her journal; and she also used the rubric she had produced to analyse the final collaborative essays.

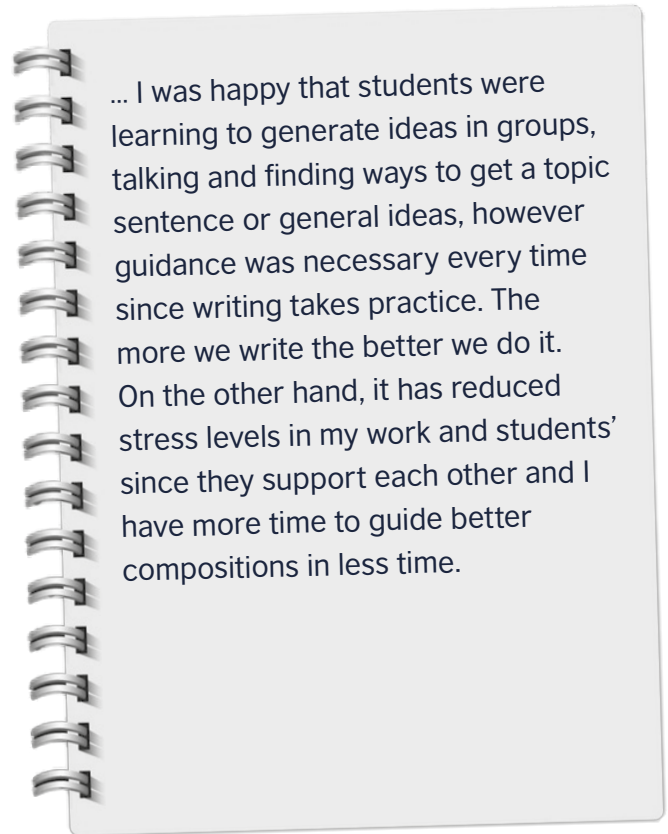
Based on the information from these sources, Roxana was able to draw some conclusions:

Working in groups

The majority of students (nine) did seem to prefer working in groups for the writing process because this made them feel supported, calm, and confident.



It also helped them work faster, and they could exchange ideas. Students felt effectively supported not just by their peers, but also by the teacher, mainly during brainstorming and drafting. Moreover, the more they came to know collaboratively about how to deal with the writing process, the more confident they felt about text construction. Consequently, Roxana felt she was able to withdraw her assistance more from the process, and she was able to assist increasingly with style and format more than organisation.



Roxana's journal notes

Strategies

Eight out of ten students thought the group work was most effective during brainstorming and drafting, and the strategies applied during these stages, for example the 'hamburger' model were valued as 'very useful' or 'useful' strategies. Opinions on revision strategies (the use of sticky notes and marking and checklists) were mixed and Roxana felt she should rethink this stage of the process.

Regarding instructions during the process (brainstorming, drafting, revision, editing and publishing), six students thought these were clear and useful, mainly because the process followed a clear sequence of activities at different stages and students were scaffolded and supported at each stage. As students became more familiar with the process, teacher guidance and instruction were withdrawn.

Participation of group members

Only half of the students felt that everyone was sufficiently involved in revising the work, and Roxana did note that those who were more skilful in grammar generally tried to assume most of the work at that stage. Also, only four students felt that everyone was sufficiently involved in the publishing stage. Since this work was done out of class and shared by email and WhatsApp, Roxana wasn't able to supervise and moderate this stage. Nevertheless, these out-of-class activities were perceived as engaging – students enjoyed taking photographs and adding these to the essays.

Finally, Roxana's analysis of the group essays indicated that they were well-organised, and the formal aspects of language were used effectively in communicating arguments. Main ideas were supported, and although some elements of the essay, e.g. the hook or the background were missing, this did not affect the overall meaning at all.

Reflections

As a result of her exploratory action research, Roxana has understood, developed and learnt more about some aspects of her teaching of writing. Particularly, she has become more aware that group writing creates a conducive environment by reducing stress and encouraging support as well as sharing of responsibilities among peers. Consequently, she will continue to focus on group activities, identifying 'experts' and promoting them to assist less knowledgeable or struggling learners.

And how does she feel about exploratory action research overall?

"I must say that it was a liberating and challenging experience. I had experience of doing research as part of a Master's Programme before, so I had learnt to use many scholarly references to support my texts and to justify every step of the research process. ... At the beginning it was a little difficult to feel comfortable about writing outside of academic conventions, and only based on my own observations and reflections. In the end though, with the support of my tutor things started to work, this approach made me feel confident and curious since the decisions were mine and based on my reflections about what was happening in my real context. I managed to find a way to express myself as a teacher and researcher, and students started to feel involved in the process, mainly because I considered their views and feelings about what we were doing."

Reflection questions

1. Roxana discovered that her students preferred group writing to individual writing, and that this increased interaction. Do you encourage group writing with your students? Why / why not?
2. Roxana designed a questionnaire to find out how her students felt about the writing activities. What kind of questions would you ask your students about writing? What would you like to find out?

Appendix 1 - Survey

Dear student, this questionnaire aims to know your opinions about our writing activities in order to improve our work in the classroom. Please, answer the following questions.

General information:

Age: _____

Gender: Male () Female ()

Date: ____ / ____ /2017

I.- Before beginning to write our essay, we have done activities such as: (1) vocabulary mind map, (2) readings and questionnaires on the subject of writing, (3) essay puzzle, (4) sensory detail writing, (5) group essay group work.

1. - Complete the chart about our activities before the writing process.

ACTIVITY	Very useful	Useful	Quite useful	Slightly useful	Not useful
Vocabulary mind map					
Readings and questionnaires on the subject of writing					
Essay puzzle					
Sensory detail writing					
Essay group work					

Other / Comments:

2. - What do you think you learned from the 5 activities mentioned above?

NE = I did not understand the activity.

NA = I did not attend that class.

ACTIVITY	What aspects did you improve during the activity?					
Vocabulary mind map	vocabulary	grammar	redaction	content	NE	NA
Readings and questionnaires on the subject of writing	vocabulary	grammar	redaction	content	NE	NA
Essay puzzle	vocabulary	grammar	redaction	content	NE	NA
Sensory detail writing	vocabulary	grammar	redaction	content	NE	NA
Essay group work	vocabulary	grammar	redaction	content	NE	NA

Other / Comments:

Appendix 1 - Survey (contd).

3. - What do you think about the instructions of the activities?

NA = I did not attend that class.

ACTIVITY	The instructions for the activity were			
Vocabulary mind map	clear	not very clear	unclear	NA
Readings and questionnaires on the subject of writing	clear	not very clear	unclear	NA
Essay puzzle	clear	not very clear	unclear	NA
Sensory detail writing	clear	not very clear	unclear	NA
Essay group work	clear	not very clear	unclear	NA

Other / Comments:

4. - What do you think you need to improve your writing process? List according to the order of importance.

To know more vocabulary	
To know more grammatical structures	
To know more connectors	
To know more about the text structures	
To know about punctuation	
To improve redaction	
Other:	

Comments:

Appendix 1 - Survey (contd).

II. During the writing process.

1. - How do you feel when I ask you to write an essay in English individually?	(X)
a) motivated	
b) quiet	
c) confused	
d) frustrated	
e) strange	
f) afraid	
g) other:	

2. - What do you feel about the proposed topic to write the essay?	(X)
a) very interesting	
b) interesting	
c) difficult	
d) boring	
e) other:	

3. - How understandable were the instructions of the essay (the prompt)?	(X)
a) very understandable	
b) understandable	
c) regular	
d) little understandable	
e) confusing	
f) other:	

4. - What part of the writing process did you find most difficult to do?	(X)
a) brainstorm, skeleton essay	
b) drafting	
c) revision	
d) editing	
e) publishing:	

Why?

5. - What part of the essay did you find most difficult to do?	(X)
a) introduction	
b) body paragraph	
c) conclusion	

Why?

Thank you very much for your attention.

Appendix 2 - Survey

Dear student, this questionnaire aims to know your opinions about our writing activities in order to improve our work in the classroom. Please, answer the following questions.

General information:

Age: _____

Gender: Male () Female ()

Date: ____ / ____ /2017

1. - How do you feel when I ask you to write an essay in English in group?	(X)
a) motivated	
b) quiet	
c) confident	
d) confused	
e) frustrated	
f) strange	
g) afraid	
h) others:	

2. - I feel better working the text ...	(X)
a) alone	
b) in group	
c) both	

Why?

3. - I participated giving my ideas and I was heard during the group work	(X)
a) Yes	
b) Sometimes	
c) No	

4. - What do you think about the instructions for group work during the writing process?

PROCESS	Very clear	clear	moderately	Slightly clear	Not clear
Brainstorming					
Drafting					
Revision					
Editing					
Publishing					

Appendix 2 - Survey (contd).

How do you evaluate the work of the group members during the writing process?

5. - PROCESS	Everybody worked	Only some students assumed the job and others observed
Brainstorming		
Drafting		
Revision		
Editing		
Publishing		

6. - I think that the performance of the group discussion during the brainstorming stage has been _____ to motivate creativity during the writing process	(X)
a) very useful	
b) useful	
c) moderately useful	
d) slightly useful	
e) not useful	

7. - The use of the outline as an essay guide was _____ to organize the group ideas in the writing process	(X)
a) very useful	
b) useful	
c) moderately useful	
d) slightly useful	
e) not useful	

8. - The division of work for the realization of the paragraphs during the drafting stage was _____ to improve the writing process	(X)
a) very useful	
b) useful	
c) moderately useful	
d) slightly useful	
e) not useful	

9. - The checklists for the revision and editing stage were _____ to improve the writing process	(X)
a) very useful	
b) useful	
c) moderately useful	
d) slightly useful	
e) not useful	

10. - The assignment of roles (director, writer, photographer, proofreader) during the publication stage was _____ to improve the writing process	(X)
a) very useful	
b) useful	
c) moderately useful	
d) slightly useful	
e) not useful	

Thank you very much for your attention.

This book contains stories from the Champion Teachers Peru programme, showcasing and celebrating ten English language teachers' efforts to deepen their understanding and improve their practice via Exploratory Action Research (EAR).

Both the Champion Teachers (CT) programme and the EAR approach it has given rise to have been going from strength to strength in recent years. The CT programme has attained a high degree of sustainability in Chile, where it began in 2013, is taking root in Peru, and has expanded to Colombia and Mexico in 2018.

This book – following on from a previous collection of stories devoted to teacher-research in Chile (Rebolledo, Smith and Bullock, 2016) – will serve a useful function for teachers around the world, not only in Peru, in providing illustrative cases for teachers and teacher educators interested in teacher-research engagement. Two features which distinguish this book from its predecessor are the way it provides more specific information about data collection and tools, and the additional provision of questions for reflection at the end of each story, making the book suitable for use in training situations and teacher development groups.

In tandem with its predecessor and with the British Council's *Handbook for Exploratory Action Research* (Smith and Rebolledo, 2018), the present collection provides concrete insights, of value to teachers and trainers alike, into how research can feasibly and beneficially be carried out *by* teachers, *for* teachers, both with and for their students, as a way of understanding and addressing the challenges they face.

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