Optimizing the writing component of your EFL class through writing workshops

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Introduction

Planning for writing in an English as a Foreign Language class is usually a difficult task given the time constraints faced in the classroom and the little preparation and expertise students have in terms of writing. Besides, English textbooks tend to offer a rather simplistic approach to writing where the product is favored over the process. Therefore, writing tends to be neglected in the classroom or relegated to homework turning it into a daunting task for students to face on their own. However, given its importance in the current world and the myriad of written tasks people have to perform on a daily basis, it is still important to teach this skill. Flipping the writing component of your course can optimize its potential and offer your students with the opportunity to develop this important skill thoroughly without having to sacrifice any of the other skills (Buitrago & Díaz, 2018). The present chapter will present how flipped writing workshops could be structured in any EFL program to solve this situation. This paper is based on a presentation delivered by the authors in the 51st ASOCOPI conference aiming at bringing professionals together in order to discuss the implementation of technology in language classrooms.

Theoretical underpinnings

The main concept supporting the workshop presented in this chapter is flipped learning. However, it is also substantiated with the teaching of the writing process, and the creation of flipped writing workshops.

Flipped learning

Flipped Learning has become a buzzword in education since 2012 when Bergmann and Sams coined the term "flipped classroom" to describe the inversion of class time and homework time and space. They envisioned how it was logical to have students watch video lectures at home and then apply Chemistry concepts while doing experiments in the laboratory. Since then, many scholars and teachers around the world have inverted class time and homework and have gotten positive results (Missildine, Fountain & Summers, 2013; Tune, Sturek & Basile, 2013; Kerr, 2015; Domínguez *et al.*, 2015; St. John & St. John, 2014; Han, 2015; Sung, 2015; Garay & Torregrosa, 2016; Torres & Hernández, 2016; Rodríguez-Buitrago & Díaz, 2018). However, in 2014, the Flipped Learning Network, an international organization created with the mission of "providing educators with the knowledge, skills, and resource to implement flipped learning successfully" (FLN, 2014 para. 5), created a definition that has guided the use of flipped learning the world over since its inception. According to the FLN,

> Flipped learning is a pedagogical approach in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space, and the resulting group space is transformed into a dynamic, interactive learning environment where the educator guides students as they apply concepts and engage creatively in the subject matter (FLN, 2014, para. 1).

As suggested by Torres and Hernández (2016), decomposing the definition of Flipped Learning and exhuming its driving components is pivotal to understand its true educational power. Thus, the components of the definition are individual space, group space, dynamic, interactive learning environment, educator's role and students' role. Even though new definitions of FL have emerged, our work abides by the one proposed by the FLN.

First of all, it is important to clarify that flipped learning (FL) extends the concept of the flipped classroom since in FL not only the inversion of the physical space is what matters, but the creation of a new environment where students' knowledge generation, active and authentic learning are the primal goals. As a result, the thoughtful rearrangement of individual and group learning spaces favors the acquisition of new knowledge. Considering the FLN's definition, learning can happen anywhere for students in their individual space (i.e. an internet café, a library, a bus, their home), reason why merely discussing home and school is not enough. Also, the individual

learning space is where the pre-class activities that give life to the model take place. Students are expected to be prepared for the class session, and this preparation happens when they are alone. Similarly, the group learning space extends the physical classroom since it refers to the learning instances where students work collaboratively and with the presence of others (i.e. peers, teachers, etc). For that reason, these two components of flipped learning are crucial in understanding how the configuration of flipped writing workshops varies from a regular writing class.

The second concept to examine in the definition is the dynamic, and interactive nature of the learning environment. In the words of Marshall (2015), the robustness of instruction in flipped learning helps "create fertile teaching and learning spaces" generating more meaningful learning and teaching experiences. That's the reason why in flipped instruction the design of impressive videos for students to watch individually is not the most important aspect to make the model work, but the restructuring of the group space and the generation of an interactive learning environment. In creating flipped writing workshops, this aspect of the definition gains special importance since, thanks to the liberation of time by sending the direct instruction to the students' individual learning space, the teacher can concentrate on helping students, providing feedback, reading their work while students write; all in class. In EFL writing, as most of the times the product is the focus, only changing the focus to the process can generate positive results for students and teachers alike.

The third component to highlight in the flipped learning definition is the educator and their role in this paradigm. This component in the definition is also one of the pillars of F-L-I-P™ and it refers to the new role a teacher has in a flipped learning environment (FLN, 2014). As the classroom is transformed, and students gain different responsibilities, the teacher's role also needs to be modified to meet the demands of the new setting. Thus, practices like ongoing assessments during class, data recording, the provision of group and individual feedback in the classroom, collaboration with other educators and the responsibility to transform one's practice become requirements for a teacher (FLN, 2014). Some teachers believe that in flipped learning they will take on a secondary role, and even though that might be true for the classroom setting, the role of the teacher remains pivotal for the approach to work in planning, assessing and restructuring the learning experience.

Last but not least, the final component in the FLN definition is the students and their role in the model. Motivation and learner engagement are proven

results of Flipped Learning (Bharali, 2014; Garver & Roberts, 2013; Wong & W. K. Chu, 2014, Webb, Doman & Pusey, 2014; and Sung, 2015) as well as increased student achievement (Overmyer, 2014). Since teacher loses the "sage on the stage" role (King, 1993), the student claims it. The students and their needs become the center of the lesson and their learning transforms in the primal goal of the educational process through the application of concepts and creative engagement while in the group space. For writing, having students at the center means having them write while in the classroom. Doing this in a traditional language class is not possible due to time constraints and other limitations. However, in the Flipped Learning paradigm, it is not only possible, but also desirable.

Bloom's taxonomy (Krathwohl and Anderson, 2002) is another aspect to consider when implementing flipped learning even though it is not part of the FLN definition or the pillars of F-L-I-P™. Bloom's taxonomy has been widely used in education for lesson planning given its practicality and clarity in the development of low-order and high-order thinking skills. The revised version proposed by Krathwohl and Anderson (2002) rearranges the tiers initially proposed by Bloom and enhances its concepts. Figure 1 illustrates the changes made to the taxonomy in the revision.
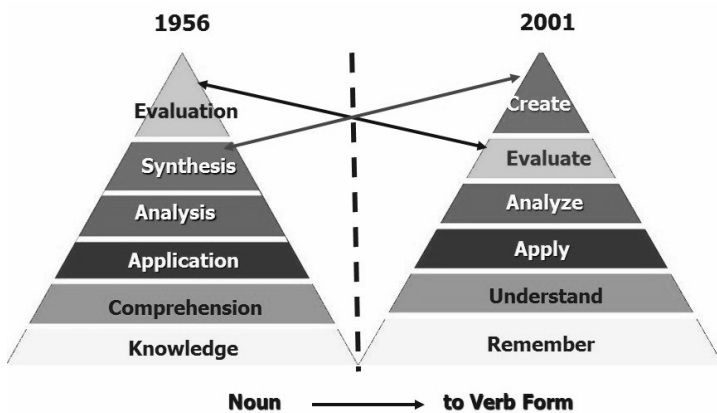

Figure 1. Bloom's taxonomy revised by Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001.
Source: https://news.nnlm.govnto/2016/10/11/
5-gorgeous-depictions-of-blooms-taxonomy/

According to Krathwohl and Anderson (2002), the low-order thinking skills (LOTS) are remembering and understanding and the high-order thinking skills (HOTS) are applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. Thus, in flipped

learning, Bloom's taxonomy is also turned upside down. According to Brinks-Lockwood (2014), class time should be spent in the higher-level skills (apply, analyze, evaluate and create) while students can access the lower-levels (remember and understand) while alone. Figure 2 illustrates what Bloom's taxonomy look like when being flipped.
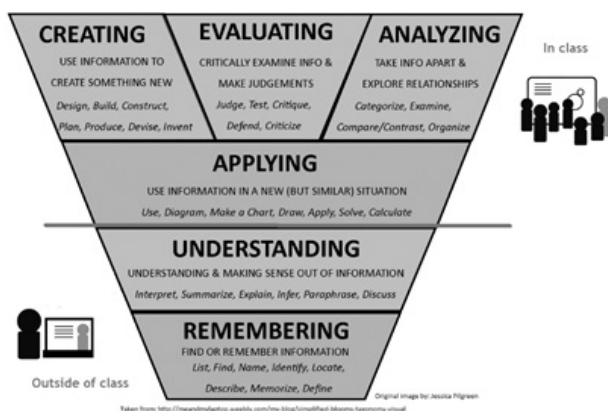

Figure 2. Authors' adaptation of Pilgreen's version of Bloom's
taxonomy for flipped learning.

In Flipped Learning, students take advantage of teacher-designed activities that scaffold their learning while in the individual space in order to develop LOTS. Thus, for instance, in the case of a flipped writing workshop students would watch a video or read a text explaining the rhetorical structure of a paragraph or study a list of cohesive devices. The lesson would be designed considering that the out of class work in which students receive input on different aspects of the tackled writing task mirrors the work to be executed in the group learning space the following class. In addition, in the face-to-face class, learners are driven through activities where they can apply and analyze what they remembered and understood to finally evaluate their own or their peers' work. Using this methodology, learners use their time wisely to follow steps to create an improved version of their writing tasks.

Flipped learning is a transformation at many levels, and even though it presents some challenges in terms of organization, planning, time management, material creation and other aspects, it is worth trying since it has been proven that it dynamizes any learning process.

Writing process

Writing is a process that requires an outcome which usually requires the writer to follow some steps and his knowledge in a long period of time (Nunan, 1999); hence most of the time it is a skill that is relegated or avoided in the classroom (White & Arndt, 1991). Despite the fact that students can take advantage of it for personal/academic purposes.

Writing in the EFL context might be tackled to trigger grammar, sentence structure and proper use of cohesive devices; however, it requires organization and development of ideas (Hedge, 2005). There are several authors who discuss the multiplicity of steps available in the writing process. However, most agree on important steps such as prewriting, drafting, revision and editing (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Hedge, 2015).

The writing process has parts in order to create a final product. This process aids learners to apply the information they understood from the independent work and wisely use their time to go through the four steps in the writing process.

Planning and outlining: In this phase, learners decide on a topic to write about. Then, they brainstorm and generate a list of ideas or vocabulary about the topic. Teachers encourage students to not only include vocabulary or cohesive devices they might need while writing, but also organize their ideas in a coherent way by including graphic organizers and other forms of visible thinking. This step is crucial since students think carefully about their ideas.

Writing the first draft: Learners use the information gathered in the outline to write the first version of the text. In this step, they create texts that include details and arguments to support main ideas of a chosen topic. The draft is the first opportunity to organize main and supporting ideas following the rhetorical structure learned in the independent work and applying proper cohesive devices.

Revising: In this phase, students have the possibility of working in pairs. They take advantage of this writing phase by providing peer feedback. Each learner reads a classmate's text in order to improve it. During this phase, by means of a checklist, students analyze and evaluate their partner's text in terms of rhetorical structure follow-up, use of cohesive devices, vocabulary, mechanics and grammar use. Brown (2007) emphasizes on the importance of promoting interaction between learners through peer feedback. As suggested by Lin & Yan (2011), research has supported the advantages of peer-feedback in student

writing since it helps them increase their writing confidence. In addition, it is crucial that students experience peer feedback and self-correction since they harmonize with an relevant pedagogical principle: formative evaluation (Hinkel, 2004). Peer feedback, in order to redraft a text, is in a broad sense a way for students not only evaluate their partners, but also to self-evaluate by means of a checklist.

Editing and getting ready for publication: Based on the feedback provided by a partner, students edit their work and create a final version of it. This final phase reinforces what students have learned in terms of proper use of cohesive devices, grammar and vocabulary and also tests whether they have been able to implement an organized rhetorical structure. Having time to go through these four writing process steps create a formative environment in class. Learners have the opportunity to put into practice what they gained independently and they use in class time to create a revised and clear product.

Writing workshops

Writing workshops are way to engage students in their learning process by offering them assistance and guidance while performing writing tasks. Johansen and Cherry-Paul (2016) define the writing workshop as "a natural venue in which to increase differentiation, engagement and efficiency and promote choice and independent learning" (p. xx). For the authors, writing workshops are composed by a multimodal guide containing the different steps and tasks for students to perform a given written task (Appendix A). Even though the work of Johansen and Cherry-Paul (2016) and Calkins (1994) in regards to writing workshops stems from the field of literacy and not English as a Foreign Language, its principles can be applied to the context discussed in the present chapter because learners in both settings share similarities in their learning processes. However, given contextual differences and varied educational systems, what our students learn in college in terms of writing is what learners in English speaking countries are learning in third grade of elementary school.

Even though Johansen and Cherry-Paul (2016) have identified steps to plan flipped writing workshops, the work of the authors precedes them and it bases the generation of the writing workshops booklet on the design of structured in-class and out-of-class activities. At the moment of designing a writing workshop, the teacher needs to consider which aspects she can flip

and which ones can be developed in class to boost students' production. Our flipped writing workshops contain two sections:

Out-of-class activities: As mentioned before, the students need input material such as videos to understand the rhetorical structure of a type of text. When students explore the video, they can identify the elements of a specific structure using charts provided in the workshop. In addition, based on the given input, they can use color coding to identify the elements of a paragraph or essay in a given example. At the same time, students might also take advantage of this materials to classify and recognize the importance of proper cohesive devices for the text. The writing workshops provide myriad of possible tasks that can be developed independently. It depends on the target writing task and the purpose of the face-to-face class.

In-class activities: Taking into consideration that learners gained some knowledge on the rhetorical structure of an essay or characteristics of a text, they are ready to use their time wisely in writing a text that complies the requirements of the task. Teachers use writing workshops to organize activities that help learners write their paragraphs or essays. Teachers can design activities that help learners go through the writing process. This set of workshops starts with drafting tasks that help students choose a topic to write about, create a list of vocabulary and choose proper cohesive devices. Then, teachers give students time to write the first version of their text. In this writing process step, learners use the information they work on their outlines to write coherent and cohesive sentences that compare and contrast two items. In this step, learners work in pairs to peer evaluate their paragraphs. By means of a checklist, students can revise different aspects the teachers want them to focus on, such as task fulfillment, cohesion, coherence, mechanics, grammar and vocabulary. Finally, learners have the time to improve their draft considering what their partners suggested.

The writing workshops enhance the writing process. And flipping them allows learners to write an essay in different moments of the class or in different classes with the support of peers and teachers optimizing the result and enhancing the writing experience.

Lesson planning for writing workshops

During the 51st ASOCOPI conference workshop, the presenters asked the participants to brainstorm a type of text they currently worked with the students in their settings. This text depended on the syllabus of the program, population and English level. Topics such as different types of essays, e-mail messages, compositions, short stories, timelines, letters, etc. emerged during the session. As soon as the participants had chosen a specific text by means of a brainstorming exercise done with sticky notes pasted on the wall, presenters offered them a lesson planning format designed based on the writing process steps and Pilgreen's (2014) version of Bloom's taxonomy tweaked by the authors for flipped learning (Appendix B). This resource was meant as a guide for participants to create a lesson that considered all the aspects already mentioned.

During the lesson planning stage of the session everyone discussed the steps they would take and the activities they would do while in class. Participants to the session generated many interesting ideas for in-class and out-of-class activities they could do at every step of the process. They filled in the lesson plan format given by the presenters and mentioned having found it useful and easy to use.

During the lesson planning stage, the presenters shared websites and tools that can be used before class in order to facilitate the writing process. These websites are presented in Table 1 below.

Writing process	Tools/Websites
Planning and outlining	Padlet www.padlet.com Lino Wall en.linoit.com
Writing the draft	Essay map Smart Art Graphs www.popplet.com www.bubbls.us
Revising	Google docs Kaizena complement
Editing	Blogger Wordpress Storybird/Mystorybook

Table 1. Websites and apps to support the writing process.

The inclusion of apps and websites gives an interesting twist to the flipped writing workshops for students since it facilitates some processes for them. Students appreciate and enjoy the use of technology since they feel it is more connected to their reality (Prensky, 2015). For example, a site like *Padlet* or *Lino* allows students to see what others are writing facilitating the process of generating new ideas. Also, as it can be used with a smartphone, so students can access it anywhere, anytime making learning pervasive and allowing them to have access to their ideas whenever inspiration strikes. These websites also present interesting benefits for teachers such as assisting them to collect information regarding students' mistakes and to providing timely and individual feedback.

After presenting the different websites that could be used, participants were invited to design their writing workshops using the lesson plan format designed by the presenters. As every pair (group) selected a different type of writing, the discussion turned noisy and went in many different directions. Teachers worked towards a full writing workshop and realized the myriad of opportunities for flipping in their own settings and with their available resources. Participants finally included different technological tools for in-class and out-of-class activities. In their groups, they agreed to include web pages and tools that corresponded to a text they wanted to focus on. Also, most of them mentioned they would flip the direct instruction of the rhetorical structure of the text, while for in-class activities, participants agreed on including tools to boost their students' writing and help walk the different steps in the writing process. As discussion progressed among the participants, the presenters circulated holding conversations with them about their particular type of workshop and assisting in shaping the different ideas that emerged from the exercise. As a debriefing exercise, the benefits of flipping were discussed and teachers shared their enthusiasm towards trying this new approach in their own writing classrooms.

Assessing the lesson plan

Participants were invited to complete a checklist (Appendix C) to assess other groups' lesson plans. According to the Flipped Learning Network (2014) there are four pillars that a flipped class should have: Flexible environment, Learning culture, Intentional Content and Professional Educators.

In the checklist, participants could find nine criteria that described indicators from each pillar and that as are observable helped them assess their own work. The participants assessed different aspects of their lesson plans such as objectives setting, out-of-class and in-class activities, use of time in each activity, meaningful activities that encourage learners to write, differentiation and self and peer assessment. In this final stage of the presentation, participants reflected on their lesson plan design. They could discuss what they learned from the workshop and what they could do to improve their lesson plans. It was evident that participants understood the importance of flipping writing and designing workshops to help learners enhance their writing results.

Recommendations

As Bergmann and Sams (2012) suggest, one of the most important questions to ask yourself when flipping your class is *what is the best use of my face to face time?* In writing workshops, time with the teacher is best spent generating ideas, drafting, erasing and re-writing, asking for clarifications regarding grammar structures to be used to convey certain message, getting assistance in vocabulary use, clarifying punctuation doubts, to name a few. Thus, for teachers flipping their writing classes, one of the recommendations the authors give is think about those tasks for which your assistance would be most valued and not easily provided in the traditional teaching paradigm where instruction is given directly by the teacher. Then, think of the best way to provide that assistance to students (individually, by pairs, by small groups, in stations) and device your lesson plan around these decisions. Remember to consider Bloom's taxonomy when planning. You may want to use a readily available resource online for the possible outcomes to be completed and goals to be achieved at every step of the way. You may want to use the Bloom's Taxonomy Teacher Planning Kit designed available on Google or any other ready-made resource. It is not always easy to think of tasks to develop the different levels of thinking, so using these resources can save you precious time.

Once you have thought of the full lesson, you can start designing out-of-class activities. Remember that in the individual learning space students are expected to perform the lower-order thinking tasks and receive direct instruction on the writing process. So, activities like watching videos or reading materials about given aspects in the rhetorical structure of a specific type of writing, researching and noting lists of connectors or transitional phrases,

studying punctuation rules would help students be ready for the productive stage of your lesson the following day.

After you have thought of the pre-class work, you need to decide on the way you will hold your students accountable for the work they did in the individual learning space. Accountability is key for the flip to work since it will show your learners the importance of doing the out-of-class activities and differentiating them from traditional homework. Thus, having an entrance ticket (Johansen and Cherry-Paul, 2016), using a website such as Playposit to build accountability in the video (Marshall and Rodríguez-Buitrago, 2017) or having a designed booklet with all the steps for students to complete as they progress through the activities (Rodríguez-Buitrago & Díaz, 2015) is crucial for them to realize their work in the individual space is crucial for their success.

Conclusion

Flipped Learning is a methodology that has shown to be successful when teachers understand the importance of using class time to create fertile learning spaces. Consequently, prepare for an EFL classroom where learners not only write a clear and complete product, but also can interact and reflect on their learning. Flipping your writing workshops will help you differentiate your classroom and provide students with personalized and relevant feedback about their written products guiding them to improvement and higher levels of achievement.

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Appendix A. Part one of the workshop "How to write a compare and contrast essay" designed by the authors

HOW TO WRITE A COMPARE AND CONTRAST ESSAY

PART 1

AIM: To analyze and understand the process of writing a compare and contrast essay.

ACTIVITY 1 (At home)

Individually, watch the video http://bit.ly/1RESCoShttp://bit.ly/1RESCoS (from 00:00 to 2:38) and complete the chart.

Definition			
Tip	a)		
Structure	Introduction (1 paragraph)	1. _____: 2. _____: 3. _____:	
	Body	1. Block Method Paragraph 1: _____ Paragraph 2: _____ 1.1. Subject to Subject Paragraph 1: _____ Paragraph 2: _____	2. Point-by-Point method Purpose: _____ Body: Paragraph 1: _____ Paragraph 2: _____
Conclusion (1 paragraph)	1. _____ 2. _____		

ACTIVITY 2 (In class)

In groups of 4, identify the structure described and explained in the video in the sample essay you received and mark it with different colors (Mark the introduction in green, the body in red, and the conclusion in blue).

ACTIVITY 3 (In class)

In pairs, SS discuss the following questions

1. How do you think the author arrived to that product?

2. What did the author have to think about to produce that piece?

ACTIVITY 4 (at home)

3. Watch the video to understand the importance of an outline: http://bit.ly/1RiZEwHhttp://bit.ly/1RiZEwH.

4. Individually, structure an outline about the following topic: **Television vs Internet videos**

ACTIVITY 5 (In class)

Share the outline you created for step 5 with a partner. Give feedback!

ACTIVITY 6 (at home)

Check http://bit.ly/2aWwzy6http://bit.ly/2aWwzy6 and either choose the topics from the list or decide on your own topics for your essay. Write your essay topic in the box below. Use the template in the following page to write your ideas about your chosen topics.

Appendix B. Lesson plan format designed by the authors for flipped writing workshops.

Enhancing your writing lessons through flipped learning

Lesson plan format

Name:		Writing type:		Writing process stage(s):
Aims:				**Date:**
LOCATION	**Bloom's taxonomy stage**		**Actions**	**Outcomes**
Outside of class	REMEMBERING (Find or remember information)			
	UNDERSTANDING (Making sense out of information)			
In class	APPLYING (Use information in a new situation)			
	CREATING (Use information to create something new)			
	EVALUATING (Critically examine info & make judgements)			
	ANALYZING (Take info apart and explore relationships)			
ASSESSMENT	How will you assess your students?			

Appendix C. Lesson plan peer feedback checklist

Lesson plan peer feedback checklist

Read each criteria and tick Yes/No based on your partner's performance. Please include comments if you ticked No.

CRITERIA	YES	NO	COMMENTS
My partner states objectives for in class and out of class activities			
My partner clearly differences between Bloom's taxonomy stages from In class and Out of class activities.			
My partner uses meaningful in class activities that positively affects his students' writing process.			
My partner uses meaningful out of class activities to provide input and prepare students for the face-to-face class.			
My partner's lesson plan makes the best possible use of face-to-face time.			
My partner establishes spaces and time frames that permit students to interact and reflect on their learning as needed.			
My partner gives students opportunities to engage in meaningful activities without the teacher being central.			
My partner differentiates to make content accessible and relevant to all students.			
My partner makes himself available to all students for individual, small group, and class feedback in real time as needed.			Not observable item