

The Usefulness of Writing Strategies to Facilitate Speaking in L2 Classrooms

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Las ideas y conceptos expresados en el siguiente Trabajo de Grado son de responsabilidad
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Este Trabajo de Investigación es el resultado del apoyo incondicional que recibí por parte de muchas personas que siempre creyeron en mí, en mi dedicación, esfuerzos y ganas por superarme personal y profesionalmente. Quiero dedicar la culminación de este trabajo especialmente a mi familia: mis padres Jaqueline y Javier por su tenaz compañía e incesable apoyo; a mis hermanos Silvia, Daniel y María Paz por su afecto y calurosos ánimos; a mi tía Carmen y a mi prima Diana, por sus palabras de aliento y sus particulares contribuciones en cada paso de esta nueva etapa que hoy culmino.

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FIRMA DE JURADO

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Resumen

Este documento de investigación presenta ideas relevantes que validan la utilidad de las estrategias de escritura como una herramienta para mejorar el desarrollo de la habilidad de habla entre los estudiantes de segundas lenguas. Además, con el fin de seguir las tendencias actuales de la enseñanza de idiomas, las cuales se enfocan en la integración de habilidades y el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa, el presente documento explora las formas en las cuales la escritura puede ser integrada con el habla como un medio importante para mejorar la instrucción en el habla. Al mismo tiempo, este documento describe la cercana relación entre las dos habilidades mencionadas anteriormente para proveer a los profesores de idiomas con estrategias de escritura útiles y actividades que se enfoquen en facilitar el proceso de producción oral.

Abstract

This research paper presents relevant ideas that validate the usefulness of writing strategies as a powerful tool to enhance the development of speaking skill among l2 students. Also, as a way to follow the current trends of language teaching, which focus on the integration of skills and the development of communicative competence, the present document explores the ways how writing can be integrated with speaking as an important means to improve instruction on speaking. At the same time, this paper describes the close relationship between the two skills mentioned above in order to provide l2 teachers with useful writing strategies and activities that focus on facilitating the process of oral production.

THE USEFULNESS OF WRITING STRATEGIES TO FACILITATE SPEAKING IN L2 CLASSROOMS

Learning to communicate in a foreign language (FL) like English has become a major priority nowadays when the world is in constant and rapid globalization (Ganschow, Sparks & Javorsky, 1998). For that reason it should be of great importance to find appropriate instruction to develop the communicative skills, especially instruction that helps students to master speaking for effective communication.

It is acknowledged that in previous years the methodologies used for language teaching were teacher-centered and there was a major focus on reading and writing but little attention to oral production (Liao, 2009). Nowadays, the field of language teaching has become very broad, and that means that there is a wide range of approaches and alternatives to be implemented in the second-language (L2) classroom. At the same time, there are more student-centered methodologies which are focused on communication and which involve the use of interrelated skills to develop communicative competence such as Task-Based Instruction (TBI) or Content-Based Instruction (CBI), (Liao, 2009). Consequently, L2 teachers should take advantage of the multiple resources provided by the recent trends as a way to boost the overall development of language learning among students. In this way, it is necessary to identify the best strategies that meet students' needs so that students can have an efficient and effective learning process and more chances to experience success.

One of the ways to provide effective instruction is by focusing on the integration of skills which helps to improve language learning in different ways. For instance, Oxford (2001) suggests that the integrated-skills approach gives teachers the opportunity to keep

record of students' progress in more than one skill at a time. Moreover by integrating skills, it is possible for students to learn real content, and it can also be significantly motivating to all kinds of learners.

Literature in the area of language teaching suggests that there is a close relationship between writing and speaking (Whiteman, 1981; Bagheri, S. & Pourgharib, B. 2013). At the same time, several authors suggest that writing and speaking can be integrated in such a way that one can influence the other (Goodman, 1986; Johnson, 1989; Larson and Jones, 1983; Magnan, 1985). It means that it is possible to use writing as a way to improve speaking. Although there are many experts who explain the differences between these two skills (Lakoff 1982; Oxford, 1993; Harmer, 2012) there are also some theoreticians who argue that there is a series of features shared between them which can be used to influence each other (Maxwell & Meiser, 1996; Cullen, 1998; Bagheri & Pourgharib, 2013). For these reasons, it can be said that using writing as a strategy might be significantly useful to boost oral production among L2 learners.

Following the previous ideas, this research paper aims at showing the importance of writing as a means to facilitate the development of speaking skills. All of this to provide L2 teachers with strategies that may help them enhance speaking instruction. This objective will be attained by means of presenting and analyzing current literature related with speaking, problems with oral production and writing strategies to overcome those difficulties.

In order to start with the discussion of how writing can be used to facilitate speaking, it is considered necessary to present some definitions of speaking, the elements

that make part of this skill and the main problems that students usually encounter with this skill as a way to better understand how to overcome those obstacles.

Understanding Speaking as a Communicative Skill

Teaching speaking should involve a deep knowledge and understanding of the elements that are part of this skill and the types of speaking performance in order to provide a more accurate instruction to our students. Many experts in the field of language teaching have proposed different definitions of speaking.

For instance, El-Koumy (2004) describes speaking as a skill-building process, speaking is the use of different sub skills which are produced at the same time, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. Similarly, Brown (2010) describes an array of micro and macro-skills in the speaking skill. He explains that micro-skills take place when a speaker produces the basic elements of language which are phonemes, morphemes, words, collocations and phrasal units. Macro-skills refer to focusing on the complex elements such as ‘fluency, discourse, function, style, cohesion, non-verbal communication and strategic options’ (p.142). In addition, speaking is also defined from the perspective of a whole language approach as a process of oral production in which there is interaction between meaning and expression (El-Koumy, 2004). Although there are different definitions of speaking, there is a tendency among L2 teachers to argue that speaking should be a combination of both skills and meaning.

Apart from the definitions stated above, Brown (2004) provides a more detailed explanation of the speaking skill through the description of six stages related with the type of speaking performance. Those stages of speaking acquisition are explained as follows:

Imitative

At this level of speech, the speaker is able to practice and imitate words, phrases or sentences. In this category it is not expected that the learner understands the meaning of what is being repeated. This type of speaking is merely phonetic because it is mainly focused on pronunciation and repetition drills.

Intensive

This second stage involves the speaker producing short language utterances focused on minimal interaction. The speaker must be able to provide responses to basic questions. For this, it is needed that the student understands the meaning of words as a way to respond. At this point the speaker is able to produce short sentences, read aloud, answer simple questions and complete sentences and short dialogues.

Responsive

This kind of performance is focused on interaction and comprehension at a limited level including short dialogues, small conversations and simple requests. The student must be able to reply to spoken sentences or questions from the interlocutors.

Interactive

This includes interaction and conversation which is more extended, more complex and possibly, with more participants. In this category, language users are able to exchange personal information (transactional speaking) or are able to maintain a social dialogue (interpersonal speaking). The latter form of interactive speaking involves more complex

pragmatic elements such as register (formal, colloquial); slang, humor or other sociolinguistic conventions.

Extensive

In this category the speaker is able to develop speeches, oral presentations and story-telling tasks. In this type of performance, interaction is very limited because the interlocutors are only listeners. Extensive speaking tasks can be formal or informal. Formal tasks are prepared in advance such as speeches or oral presentations. On the other hand, informal tasks are certain types of monologues where the speakers tell an anecdote, a story or make a review of a book or a movie.

As shown so far with the above definitions of speaking, it can be concluded that when teaching speaking it is important to be aware of all the elements that are part of this skill. Also, it should be an implication for language teachers to deeply understand and control their instruction taking into account the different stages that students face in their language learning process. A clear understanding of the six types of speaking explained above should help as a guide for teachers to provide organized instruction and to know how to assess students. In this way, it could be easier to choose activities and strategies that meet students' needs, according to their level and skills.

Appropriate instruction based on all the elements mentioned above should be given considerable attention to help students develop their speaking skills. This taking into account that from the perspective of the Communicative Language Learning (CLT) approach, it is acknowledged that speech is seen as the most direct way of communication. Furthermore, there are several reasons explained by experts to focus on building up the

speaking skill when learning a second or foreign language. For instance, Liao (2009) argues that ‘speaking is the skill that students will be judged upon most in a real-life situation’ (p. 1). This means that speaking is an essential part in daily life interaction with others, and most of the time, the first impression that a person has depends on the extent to which language users can speak in a fluent and comprehensive way. Brown (2001) states that when an individual is able to speak a language it means that he can have a conversation without many limitations in terms of language competence. Furthermore, he adds that successful language acquisition can always be demonstrated with the ability to reach pragmatic goals through an interactive discourse with other interlocutors. For these reasons, it is an implication for FL teachers to prepare their students for situations where they are able to speak and communicate easily and fluently.

In regards to the development of speaking in language learning it has been found in several empirical studies that many English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students usually face obstacles and difficulties while participating in oral classroom activities (Gan, 2012). Such difficulties are frequently related with inadequate vocabulary, fluency, and affective factors such as anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, frustration and stress (Tanveer, 2007 in Jamshidnejad, 2011).

When addressing the Colombian educational context, similar problems as the discussed above appear in the majority of Colombian L2 classrooms. All this is reflected in the low percentage of the population who are able to speak English, in fact, only 2% of Colombia’s population have a mastery of English as a second language (DANE, 2008; de Mejía, 2002; Gamboa, 2007; Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2006; in Usma, 2009). In addition, the reasons why students show a low proficiency level of English are explained by

Cardenas (2006) who states that “part of this situation is linked to the low communicative competence in English that teachers of this subject have, coupled with the low relevance of some curricular programs for English teaching and the deficient methodologies applied by teachers (MEN, 2005)” (5).

Linked to this series of problems is the need to enhance the use of strategies that help achieve a communicative use of the target language as well as it is necessary to improve the four primary skills among 12 learners: reading, writing, listening and speaking; especially the latter, considering that being able to interact in an oral way is highly important to develop communicative competence (Castrillón, 2010) and in order to achieve the Colombian government’s aim of having proficient “speakers” with the national Bilingual Colombia Programme which expects that Colombian people are bilingual by the year of 2019 (Usma, 2009).

Correlation between Speaking and Writing

One of the ways to overcome some of the problems mentioned previously could be the integration of writing and speaking. As it will be discussed in the following section, it is necessary to start by revising and understanding the relationship between these two skills. It is important to understand the differences and similarities in order to know how one can influence the other.

Although there have been studies that show how speaking can affect writing, such as in the case where dialect specifically can affect writing (Whiteman, 1981) research on the influence that writing has on speaking or how writing can be used to develop oral communication is very limited. As Boyadzhieva (n.d.) argues, the reason for the previous

may be that ‘we tend to take for granted that writing development comes after speaking, although it is not unusual that some learners are more proficient in writing than in speaking an L2’ (p.1). And as the same author discusses, this issue is considerably common in the case where the language is not a second but a foreign language, (i.e. in EFL contexts where the language is not acquired but studied) and therefore, it results that speaking usually tends to be the skill which L2 learners struggle most with.

Integrating speaking and writing might seem a difficult task to attain, given that many authors argue that both skills are completely different entities and they should be treated separately. For instance, Lakoff (1982) notes that what works in the written form does not function equally in the spoken form. It is generally known that speaking is spontaneous and immediate, whereas writing is non-spontaneous, it is organized and planned. At the same time, Oxford (1993) differentiates how speaking, in contrast to writing, contains a series of fillers, hesitations, ungrammatical patterns and incomplete utterances.

A complete description of the differences between speaking and writing is provided by Harmer (2012) who states that one of those differences is that in the written form it is the norm to use grammatical sentences such as *I have been there, and I have done that*. It is necessary to use all the parameters and elements that make a piece of writing clear and generally well written, including adequate punctuation, grammar, spelling and vocabulary. However, those elements are more important to be correct in writing than in speaking. On the other hand, in the speaking form it is acceptable to use contractions, that is, linking two words to form a single one, or else, it is possible to use ellipsis which refers to missing out unnecessary words as in *been there, done that*.

Another difference appears regarding the use of informal language. For instance, at the moment of speaking, it is not necessary for an individual to use correct grammar as to convey meaning and communicate with others. For this reason, a person could normally say something like *There's lots of apples on the counter* in the oral form. However, in the written form one should write *There are lots of apples on the counter*.

In addition to the above, when approaching the writing process, it is necessary to bear in mind aspects such as coherence and cohesion which are used to give the text a comprehensible and ordered sequence of ideas, and which help connect parts of a text, and, in this way the text becomes fluent and easy to understand.

As for speaking, to attain the same purpose of being intelligible, it is necessary to use variations in stress and intonation, so that utterances in speech have a clear logic and be easy to follow. For this, what a speaker can do is to speak louder and make some variations of pitch in certain syllables or words that are important and also use some fillers, words and phrases such as *erm*, *you know*, and *well*, which can be used as punctuation in speaking.

Finally, what Harmer (2012) explains is that when a person wants to convey emotion in the written form, he or she might use punctuation devices such as exclamation marks as in *Congratulations!!!*, or question marks as in *What?* It is also possible to use capital letters or repeated words to express emotion in informal writing such as in *Where ARE you?* or *Ok! Ok!*

In spite of the fact that speaking and writing have several differences such as the ones presented above, there are different authors who explain that these two skills share a series of similarities. Authors such as Goodman (1986) and Johnson (1989) believe that writing and speaking correspond with each other; it means that they are equal and

integrated. The reasons to assume this are that both speaking and writing, in contrast to reading and listening, are production-oriented skills (Larson and Jones, 1983). Moreover, writing and speaking are determined by the language user's communicative competence. Another reason is stated by Magnan (1985) who claims that "writing is the only possible form for speech ... [and] speech is the most feasible form for writing" (p. 117).

Furthermore, when observing the sequence of writing and speaking acquisition, the results of such observations demonstrate that the acquisition sequences of determined structures elicited in the natural process of the writing process are exactly the same as those regarded in speaking (Boyadzhieva, n.d.).

In brief, as shown so far, speaking and writing share an array of differences and similarities. However, it is believed from the author's opinion that they should be taught simultaneously as some theorists like Oxford (2001) assert, skills should be integrated given that an active involvement of skills may be meaningful and advantageous for the development of both speaking and writing.

Rationale of Using Writing to Improve Speaking

The integration of skills mentioned above could be carried out by means of paying attention to the differences and similarities previously discussed and to the features shared between speaking and writing which can be used to facilitate oral production. One of the ways to support this point of view is by means of understanding the evidence that was obtained with a study conducted in Iran by professors Somayeh Bagheri and Behzad Pourgharib (2013). In their study, they investigated the effect of dialogue journal writing on EFL learners' oral production. This mentioned study was carried out with the purpose of

reaffirming what several theoreticians have said and with the aim of demonstrating the effect that writing has on speaking. This study was developed with 30 female students of different ages, all of them with the same level of proficiency in English (intermediate level) and they were selected based on proficiency tests results from two classes of Abrar Language Institute, in Gorgan, Iran. During the experiment, students were instructed in dialogue journal writing and they were asked to write about a free topic which allowed them to interact in their classroom with their teachers and classmates. The results showed that after the post-test students took when they finished the experiment of dialogue journal writing, the test results obtained were significantly higher in contrast to those obtained when the pre-test was administered. In general, thanks to this study, it was proven that dialogue journal writing helps improve not only speaking but also interaction, intrinsic motivation, fluency and accuracy in both speaking and writing.

Some more evidence that supports the idea that writing can be used to improve speaking is explained by Cullen (1998) who states that brainstorming which is a writing technique, can be particularly useful as a way to boost speaking in the classroom. He develops this idea through the analysis of a research study on brainstorming in the conversation classes in a Japanese senior high school. Students had previously studied English in their junior high school but they had never attended spoken English classes before becoming senior students. For that reason, they had a very low level of speaking. As a way to warm-up students, the technique of brainstorming was introduced in order to prepare them for oral production tasks and to maximize their speaking time. The idea of the experiment was that in every session, students were given a topic and two minutes to quickly think of words and ideas related with that topic without worrying about mistakes.

This encouraged them to think faster and to participate as much as possible. After brainstorming students had to carry out an oral information gap activity, and since they were familiar with the topic and vocabulary because of the warm-up exercise, then it was easier for them to speak and answer the questions in the main speaking activity. At the end of the experiment, students were tested one more time and it was shown that an increase in speaking time and a more positive atmosphere were the two main benefits that brainstorming helped to obtain.

Additionally, Boyadzhieva (n.d.) presents three advantages of using writing to promote oral production.

The first one is that writing is not as difficult as speaking-in-class could be, yet more feasible when L2 learners do not feel prepared and comfortable to speak during class. Reasons for that fear of speaking can be psychological (i.e. students' affective filter might be threatened because they are too shy) or else, the factors can be physical (i.e. classes are too large or there is not plenty of time for all students to practice, etc.) (Boyadzhieva, n.d.).

Another advantage is that written work can reinforce what has been practiced when speaking and at the same time, speaking can promote writing development. It can provide practice in forms that are more fully realized in writing (Rivers and Temperly, 1978, in Boyadzhieva, n.d.).

Finally, if the activities carried out inside the classroom do not need response from the teacher, writing can be used with large classes, meaning that all students can have the chance to practice both speaking and writing.

Additionally, as it is stated by Maxwell and Meiser (1996) speaking is similar to writing in significant ways. Parallel to writing, speaking is purposeful and has a communicative goal. Besides, in both forms of language students experience different communicative functions such as expressing feelings, imagining, informing and controlling. Therefore, taking into account all the elements shared between speaking and writing, it is reasonable to say that both skills gather a close relationship as to influence each other. The idea of replicating these experiences in the Colombian educational context could be highly advantageous considering that the government aims at having proficient “speakers” or “bilingual” people in the near future. Therefore, it is considered that the results of implementing these experiences might enhance learning conditions for different groups of Colombian students.

Writing Activities to Facilitate Speaking

Considering the fact that writing and speaking share many features as shown above, following there is a series of writing activities that can improve oral production in the L2 classroom.

Free Writing Technique

By using this technique, students have the opportunity to write in a free way for a short period of time, usually around 10 minutes. This technique enables students to write without inhibitions which normally influence writing. While employing free writing, students do not need to be aware of correctness, clarity or tidiness (Dickson, 2001).

From the author’s experience, when students apply this technique, it is possible for them to be more fluent because they do not need to pay attention to grammar rules or

spelling because they use writing only as a way to keep record of their thoughts and to put down all the ideas that come to their minds. Given that all writing has the purpose of communicating ideas, sharing is necessary (Dickson, 2001). In order to integrate writing with speaking, this sharing has to be done orally.

The following is a method to use the free writing technique explained by Dickson (2001).

1. Preparation. Students must gather all the materials for writing (i.e. notebook, pieces of paper, pen or pencil). It is advisable to do this activity at the beginning of each class because other activities may distract students and the results obtained may not be as desired. For better results an anxiety-free space and enough time should be allotted.

2. Free writing. Elbow (1998) in Dickson (2001) describes precisely what to do when using this technique:

“The idea is simply to write for 10 minutes... Don’t stop for anything. Go quickly without rushing. Never stop to look back, to cross something out, to wonder how to spell something, to wonder what word or thought to use, or to think about what you are doing. If you can’t think of a spelling, just use a squiggle or else write: ‘I can’t think of it.’ Just put down whatever is in your mind. If you get stuck it’s fine to write ‘I can’t think of anything to say, I can’t think of anything to say’ as many times as you want; or repeat the last word you wrote over and over again; or anything else. The only requirement is that you never stop.” (3)

3. Instructor's roles while free writing. To start, the teacher could demonstrate the activity by doing the task himself in front of the class. A different role can be that of a facilitator in order to ensure that students are not correcting, using a book or dictionary, changing their sentences or any activity that distracts them from writing. Finally, the teacher can act as an encourager by reminding students to concentrate on the activity and follow the advice and explanation given at the beginning of the task.

Once students complete their free writing task there are different alternatives for them to share what they wrote. Of course they have to do it orally. Their writings will be a guide to remember what they are going to say but teachers should encourage students not to read every single word they wrote.

In order to practice, students can be organized in pairs, groups or in one general circle as in a round table. A good option could be to organize groups and do a jigsaw activity in which one or two students have to swap chairs with a different group so that they can interact with all the groups in the classroom and have more opportunities to practice their speaking by sharing their ideas from the free writing task.

In short, this activity can be highly advantageous because students have time to prepare what they are going to say. From the author's experience, this activity reduces anxiety among students because they do not have to improvise when they have to talk because they have time to plan and organize what they want to say and it is easier for them to express their ideas.

Mind-Mapping

As explained by Kiewra and Fletcher (1984) in Guinda (2010) mind mapping is a convenient note taking strategy used to focus on key factual, conceptual and relational ideas. This strategy helps students represent cause-and-effect relationships, classification, composition and exemplification of their ideas. Accordingly, Harmer (2012) states “we can give the students information in the form of a visual organizer. They then have to transform it into written text” (232).

As it was stated in previous sections, writing and speaking are similar in that both are production-oriented skills. For this reason when using a mind map it is not only possible that students transfer the information from this visual organizer into written text but also they can transfer that information into speaking utterances and the mind map can be used as a writing strategy to facilitate a speaking task.

The following is an activity focused on helping students prepare for in-class participation, oral presentations and lectures through the use of the mind-mapping strategy.

1. Preparation. Students should have all their materials for writing (notebook, pieces of paper, pen or pencil)

2. Pre-writing. Allocate 10 to 15 minutes for students to develop the writing strategy. The idea is that students start by writing the main idea or keyword in the center of the piece of paper. They then have to add branches that connect ideas, words or symbols connected with the central topic. They do not need to focus on spelling or grammar; they simply have to write all the ideas that come to their mind. Make sure to clarify that at the beginning, the organization of ideas is not important.

3. Mind-mapping to organize and classify. At this point, students have 5 minutes to organize all the ideas they wrote down in different categories or according to their relationship. They can be put from left to right starting with concepts, facts and examples.

4. Sharing time. Once students finish with the writing strategy organize them in groups or pairs. They can practice with as many classmates as possible. The idea is that they use their mind-maps to control and guide their presentations.

5. Instructor's role. Teachers can encourage students to be as creative as they can and to write all the ideas that they can think of without limitations, as in the free writing technique. Also, while the writing process is taking place, teachers can help students with any vocabulary or expressions that students may need.

From the author's experience, this is a great way for students to prepare for oral presentations or even for oral tests. This is particularly helpful for more visual learners (Harmer, 2010) given that they can use the words, phrases or symbols in their mind-maps as reminders to transfer what is written into speech and to relate those words with the ideas they have in mind.

Brainstorming

As explained by Cullen (1998), "Brainstorming is an activity used to generate ideas in small groups" (p. 1). The idea of this strategy is that students propose different ideas related with a given topic during a specific period of time as a way to warm-up before speaking.

There are multiple and useful ways to use brainstorming in the L2 classroom as a way to prepare students for speaking tasks, and some of them are listed as follows.

Simple words list.

- 1. List words to describe someone's personality*
- 2. List all the items you need for a birthday party*
- 3. Make a list of the ingredients you need to cook (lunch, breakfast, a pizza, etc.)*

Finding alternatives for a blank in a sentence. 1) Mary went to the _____ and bought a/an _____ (answers could include: shopping mall, street market, department store, shopping center, book shop, etc.; and any item or product such as hair brush, beer, shirt, dictionary, etc. 2) I love my mom because she is _____ (answers could include: beautiful, brave, affectionate, etc.)

Brainstorming on a picture.

- 1. What is the person doing?*
- 2. Make a list of the elements you see in the picture*
- 3. Write 5 words to describe this animal*

Group storytelling. Students work as a whole class group and each student takes turns to say a word or sentence connected with what a previous classmate said.

Example: Teacher: Elephants are big animals that

1. Student 1: live in Africa

2. Student 2: they are very beautiful

3. Student 3: and they are frightened of mice

4. Student 4: because mice are really scary

If students are writing, it could be advisable to write several stories at the same time (Cullen 1998).

In short, brainstorming activities can provide many advantages because they are a way for students to warm-up before speaking and they can also be fun and attractive since there are different ways to vary the use of this strategy.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this paper was to show how writing strategies, namely the three strategies discussed in this paper, are a viable means to enhance the development of the speaking skill.

Although there are many differences between writing and speaking, there are also several similarities that make possible to control some of the elements shared between them as a way to create activities that meet students' needs, skills and interests.

In this paper it was also possible to explain that many of the problems encountered by language learners when trying to speak are usually related with hesitation, anxiety, and nervousness because speaking is usually expected to be unprepared and spontaneous. However when using the writing strategies mentioned in this piece such as the free writing

technique, mind-mapping and brainstorming it is possible to think and plan beforehand in order to share ideas and express thoughts in a more accurate way. Although these strategies are mainly focused to be developed in the classroom, they can be a good way to practice for any real situation where the use of the target language is needed.

As it was shown within this work, the integration of writing and speaking is not only innovative but also highly recommended for its many advantages and the useful activities that can be developed to promote communication. Speaking is usually the most difficult skill to master when learning a language, and given the many features shared between writing and speaking it was possible to demonstrate the different ways in which they can be combined as to influence each other.

In addition, it is advisable for L2 teachers to consider the activities and strategies presented in this paper because they can provide them with many ideas that can be adapted to any teaching situation and used with all kinds of learners. It is important to remember that learning to speak a foreign language has become a primary need in these days when communication with the world is immediate and without limitations. For those reasons, it should be an implication to focus on instruction that promotes the good learning and development of this skill in such a way that students can communicate fluently and can express their ideas without problems.

Regarding the possible limitations that L2 teachers might find when applying the strategies suggested in this paper, it can be said that implementing these activities may be difficult considering the factors that affect an EFL context such as the lack of materials, limited class time, large classes and even the low level of communicative competence that

many L2 teachers have (MEN, 2005). However, these drawbacks should not be an excuse to try a change for the better.

Finally, regarding the Colombian L2 classroom, the experiences proposed in this paper may be particularly suitable for teachers who tend to drift away from the idea of teaching a language as a whole (i.e. through instruction based on integrated skills). The reasons to assume the above are that the techniques presented in this paper may ease the difficulties L2 teachers might encounter at the moment of choosing activities that integrate more than one skill at a time. Moreover, it is acknowledged as a common preference of traditional teachers to focus on writing when teaching a foreign language; therefore, it is considered that the activities suggested in this paper may be highly convenient for those high school teachers who tend to focus on that skill over the others.

In brief, after revising all the available literature on the teaching of skills, it can be concluded that writing is indeed an effective tool for enhancing the development of speaking, especially in EFL settings where exposure to the L2 may be scarce.

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