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Engaging student participation through the scaffolding of students' writing process using social media.

TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN

Para optar al título de Profesor de Inglés y el grado de Licenciado en Educación

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I. Introduction

Writing is a complex skill that requires deep knowledge on different levels to become proficient, this is especially true for second language learners. One way for ESL teachers to impart this knowledge is by presenting their students with properly scaffolded steps and techniques in order to successfully carry out a writing task. Scaffolding students' writing process through social media requires carefully planned actions to gradually improve students' writing abilities in order to independently complete different communicative tasks, as is outlined in this report.

The topic of scaffolding students' writing process has been widely researched throughout the years by various authors (such as Hammond, 2001 and Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976), which will be further explored, contributing with strategies and techniques to gradually get students to improve their writing in classroom settings. On the other hand, scaffolding strategies have been recently used in blended learning through face to face and online modality, in this case with social media (Facebook), (Majid, Stapa & Keong, 2015). Their research showed positive improvement on students' writing through the use of Facebook because the online learning environment helped students interact not only with the teacher but also with other classmates, privately (by private messages) and publicly (by commenting on public posts). They proved how social media platforms could be a beneficial tool in aiding students' writing process.

Social media platforms, specifically Instagram, have seen an increase in popularity in the last six years. However, the implementation of scaffolding techniques to improve student's writing solely through social media is a much less popular and researched area. What is unknown in this area is how teachers can use Instagram to scaffold writing, how students will react to this informal educational platform and how effective using this platform will be in improving students' writing process.

While Chile is suffering through a global pandemic, one of the most notorious challenges the country is facing is the lack of accessible education for the majority of the public-school-student population, and the problem is exacerbated when the student and their family are economically vulnerable. The school where I carried out this action research project is a technical public high

school where 80% of its students are classified as economically vulnerable. This means that the education of these students is being greatly impacted during the pandemic. This has meant that, whether it be due to the lack of access to the internet or for complex individual reasons, some students have not been able to participate in school activities from home during this unique semester where distance learning has replaced the traditional education system. Due to the current conditions, researching how to successfully scaffold students' writing process through an accessible platform, such as Instagram, is crucial to provide an accessible education to public-school-students in Chile.

II. Contextualization

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has caused students' learning to migrate to a distance based education system. Teachers, as well as students, at this public technical high school have struggled immensely with the adjustment. Many students at this school, as well as across the country, do not have secure and/or reliable access to the internet. To facilitate the distance education of the students, national telecommunication companies have provided free basic cell phone internet/data access in order to access social media platforms, this service can be accessed through their school's website. The effectiveness of these data plans are still unknown because it depends on the type of phone one has access to as well as the student's geographical location.

The present research was implemented at the 12th grade level, where there are 270 students between the ages of 16 and 20 currently enrolled. Although these students are normally divided into eight classes according to their chosen speciality, because of the current situation and the lack of internet access that many face, it was decided to asynchronously provide students with learning materials as a whole grade level rather than by individual classes.

At the beginning of the implementation of the distance based education the learning material was solely delivered by uploading worksheets every two weeks to the school's website for students to access. The students who did not have access to this option, be it because of a lack of internet or another reason, could opt to have a caretaker pick up the printed worksheet at the school. Students were expected to complete these worksheets and submit them to their English teacher. This modality only saw a 10% student participation rate. In order to increase participation it was determined that material would be uploaded to Instagram twice a week through an account designated to the twelfth grade level.

Through email conversations with their English teacher I was told that most of these students have a low level of English proficiency, although there is some variability in the class. She also mentioned that the majority of students avoid using English at all costs, only producing the language if they have a concrete example or model to directly follow or copy. Finally, she said that the students have difficulty with productive skills and do not find motivation in their English lessons.

To try to combat the students' lack of motivation I conducted a survey where I was able to collect data on a small group of students' thoughts on writing through a survey about students' interests and beliefs on English through Google Forms (see appendix A). This survey showed that the students believe that the skill of writing is neither the easiest nor hardestest skill to acquire, but rather somewhere in between on a scale from easiest to hardest. These results are important since, due to the ongoing pandemic, this semester students would not be able to work on their speaking skills, only reading and listening comprehension and writing would be further developed. I took this as an opportunity to focus on the writing skill by carefully scaffolding their writing exercises. Additionally, efforts were made to ensure that the writing tasks were made meaningful for students with the intent to motivate them to participate in the learning process. However, I was conscious that these approaches may be unsuccessful as previous attempts at distance based education had only had a 10% participation rate from the students and that direct contact with them was minimal, making it hard to appeal to students' needs and interests.

In the face of the present issues that have arisen in this context I have chosen the following research question to answer: How can I design well scaffolded writing tasks that students will want to complete while at home during the pandemic?

III. Literature Review

Writing in a second language is a complex functional skill to acquire, it requires the teacher to provide a lot of guidance and support through different aid techniques and strategies to the students with enough support so that they will eventually accomplish a task independently without any help. This describes the concept of scaffolding exactly, defined by Wood, Bruner & Ross (1976) as the process that "enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond [their] unassisted efforts" (p. 90). Scaffolding is a widely accepted and used strategy in second language teaching because, as Riazi & Rezaii (2011) state, it "is a highly flexible and adaptable [model] that supports students as they acquire basic skills and higher order processes," (p. 56) this leads to teachers being able to differentiate materials and instructions for students who have diverse needs. For these reasons, different scaffolding strategies were used during my action plan.

Hammond (2001) talks about the different opportunities for developing deep knowledge through scaffolding, something we aim to impart onto our students. To achieve this we rely on the concept of "design-in" scaffolding that happens at the macro level, during the unit planning. At this stage the teacher must think about the "cognitive and language demands of the specific educational goals" (p. 45). The sequence in which learning experiences are delivered need to be supported so students are able to grasp new concepts while developing the skills and acquiring necessary vocabulary in proceeding to more challenging objectives. At the beginning of the unit it is necessary to introduce new language and concepts using language support and visuals such as the use of the L1 (Mart, 2013), emojis (Tang & Hew, 2018) and code switching (Canagarajah, 1995). At this stage it is necessary to build on students' previous knowledge so that these concepts do not seem so foreign from their everyday lives and their previously acquired knowledge. This can be achieved by implementing short yes or no questions, true or false statements and gradually fill in the blanks to check the student's level of comprehension. These types of activities are targeted at a low cognitive level. By applying this approach during my teaching, it was expected that students would build on their previous and learned knowledge. This was used to enable them to then move on to more independent and challenging tasks that they were given.

Nunan (1991) explains that giving students a "task" to complete provides them with more of a "purpose" instead of having them use the language without a real purpose in order to just demonstrate their ability. The latter many times may lead to a lack of language retention. The type of writing task presented to students may be just as important as the scaffolding process it takes to complete said task, especially when regarding the motivation of the student in completing the task. With a task based approach to writing, students are presented with "tasks that are reasonable for them and related to their real life experience" (Kawachi, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000 cited in Marashi & Dadari, 2012). The task based approach is also about making sure that students are focused on using the language to express their thoughts, views and themselves instead of solely focusing on grammatical correctness. Especially during this delicate context of a pandemic and learning from home, students should be focused on meaning rather than form, although form should not be ignored. To try to push this concept further, while applying it in a "classroom" setting, specific tasks were given to the students through both the school website and the course Instagram account. The need to do this is further supported by Ellis (2005) who states that "engaging learners in activities where they are focused on creating pragmatic meaning is intrinsically motivating"(p.212).

Although these tasks were presented through the school website and the course Instagram account, it was important to remember that these students have a mixed level of proficiency. Taking this into consideration, differentiation had to take place when designing materials and giving instructions to accommodate all levels of proficiency, while still challenging students. There is no one right way, or one better way, to differentiate materials for students. The concept of differentiation, defined by Tomlinson (2005) is just the teacher being able to "effectively address variance in students' readiness levels, interests, and learning potential of each student" (p. 263). A concrete, but general, way in which differentiation can be applied, as suggested by Nuangpolmak (2014), is by creating "various versions of the same activity in order to accommodate learners of different proficiency levels and interests" (p. 124). This exact approach was applied when creating the course content for both the school website and the course Instagram account. This was meant to effectively engage and appeal to the interests of all students in the course.

IV. Action Plan

The action plan was designed based on "Unit 1: Rights and Responsibility of the Youth" from the national curriculum of the Ministry of Education. As a result of the pandemic the Ministry of Education provided a prioritized curriculum where they had outlined fundamental objectives for each language skill. Although the listed fundamental objectives included both writing and oral skills, the action plan was only directed at the writing components as these are the objectives that were integrated into this semester.

A. Objectives

In order to answer the main research question of "how can I design well scaffolded writing tasks that students will want to complete while at home during the pandemic?", as stated above, I outlined actions that should be taken to answer my question in the following section. Therefore, the main objective of this action plan was to get students to independently complete writing tasks which were uploaded to Instagram in order to improve their foreign writing skills. This main objective could be achieved by making the materials more accessible to all levels of proficiency and by motivating students through making the tasks have a purpose and making sure that the tasks are and feel meaningful.

B. Description of action plan

The action plan had a duration of four weeks, where every week, through the designated Instagram account, two separate uploads of scaffolded sequenced materials were posted. Ideally, this resulted in eight different learning opportunities. Additionally, three worksheets were made available for the students who either did not have access to Instagram or wanted additional exercises to further their English language proficiency. The contents that appeared in the worksheets and on Instagram both covered very similar, if not directly related, content and topics about the unit. Each post was presented in an engage, study, activate (ESA) model (Purgason, 2013) where: the engage phase was presented to the students through Instagram stories that lasted 24 hours, the interactive tools were used to get students to engage with the materials; the study phase was presented by an Instagram post with multiple slides depending on what was being introduced/presented; and the activate phase included opportunities to use the learned language or structures through Instagram stories or posted on the feed. All activities were "highlighted" in order to be available to students even after 24 hours on the account's home feed.

C. Implementing scaffolding

The first two weeks were meant to introduce and familiarize the students with the unit. The activities included in this time period were for students to identify and get familiarized with unit specific vocabulary by matching concepts to definitions/images, answering yes or no questions, answering true or false statements (see appendix B) and filling in the blanks. This was mostly aimed at having students identify, remember and relate the information to themselves and their previous knowledge. The only writing activity implemented in the first two weeks was the activity of "2 Truths 1 Lie" where students were expected to write simple sentences expressing facts about themselves. This was meant to gauge the willingness and ability of students to write about themselves in English. This activity was also meant to be a source of data collection to observe if students were able to complete this task. Choosing the topic of themselves, and not necessarily something from the curriculum, was meant to lure them in by making the writing task about something they knew, themselves. All instructions were both in English and their L1 (see appendix C) and an example of what was expected was always presented as well.

In the following two weeks, during the "engage" phase students were presented with authentic examples of people's opinions where students were introduced to the basic structures on how to give an opinion (I think that/I believe that.. etc.) and students were asked to agree or disagree with the statements. This was still targeting students' knowledge at a low cognitive level. After a while the posts began to be targeted to a more intermediate cognitive level by withdrawing translations from vocabulary that had already been presented multiple times in previous posts,

with the hope that students had already integrated these structures and vocabulary into their knowledge.

D. Implementation of differentiation

Differentiation was implemented by the use of translations and images or emojis in most cases. Instructions were always written in the target language but in brackets there was the translation in their L1. This was mainly done so that there was to be no confusion from the lower English language proficiency students when it came to how to complete a task. Texts either had language support on the side, or direct emphasis (by bolding, underlining and comparing) on vocabulary and concepts were brought to students' attention to have them distinguish cognates. A way of implementing differentiation in reading texts was to have three different versions, an original version for advanced learners where there was little to no language support, an intermediate version where support was given with grammatical structures and more advanced vocabulary and a beginner version where the text was completely adapted for a low level of proficiency with translations, and by the removal of difficult words and structures, while also removing unnecessary adjectives, while still keeping the main idea of the text (see Appendix D).

E. Increasing motivation for better participation

At the beginning I asked students through a survey on Google Forms about their interests and how important English was for their lives. Every student (the 7 that answered) gave me different answers. I tried to integrate their stated interests into the action plan to encourage student participation by appealing to their stated interests. The actions I took to motivate students were making tasks as meaningful to their lives as possible. Through the survey, and from conversations with the mentor teacher, I was made aware that most of these students enjoyed music. By involving music into the material and asking students to give their opinion on certain lyrics and asking for music suggestions from students I intended to appeal to their interest in music. Another action I took was giving them options on readings, so students were able to choose the reading that interested them, hopefully motivating them to complete the activities that were related to the reading they had chosen. On a few occasions I explicitly told them not to

worry about making mistakes when using the language because mistakes were welcome in the learning process, this was meant to lower anxiety in students and give them motivation to make mistakes and learn from them.

F. Data collection

Most of the data collected, regarding information about the students, was done through informal email conversations between my mentor teacher and I. To gather more information on the students I sent a survey to students regarding their general interests and beliefs about English through Google Forms, although only 7 students answered. The information about the school was all collected through the school website or through informal email conversations with my mentor teacher. The data about students' participation was gathered through Instagram tools, this allowed me to see which students were answering and interacting with the account (see appendix E), although these interactions were very minimal and I never received any completed writing tasks.

V. Conclusion & reflection

Carrying out this action research confirmed my deep rooted beliefs on the importance of studentteacher relationships. I believe that if students were able to put a face to the person behind the Instagram account they would have felt more comfortable interacting and writing to it. The classroom atmosphere is crucial for students' learning in a traditional educational system, therefore, it is important to try to recreate that atmosphere on any platform that is used for learning purposes. This was hampered because the communication between preservice teacher, mentor teacher and students was not coherent, which made the interactions through Instagram far from ideal. In the end, I was unable to confirm if the scaffolding was effective.

I believe that successfully scaffolding students' writing process first requires a solid base of information about the students. It is necessary to know students as both learners and people to be aware of their learning style, preferences and abilities as well as taking their objectives, interests and motivation into consideration. Due to the lack of interaction from the students I was unable to observe if my scaffolding approach was having a positive or negative effect on the students' writing process. Even when students were directly asked to provide their feedback on the materials, they did not share any insight. This was very challenging for me to gauge the effectiveness of the materials that I prepared.

This year's overall teaching experience has been extremely challenging to adapt to for me personally, especially because I consider myself having a low level of proficiency when it comes to the use of any type of technology. My motivation and passion for teaching (student interactions, student feedback, student progress, etc.) was almost non-existent this semester. I did not know the students as people or as learners, something I find extremely important when planning what to teach and how to teach it. Neither did I receive student feedback or much participation which made creating materials even more difficult, as not knowing what was effective or what needed improvement meant that I could not alter the materials I made in order to create a better understanding. Also, related to not having a relationship with my students, I felt helpless not knowing their situation during this pandemic. This directly affects their learning, and since I did not have a relationship with them there was no way that I could adjust my

teaching or give extra attention, help or guidance to those going through a hard time, something I would have done if it were a normal classroom situation.

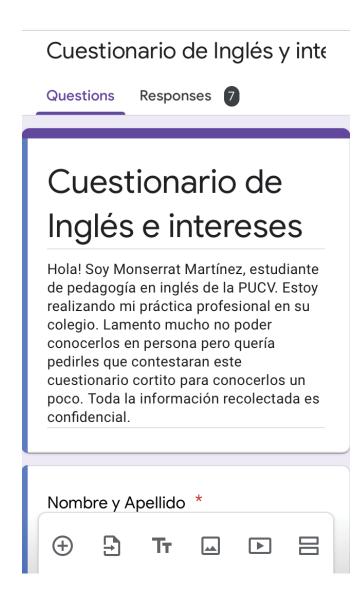
Since I believe in a student centered lesson plan for better learning, uploading material to social media was challenging because it felt very teacher centered. Without student participation or feedback I could not deliver my ideal student centred lesson plan, I found it very difficult to adjust to this new reality. This was evidenced by the fact that even though I tried scaffolding students' writing processes to eventually get students to independently write an opinion piece, this proved to be much more difficult than I had imagined. This left me curious and motivated to learn more about strategies and techniques that can aid students' writing process, such as bringing attention to vocabulary by underlining, highlighting and translating words which I will keep in mind and implement in my teaching in the future to ensure that different learning styles are accommodated, such as visual learners. Although Instagram was challenging to adapt to, I believe social media platforms can be beneficial for students so they can have access to the materials at any time on a platform they are already familiar with.

Despite all of the hardships described above, I still believe that having a student centred teaching strategy is the best teaching method. During my practice I tried demonstrating this by reaching out to the students and trying to engage them into meaningful discussions and learning opportunities. I believe that this approach, and teaching English through both rich input and engaging content is the best way for students to learn. I truly believe that by doing this they will be able to learn a second language, a skill that will open both eyes and doors for many.

I humbly continue this process in becoming an educator knowing that even though I may have a degree in education, my learning process will always continue. As much as students can learn from me, I can also learn from them.

VI. Appendix

Appendix A: Survey through Google Forms



En orden de mas fácil hasta más difícil clasifica los siguiente , listening (escuchando) writing (escribiendo) reading (leyendo) speaking (hablando).

7 responses

Trading, listening, speakung

Escribiendo,escuchando y hablando

Listening, reading, writing, speaking

Reading- writing-speaking-listening

Reading , writing , speaking , listening.

Listening, reading, speaking and writing

Reading, Writing, listening and speaking

Cuéntame de algunos de tus intereses. (Leer, pintar, música, escribir, autos, deportes, otro idioma, etc)

7 responses

Dibujar, me gusta dibujar pero nunca se que así que terminó no dibujando. Me gusta escuchar música.

Me gusta la música

Me gusta mucho la musica

Música, motocicletas, y deportes (variado)

Me gustan los autos porque es lo que me gustan de chico y ya e trabajado en ellos.

Otro idioma, Música, dibujo y deporte

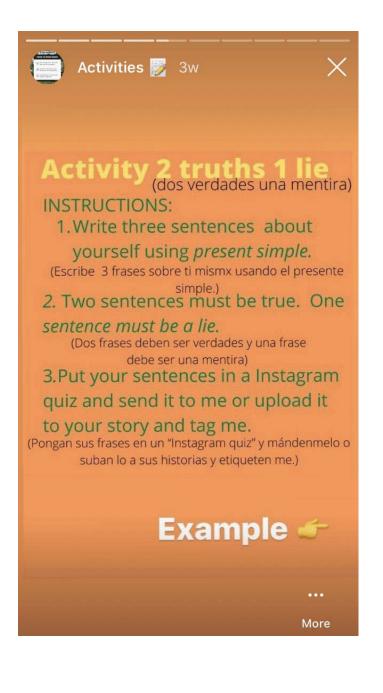
Me encanta el idioma Alemán, y jugar





Appendix B: Sample true or false low cognitive activity

Appendix C: sample of instructions

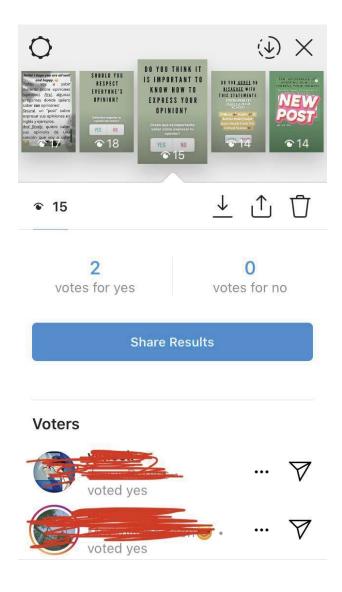


Appendix D: beginner level texts

Four poli have been arrest	ce officers in <mark>Chile</mark> red over the	han sido arrestados por		
shooting of an indigenous		🛧 fusilamiento 🛧 indigena		
man in the	southern region of			
Araucanía, as anger over the incident				
*threatens				
to spiral out of President Sebastián		🖈 amenaza		
Piñera's control.				
Thiera's control.				
	Public fury over the			
's = posesion	killing of Camilo	🛧 matanza		
of = de	Catrillanca, the 24-			
or ac	year-old grandson	🖈 nieto		
as = mientras	of a			
	Mapuche			
a = un	indigenous leader,			
	has led to massive	🛧 ha llevado a		
on = en	protests and	- 10		
shone a light on Chile's		★ brillo		
treatment of the country's largest		Longia and		
indigenous group.		🛧 pais 🛛 🛧 mas grande		
margenous group.				

í	theguar	dian.com 🗘	
The US	is debatin	g about	* debatiendo
race and police brutality after		* brutalidad	
a videowent viral of a white police		* blanco	
officer killing a black man by		* matando	
kneelin 8eight m		ck for more than	* arodillado * cuello
after = a		Protests have started as	* empezado
went = de $of = de$ $by = por$ $for = po$		people demandan the arrest of the officers involved in the killing and for	<mark>≭</mark> involucrado
<u>chang</u> e brutalit		it an end to police	* cambio *pondrá fin

Appendix E: student participation/interaction



Appendix : Carta Gantt

Sub-question or objective	Planned action	Data collection
Make materials accessible to all levels. Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced.	Instructions presented in the targeted language as well as their L1. Code switching on various occasions. All reading comprehension texts have language support (translations, emphasized vocabulary, underlined etc.) Get students to recognize cognates. Differentiation. Examples and models.	Survey to see their level of proficiency and interests (see Appendix 1).
Motivate students to participate.	Meaningful tasks. Tasks related to their lives. Scaffold writing tasks so they are not overwhelmed by not knowing where to start or how to start. Give students options on what to write about.	Instagram saves students' answers - tool used to see how many people are participating. (see Appendix 6). Asked the mentor teacher about interests and things that motivate students.
How can I differentiate materials so every student is challenged but not overwhelmed.	For reading - adjust and adapt vocabulary to each level. Have three different readings (beginner,	

intermediate and advanced). Choose which reading is for their level.	
For listening - give students options for listening such as slow down the audio and subtitles.	
For writing - students will be presented with options for writing, making them focus on function and not so much on form so that they are not discouraged when faced with a writing task.	

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