

Screenwriting: A Strategy for the Improvement of Writing Instructional Practices

La escritura de guiones: una estrategia para mejorar las prácticas instruccionales de escritura

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This article presents a pedagogical experience that addresses the use of an instructional strategy called screenwriting aimed at improving the teaching of writing in an educational context. This pedagogical intervention took place in a private English language school, where three adult students willingly participated to create their own short scripts. The idea was to introduce and reinforce the importance of screenwriting to observe its usefulness in education. Students participated in writing workshops for a 3-month period. The workshops included the respective screenwriting theory and activities that helped them to achieve completion of their final stories. Students' final pieces proved that the writing instructional practices were enriching and beneficial.

Key words: Screenwriting, creative writing in English, screenplays.

En este artículo se presenta una experiencia pedagógica sobre el uso de una estrategia instruccional llamada "la escritura de guiones", y cuyo objetivo es mejorar la enseñanza de la escritura en un contexto educativo. Esta intervención pedagógica tuvo lugar en una institución privada, dedicada a la enseñanza de lengua inglesa, donde tres estudiantes adultos participaron en la creación de sus propios guiones cortos. La idea era introducir y reforzar la importancia de la escritura de guiones para observar su utilidad en la educación. Los estudiantes participaron durante tres meses en talleres de escritura creativa. Estos incluyeron teoría y actividades para la escritura de guiones respectivos que los ayudaron a lograr sus historias finales. Los trabajos finales de los estudiantes mostraron que las prácticas instruccionales de escritura fueron enriquecedoras y benéficas.

Palabras clave: escritura de guiones, escritura creativa en lengua inglesa, guiones.

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Introduction

Innovative and powerful strategies for the improvement of learners in an academic setting have required constant research over the past years. A teacher-researcher usually looks for what best suits his/her particular educational context and considers potential teaching options to overcome students' learning challenges. In constant observations, I could analyze that writing became a challenging process for students due to the fact that it was not the main focus as speaking was.

I consider writing an important vehicle that should be taught for self-expression and determination as a way to support students' creative process. In this article, I present screenwriting as a strategic tool to improve the teaching of writing.

I start by describing the setting and the participants of this pedagogical intervention as well as the justification; then, I present an assortment of theory based on creative writing and screenwriting. In addition to that, I include the design and implementation. Next, the results obtained in the process and, finally, the respective conclusions.

Setting and Participants

This pedagogical intervention was carried out in a private school. It offered several personalized English programs aimed at executives of diverse companies in Bogotá, Colombia, as well as students of all ages who wanted to perfect their English or live abroad. Personalized courses were a priority since students' performance was thoroughly analyzed and assessed according to their needs. Courses were usually made up of 1, 2, 3 or 7 people at the most to be able to help students on a personal basis.

Three adult participants voluntarily agreed to be a part of this study. The students' level was upper-intermediate. Participants were not familiar with the use of screenwriting in an educational

context and agreed to write what they wished to tell using screenwriting as the main focus. Besides that, I realized that they were excited about improving their most common limitations in writing skills with a different writing perspective. This group of people motivated me to develop this strategy as well as possible.

Justification

According to the policies of the institution, students who enter this school are promised a well-rounded education in the English field, which covers the four skills –reading, writing, speaking and listening. Although this promise is fulfilled as far as speaking is concerned, I considered that the students did not receive the full spectrum of writing benefits. Most of the time, the school emphasized oral skills, overlooking writing. The participants had very few writing exercises, in which they had to answer questions about the current political/economical situation in Colombia or fill in the blanks.

For the above mentioned reasons, I could infer that their few writing exercises were not inspiring enough and students usually ended up with confusion and inconsistencies. I came to that conclusion because most of the time after the questions they were asked, participants limited themselves to short sentences such as “Colombia is poor and had problems” or “Colombia is poor”. These answers may not be complete enough due to the lack of explanation participants give for such statements. These sentences need a better process of elaboration. When one of the students wrote “had problems”, he used the past tense when he was not supposed to, or he could have given an explanation as to why he thought it was poor. Why is it poor? Has he had any personal experience with poverty in Colombia? Can he offer any solution to that problem? For this reason, I used a different teaching strategy for the participants' writing so that they could write and

express more, expanding their knowledge on the topics of their own interest.

With screenwriting, teachers may see that students choose what they want to write about and their imagination takes wings, floats around and puts everything in writing. Therefore, the more students are permitted to select what they want to write about, the more they become engaged in what they are writing.

To accomplish this pedagogical intervention, I present the theory I considered pertinent for the development of this strategy.

Theoretical Framework

Below, I will present a series of studies and theory, which have focused on screenwriting and its usefulness in an educational context. Since Harper (2006) suggests that screenwriting is one of the forms of creative writing, I start with creative writing as one of the key themes in this intervention and consequently screenwriting.

Creative Writing

In order to improve the writing instructional practices in my context, I did a lot of reading as to which strategies would work best for the aspects I observed and analyzed in my setting. In a research study, Vecino (2007) tackles the problem of writing with an appealing strategy, which is creative writing. The author suggests creative writing as further research to improve students' feelings towards writing, which made me think I could go in the same direction to see improvement in the way writing had been taught in my teaching context.

Harper (2006) states that creative writing is an art, an action, and an activity as a mode of engagement with the world, as the producer of artifacts in the form of book, plays, poems, television and films, websites, and much more as well as a site of knowledge where there is teaching and

learning. Regarding Harper's definition, I consider creative writing as the artistic vehicle that fosters self-expression in different forms. For this reason, constant research has been done concerning this writing perspective.

Pardlow (2003) claims that creative writing should be used for further research due to the benefits and impact it has on the participants' writing, such as improving it considerably. In addition to that, Atchity (1984) focuses upon the use of creative writing as a universal discipline for advance in the writing process. His in-depth study of the English language in all its different dimensions of variation led to creative writing. The highest priority in this research is given to the cultivation of a strong feeling for words, including different tones, weights, nuances, and registers. Students were encouraged to stretch their boundaries and extend themselves in terms of writing techniques. The studies I have read enabled me to consider the use of creative writing in an educational context to improve teaching strategies regarding writing.

After reading and analyzing some pedagogical studies concerning creative writing, I decided to use one of the forms of creative writing as an alternative to improve the teaching of writing. I wanted to show the merit of letting students create their own personal pieces and analyze how useful this creative writing strategy is for participants. Harper (2006) states that short stories, poetry, and screenwriting are some of the categories of creative writing. I recognized that with creative writing, a variety of teaching options was available, options such as the writing of poetry, short stories and screenplays. I wanted to focus on only one and decided to do so by using screenwriting.

Screenwriting

The implementation of screenwriting was a very strategic step for me as an educator in order

to let students enjoy a writing perspective they had not been familiar with. According to Argentini (1998), screenwriting is a document that outlines every aural, visual, behavioral, and lingual element required to tell a story. Would it not be positive if students had an idea, and from that simple idea, wrote more pages? Johnson (1999) states that screenwriting involves visual elements that captivate emotions of the reader. While students carry out screenwriting activities they learn to visualize a story they are interested in and create tension, obstacles and challenges for their characters. Besides that, they turn a simple sentence or idea into a properly formatted screenplay.

Other researchers take screenwriting as their object of study, since it is one of the forms of creative writing. Studies regarding screenwriting have been done by Johnson (1999) who allowed a group of 10 students to write screenplays to make short movies and grade them according to the accuracy involved in the dialogue, acting, scenarios, etc. Students wrote in a sequence of scenes from beginning to end. This showed that they elaborated more on the writing process, learning the rules of screenwriting. This research has shown that it has encouraged and developed imaginative and original forms of creative writing for the participants; besides that, they visualized their own stories, and had fun writing what they wanted. They enjoyed sharing the short movies after writing the screenplays. I conclude that when writing stories or scripts, students should take into account what it takes to carry this out for their own benefit.

Screenwriting is a writing variety that I strongly suggest for further research and pedagogical practice. It is a way students can learn a different format and strategy. Wolff (1991) states that screenwriting is left aligned, font courier 12, and scenes are divided into exterior and interior slug lines. This kind of format was innovative for the three partici-

pants I worked with and showed the impact it had on the students for the enhancement of their skills.

Trottier (1998) suggests that screenplays involve three acts. In Act One, characters and conflict are introduced. The conflict deepens in Act Two until it reaches a climax or breaking point. In Act Three, the conflict resolves and leads to a denouement, or conclusion. Wolf (1991) states that the three acts will probably lead learners to more coherent narratives and exciting creative texts from start to finish. This allows students to understand the importance of an organized piece of paper.

To facilitate this pedagogical practice using screenwriting as the main focus, I present the design and implementation of this pedagogical strategy.

Design and Implementation

In order to design the teaching strategy, I used writing workshops throughout the whole screenwriting process. Rothermel (1994) states that when writing in workshops, students learn to write with focus and direction to develop their ideas and descriptions, to discover their voices and apply grammar conventions. I considered the writing workshop a great space for students to communicate their feelings through creative exercises including worksheets that helped them develop the creative texts they wanted to write. The workshops I planned for them intended to teach the theory behind creative writing through practical activities regarding the use of movies, pictures, and other visual examples. Those activities enabled participants to grasp what was needed in order to create the stories they showed as their final results.

Three workshops were planned according to the time I had with the participants. It was a 3-month period. The purpose of the activities was to introduce students to a range of creative exercises supported by theory whilst developing their ability to use language accurately and imaginatively. In the

workshops developed in this teaching experience, students found exercises that led their writing in various directions, as well as strategic steps to use their imagination. Besides that, students found techniques to support their views to acquire a solid foundation on how to write screenplays.

There were three workshops throughout the whole study; students were given worksheets with which to get acquainted with creative writing and screenwriting. Hedge (1991) states that worksheets involve a process of filling in the forms that helps students organize their thoughts and kick-starts the creative writing process. I used worksheets as a means to get a student started on creating a universe all his or her own.

In the second workshop, I used a worksheet called “writing my own story”. In this part of the workshop students were encouraged to explore their imagination and understand the art of story creation. I wanted students to discover and strengthen their unique writing voice, as well as understand how to tap into their creativity improving their most common problems in English writing.

At the end of the workshops, the pieces students created were essential to obtain analytical results. These creative texts were used to see how they improved normal aspects of writing, and to observe the way they wanted to convey their message through characters, locations, dialogue, and using their imagination. Those aspects helped students think of the stories they created as their own universe, one which they had total control over.

All the sessions I had with the participants were recorded in an orderly manner. A summary of the results that emerged can be found in Figure 1.

Results

The results of this pedagogical intervention are presented based on the three writing workshops. I followed a systematic process from workshop No. 1,

where I started with simple creative writing exercises and advanced to screenwriting activities to achieve the final products in workshop No. 3.

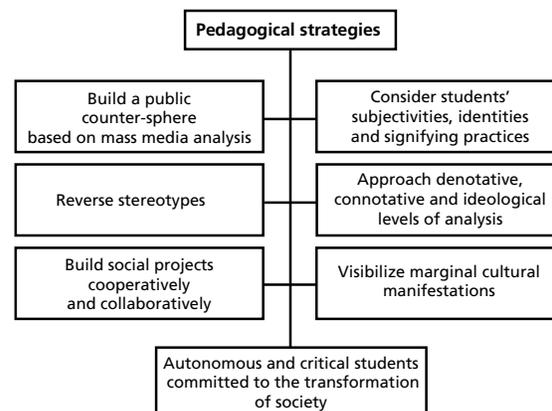


Figure 1. Results that emerged in the workshops.

Writing more than Expected

In the first activity of the workshop, I planned a very simple activity where participants wrote a story about the picture of Pegasus. I had planned only 20 minutes for the story, but it took them the whole hour. It was due to the fact that they wanted to complete the worksheet and add more. Furthermore, I only gave them a few paragraphs to write, but all of them wrote more than that –they even continued the story on the back of the page. They had a lot to say about Pegasus. In this part of the workshop, Student 1 wrote, “I escaped to the forest alone, the forest was thick, full of plants and high arches of flexible branches”. It proves that the participant tried to make his writing appealing and gives descriptions of the forest, without just saying “the forest”.

With that simple but effective activity I observed that from a simple picture, students were able to use their imagination, writing appealing sentences with creativity. As for creativity, Hampton (1989) suggests that creativity is the ability to write freely anything the learner wants to write.

In the example above, the student had a tale to tell about the picture he saw. Whether it was an incident that actually happened or one that was a complete fantasy, the story in his mind was being told in his own words. I consider this writing process very strategic for the enhancement of writing instructional practices.

Student 2 wrote, “There were people, angels, pegasuses all around, beautiful, beautiful horses with exquisite wings that took to the most incredible journey of my life”. This excerpt showed me that the student writes about a journey he dreamed of, and words poured out. He even repeats the word “beautiful” twice placing emphasis on the beautiful paradise he is portraying in his vision of Pegasus. He envisions his journey and gives descriptions of the paradise and what is found there such as the angels, people, other animals, etc. I observed that the participant’s writing flowed naturally, his creativity was enriched by imagining his idea of what a paradise and an incredible journey is for him.

Legrandis (2006) states that creativity is the stunning imagery the writer shows us on his journey. Would it not be beneficial if students shared that imagery with educators and peers? They would show others personal experiences and inherent creativity to craft an inspirational piece of work. Lannon (2000) states that creativity in writing is like painting a rich picture pallet of words taking us along, enveloping us in the feeling and emotion that emanates from each line. This creates feelings and thoughts from students to expand on their writing, which is helpful for educators who want to look for instructional writing approaches.

Another useful excerpt I obtained from this exercise was when Student 3 wrote in the text, “The mother carry to Mariana at the farm and she show her the pony” and “She had a sick. She had a de-generative sick. So she be died in any moment”. Although he made grammar mistakes, his writing

was understandable. This participant wrote what he wished to tell in his own words. Engel (2000) suggests that the creative writer is free of the ‘tyranny of perfectionism’ that strangles people who want to express thoughts and emotions. I find Engel’s position valuable since, in this specific activity, I was not looking for perfectionism, but for the free choice, determination and expression of words.

From the abovementioned excerpts, I observed that students had the freedom to express their feelings, expanding their voice and thoughts towards the picture of a fantastic animal.

Sharing and Learning from Our Writing

After students wrote the story, they were asked to share their pieces. Sharing and learning the activity of Pegasus proved to be very useful because I observed aspects that fostered awareness of accuracy. For instance, students were excited to tell their stories, but when they told them, there were confusing sentences such as “A girl fligh with the Pegasus with hers pony”, “a poney with wings to be died”, and “a poney was he in love”. The other participants were wondering what the student meant due to the inconsistencies in grammar. Of course there was a misunderstanding and the sentence was not clear for the student, not even for me. I clearly told students that these aspects happen when words, expressions and sentences are not accurate, clear or coherent. If writing is not accurate with the proper grammar conventions, there will probably be misunderstandings and confusion.

Gaining awareness of accuracy in creative writing is essential because students want their voices to be heard, but if what they read or write is not understandable, it is because there is no clarity. Lester (1994) states that creative writing is not about imagining stories. Students will best serve the reader if their creative writing addresses

a central issue or theme about life. What Lester states is quite reasonable. I do not consider creative writing as solely the imagination of stories, but view it as wanting to write and create, which requires the elements such as accuracy, punctuation and grammar to be understood clearly.

Writing accurately is relevant in creative writing. This could be evidenced when Vecino (2007) states, "How can we express ourselves if what we are writing does not please the reader in all the dimensions that make a piece of writing readable?" (p. 14). Expressing ourselves and wanting to be heard require skills and the proper way of conveying the message. Educators may encourage students to use creative writing while understanding the mechanics of structure and punctuation for proper characterization and plotting in the final stories of their choice.

Asking for Freedom to Choose the Stories

My students and I participated in a discussion about what suggestions they would make to improve the workshops. I knew I had to be open-minded to enhance the teaching strategy I proposed. The participants agreed that Pegasus' picture was a topic imposed on them by the teacher. One student said, "Although the activity was nice, I did not want to write about Pegasus, but about my own story, I feel that the picture was imposed on us". Student 2 said, "The activity of the Pegasus was interesting, but I was getting ready for my fictional story". Student 3 agreed with the other students, stating, "I liked the Pegasus, but I hope the teacher let us create our own things".

After their comments, I realized that although Pegasus was not the topic they expected to write about, they imagined interesting stories with this character and wrote more than expected. I view this activity as waking up in the creative writing

process. Participants wanted to make their own decision as to what to write, say and feel. It could be evidenced when Student 1 stated, "I want to select my own topic, not the teacher". I realized that participants' opinions were valid, which enabled me to pose the question: "Who would not like to do what one likes freely?" In this pedagogical intervention, their views and insights allowed me to know what I could change. After their testimonies, I decided to teach the theoretical background of screenwriting so that they could create their own scripts as they claimed.

Learning from Screenwriting

I planned an activity in which we watched a movie and then analyzed the screenplay of the movie afterwards. I would advise future researchers and educators who want to focus on the improvement of writing to use that strategy because the students understood the screenplay easily and quickly. This is due to the fact that they had already seen the movie. It was an appealing and useful strategy in this study because the students learned a new perspective they had not been familiar with.

In this section, students learned the format of screenwriting, and the movie helped them to realize that stories needed aspects such as dialogue, locations, and the three acts stated by Trottier (1998). Students were led through the planning, writing and completion of a variety of fiction with the ultimate goal of helping them to write creatively and to write well for a specific audience.

One of the abilities that I could observe that makes screenwriting useful for writing instructional practices is that students are presented with a wide variety of words which lends itself to vocabulary building. This build-up could be evidenced when I asked the students what new words they had learned from the screenplay. Student 1 said, "I did not know what 'pulls up in BMW' meant, but I remembered

the scene in the movie and inferred that it was like stopping the car". "Pulls up" is a very idiomatic phrasal verb, and learners benefit greatly from those expressions to write with better structures.

In the screenplay, participants underlined the unknown vocabulary and cohesive devices such as "clockwise direction", "Chapel", "Whispering", "kneeling", "lights in the windows flick on", "stretcher", "pulls up in BMW", and "moves off", among others. These are just some of the words that could evidence how much vocabulary students are faced with when the teacher has a screenwriting strategy.

After students read a screenplay, teachers can see the effect it produces on the participants. Not only do students get acquainted with new words and expressions; they also learn cohesive devices, dialogues, idioms, linking words, and visualize the movie they have already seen.

Development of Coherence and Cohesion and Gaining Confidence to Write

In the written work, students wrote their outlines for the final stories. This is an excerpt of one of the stories they wrote: "Once upon a time, there was a vain woman who always looked at herself in the mirror. Mirrors were her life, and looking at herself was her pride". In this sentence, we can see that the participant used the linking words "once upon a time" to start a sentence; then, he continued coherently with "mirrors". Besides that, there is a two-word-rhyme which is "life" and "pride". They learned more vocabulary because I constantly suggested the use of a thesaurus.

The same student later wrote, "Days pass by, and Eloisa feels better, Eloisa, with frustrated red eyes, looks at her face teary, stained, and fairly bruised". With this excerpt, I could recognize that this participant likes telling a great deal about the

character. The student gives a lot of descriptions of the character, especially when he says "frustrated red eyes" and specifies that his character's face is "teary, stained and fairly bruised". The student looked for synonyms and wrote all those descriptions instead of saying the plain "she cries". In addition to that, he wrote a coherent story using words such as "In the next day", "days pass by". The story is coherent, has a beginning, middle and ending. The participant used the appropriate linking words and described the characters and the situation coherently.

As for the creative dimension of the student's work, I could observe a commitment toward fostering and expanding the exuberant writing talent the student possessed in order to write about an appealing character. It was a vain woman and the effect mirrors had on human beings' lives. With this artistic vehicle that is screenwriting, students were able to explore and show worlds they had not been to before, bringing into existence something genuinely new that should be valued enough to be added to the culture and the language classroom.

Another participant wrote, "Christian relaxes on a lamp-lit bench. He smokes and shivers from the cold. His eyes are close to shedding tears". In this example, I observed that not only does the participant want to write interesting adjectives such as "lamp-lit bench", but new vocabulary such as "shivers" and "shedding tears" came from a thesaurus. These are visual examples of parts of their stories and these have been worthy in this second workshop.

I could also observe the level of coherence and cohesion in this student when he wrote, "The next day, Christian drives into the hotel's garage, shows his ID to the attendant. The attendant nods, gives it back, and lets him in. Christian looks around the garage and makes sure no one's looking. Christian goes straight to his blue car. He opens the trunk and removes a lot of rugs. He sees the explosives". This

excerpt is up for analysis because it shows that he followed a sequence of events coherently. His character was lively and took action when he wrote “he drives, shows ID, looks around, opens the trunk, removes the rugs, sees the explosives”.

In order to achieve cohesion and coherence, Hampton (1989) suggests that every phrase must contribute to the meaning of the whole piece. In this example, I could observe he used all the sentences with the proper organization and his ideas were connected, which kept me guessing what was going to happen to Christian. The text was readable, had proper grammar, accuracy and vocabulary. This piece of text was easily comprehended by both the writer and the reader.

I could observe that Student 3 wrote a logical sequence of events, and gave the reader a clear understanding and appreciation of the story. I could see that when he wrote, “Mariana and her husband go on a trip to Chapultepec and when they stop at a red light. A man approaches the door and points a gun at her. Mariana faints, and dies of a heart attack. Her husband is crazy, and doesn’t know what to do, he’s despaired, the criminal panics and leaves”. This part of the text is cohesive because the sentences are well structured, well linked and there is no unnecessary repetition. The participant is consistent with the story.

The three students developed coherence and cohesion because their stories were logically laid out and connected, so one sentence led to another. They were gaining confidence writing and they had clear plots as to what to write in the final workshop. In order to do so, students were given individual tutorials for talking about their stories. It was like friendly conversation between the participants and me. Student 1 told me he wanted to write a story about a mirror, and the impact a mirror could have on somebody’s life. It was very creative and was something I did not expect he would be writing. From

an analytical point of view, I can see that this student considers that any inert object can have either a positive or a negative effect on human beings and he wants to express that in the story.

Student 2 told me he wanted to write about the terrorist attacks in Club El Nogal. Club El Nogal is one of the most important business and social clubs in Latin America. It is located in Bogota, Colombia, and offers a variety of social and cultural entertainment for its members. On February 23, 2003, Club el Nogal was attacked by terrorists who planted a bomb, which killed 36 people and wounded more than 200. Student 2 decided to write a short screenplay about how it happened and the effects it had on people. This person was becoming more serious about writing of the fatality that happened 7 years ago in Bogotá, Colombia. It was very impressive to see that they wanted to show real life through screenwriting.

Student 3 wanted to share a real life story about what happened to a famous actress who died in Mexico City after being robbed. This student wanted to write about an actress he liked and admired. It was based on a true story, which required an in-depth analysis. Creating believable characters and bringing them to life on the page required observation, understanding, imagination and skill in the techniques of character development and characterization.

In this workshop, students showed the characters, locations, and tension they created for the stories they devised. They were using their creativity for the final piece, which was the screenplay. Dyson (2003) suggests the following five steps to achieve creativity: (1) *Preparation*: arousing curiosity of a problematic situation; (2) *Incubation*: ideas fly below the threshold of consciousness; (3) *Insight*: the moment when the puzzle starts to come together; (4) *Evaluation*: deciding if the insight is valuable and worth pursuing; and (5)

Elaboration: translating the insight into its final work. I could observe that all three participants aroused curiosity about their characters, the vain woman, the terrorist and the famous actress. Students became curious to know what was going to happen to them.

Ideas flew in the participants' minds, ideas such as the characters' behavior, motivation, goals, etc. Insight emerged when students organized their stories and understood what their stories were like and in what direction they were heading. Evaluation occurred when they assessed their characters, learning what moved them forward in the story and how they would end. Finally, elaboration occurred when students transferred their ideas into a final piece of writing.

Creating the Story Students Yearn for and Writing from Head and Heart

Students finally created a short screenplay at the end of the workshop after all the process we followed in the previous workshops. It proved to be a very enriching experience in this research. When students were creating the stories they yearned for, I observed that the three participants had two natures: the heart and the head. The heart was the passionate creator, the emotional artist, the child, the intuitive subconscious. On the other hand, the head was the detached critic or editor, the parent, the logical and analytical scientist or surgeon. As a researcher, good writing utilizes both natures. For this reason, with this teaching intervention, I could observe the technical and creative dimension of writing. Technical being the head, while the heart was the creative dimension. Creatively speaking, students presented the stories their heart told them to write. It could be seen in Student 1 who wrote the following text in screenplay format. This text is coherent, organized, and well-structured. The student wrote what his

desire to tell was, and did it from both natures: head and heart.

INT. MIRROR STORE - DAY (1860)

Elegant and exotic mirrors of all sizes and shapes hang on the walls. ELOISA, 28, beautiful, tall and stylish, peers into the biggest, most exquisite mirror and proudly stares at herself. Next to her, ANNETTE, 27, short, attractive and elegant looks at the mirror.

The following excerpt shows a scene Student 2 wrote in his final screenplay:

INT. GARAGE – MINUTES LATER

The garage has three floors, each with assorted cars. Christian drives up the three floors. He finally finds a parking spot on the top floor, which is rather empty. He parks his car.

This part of the screenplay showed that the student had control over the story, had a linear sequence, and gave the reader excellent details, knowing what he wanted to write and what for.

Student 3 did a good job with the screenplay format using a series of shots to explain how his main character turns from a child into an adolescent:

SERIES OF SHOTS

MARIANA, 7, splashes Talina in a swimming pool. A smiling MARIANA, 8, poses for a picture in her first communion dress and veil. Talina proudly watches MARIANA, 10, perform on stage. MARIANA, 15, models a prom dress for Talina in their living room. MARIANA, 18, stands at the bathroom mirror, puts on makeup.

I could observe that the student was clear with his portrayal of how Mariana turns 18 and becomes an adolescent. This participant wrote with accuracy, knowing what he wanted to put in and

leave out. He expanded and polished his own work effectively. In the 3 workshops students showed a range of ideas that demonstrated their development of skills, fluency gained comprehension of their own stories and others'. Thus, the use of vocabulary, accuracy, grammar and such in this particular setting was productive.

In the examples above, I realized that students wrote freely and with great skill and self-assurance. Students prepared their characters already determining the physical and emotional aspects of them, incubating ideas, evaluation and elaboration of the development of the story with the description of the place and locations. Even Student 1 makes an impression writing a story that took place in 1860, when he was not even born, but allows his creativity to flow and imagines what it was like to live in that era, creating his own world of fiction.

With screenwriting in an educational context, I found that the three students revealed their having constructed a writing process based on what interested them; they produced creativity and then put it into practice. The writing world belonged to them as well as the journeys they envisioned and wanted to share.

Conclusions

Screenwriting used as a teaching technique permits me to conclude that it allows students' free choice. As seen in the excerpts, they had the opportunity to exercise a degree of independence, which involved exercising free expression in selecting the stories they explored and wished to tell. That is a strategic step for educators to let students strengthen their voices and share their writing process.

I could observe that students experienced the need to tell more about the stories and characters they were exploring. Besides, students experienced screenwriting as a writing perspective they had not been familiar with and, at the same time,

as a tool for learning and improving their writing. I found their final pieces vivid, abstract and yet challenging in their screenwriting format.

When carrying out this pedagogical intervention, students followed a systematic process from workshop No. 1 to workshop No. 3 that allowed for clarity and better organization. From starting with a simple creative writing activity like the picture of Pegasus, participants ended with the writing of their own scripts based on the theory previously given. Teaching screenwriting systematically provides participants with better tools for their final products.

In this pedagogical experience, writing creatively was not only about imagining stories. It was about understanding the critical implications it conveyed for the participant who was not only a passionate creator or an emotional artist, but a detached critic and a logical and analytical writer. The function of the target language in the relation between writing and creativity implied the participants' need to be heard and analyzed in response to their work. Therefore, it ensured an engaging and critical process in which students were faithful to their own screenplays using their creative and analytical side.

With this teaching strategy for the improvement of writing instructional practices, I was able to see beyond the mere reality, expand my knowledge with participants' contributions and learn that this writing perspective has helped the participants to pour out words, open the gate of imagination, gain understanding of accuracy, and most importantly, experience the sheer joy of writing.

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About the Author

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