In and out of School Literacy Practices

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In this article I describe and discuss some studies that have been conducted in the field of literacy in and out of school in the Latin American context as well as in some other regions. I also relate those studies and some theories about literacy practices to my own experience as a teacher. Here I cite the findings of an exploratory study with a group of students from the Extension Courses at a public university in Bogotá on some literacy practices in and out of the school context. This experience disclosed interesting aspects in regard to the way students construct knowledge, not only by resorting to their previous knowledge but also by constructing and conveying their own meaning. In addition, I give an account of in and out of school literacy practices in the context of globalization and the use of new technologies of information and communication.

Key words: literacy, school, practices, globalization, technologies, information, communication

En este artículo describo y discuto algunos estudios que se han llevado a cabo en el campo de las prácticas de lecto-escritura dentro y fuera del aula, tanto en el contexto Latinoamericano así como también en otros países. De igual manera relaciono esos estudios con algunas teorías relacionadas con prácticas de lecto-escritura y con mi propia experiencia como docente. N este artículo hago referencia a los hallazgos obtenidos en un estudio exploratorio sobre algunas prácticas de lecto-escritura con un grupo de estudiantes de los cursos de extensión en una universidad pública en Bogotá. Esta experiencia reveló aspectos interesantes con relación a la forma como los estudiantes construyen conocimiento a la hora de leer y escribir; ellos no sólo recurren a su conocimiento previo, sino que también transmiten al lector, sus propios significados. En este artículo también doy cuenta de las prácticas de lecto-escritura en el contexto de la globalización y el uso de nuevas tecnologías de la información y la comunicación. Además, describo las prácticas de lecto-escritura dentro y fuera del aula de clase en el contexto de la globalización y el uso de las nuevas tecnologías de la información y la comunicación.

Palabras clave: lecto-escritura, escuela, prácticas, globalización, tecnologías, información, comunicación

Introduction

I have been involved in the teaching of English as a foreign language for only a few years and now, but more than ever, I have realized how important it is to take into account my students' literacy practices in and outside of school. Our students come to the classroom with a lot of experiences and knowledge they have gained outside in their homes and in the environment they are surrounded by. By reading some pieces of research in the field of literacy development, I have found significant information on studies that explore the ins and outs of school literacy as complementary learning experiences. In this paper I will refer to those pieces of research and relate some of the readings to my teaching practice and my own experience. I will also relate the ins and outs of school literacy practices in the context of globalization and will then draw some conclusions.

Reading and Writing Practices at Home and at School

To begin with, I would like to quote here a study carried out in a public school in Bogotá by López (2007) in which she implemented literature circles with a group of 10th and 11th graders in order to encourage them to express their opinions about some readings and at the same time relate the readings to their life experiences. López' students enjoyed reading, so she focused the reading on their needs and interests. This was an opportunity for the students to explore books and learn the language differently. Based on the analysis of the information collected during the implementation, López concluded that the students reflected critically upon the different topics discussed within the group. She found that they showed concerns about problematic situations of the society they lived in and sometimes even posed a solution for problems that were presented in the stories.

I believe that it is of paramount importance to plan and implement activities taking into account the students' needs and their backgrounds. All of our students come to the classroom full of different needs, expectations, motivations, interests and previous knowledge. Our task as teachers, then, is to turn all that knowledge into an experience that enriches everyone in the classroom to learn from one another.

Parents' involvement in their children's literacy practices has been a subject matter that has caught the attention of researchers in the Colombian and Latin American contexts as well as abroad. A representative sample is the contributions

made by Burns, Moll, and Goodman and also some other contributions made by Hederich and Charria.

For both Burns (2003) and Moll (as cited in Ruddell, R.; Ruddell, M.; and Singer, H., 1994), literacy processes and families have a great impact on the students' learning process inside and outside the classroom. Burns affirms that "literacy is intimately bound up with the students' lives outside the classroom in numerous and complex ways that affect their L1 and L2 identities" (p. 23) while Moll asserts that families are a great social and intellectual resource for the school. Therefore, promoting literacy projects where parents actively participate in the literacy of their children is of paramount importance. In this regard, our task as teachers is, as Goodman (2008) expressed in a video conference held in October, 2008, to get to know what our students already know and take advantage of it in the classroom.

In 1995 Mexico began to develop a program to promote reading and writing skills in schools in Latin America. In order to reach this goal, the *Secretaria de Educación* and the *Centro Regional para el Fomento del Libro en America Latina y el Caribe* (CERLALC) created the project 'Podemos Leer y Escribir'. The project selected a variety of books and gave them to nine countries that were participating; those countries were Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Cuba, El Salvador, Honduras, Uruguay, Nicaragua and Venezuela. To distribute the books, some organizations and coordinators who were interested in updating reading and writing practices were chosen in each of the countries. The coordinators decided to distribute the books among schools that were interested in developing reading and writing practices. The schools that participated in the project agreed to cooperate in the collection of information to evaluate the impact of the project.

Hederich and Charria (1999) described the results of the evaluation of the project and highlighted the participation of the students' parents in the proposal. As reported by Hederich and Charria, one important achievement of the project was the possibility that children and parents had to observe and to share reading moments at home; this was important for the children to develop into good readers. It was also surprising to see that some parents read some of the books at school and this reading time took place when the parents went to school for meetings. Hederich and Charria believe that it is very important to open the doors of the schools for the parents to participate and meet there with the books.

In the same vein, Avila and Garavito (2009) recognize the importance of integrating parents to the students' life at school. These researchers conducted a study whose objective was to describe what happened when parents are involved in the students' homework development (p. 106). The most important findings from this research have to do with the parents' involvement as well as the development of strategies to promote interaction among parents and children. While doing homework both parents and students showed willingness to listen and to communicate with one another. In addition, the collaboration between parents and students while doing homework got to be an effective strategy to get to know each other. The authors came to the conclusion that "tasks play an important role and can be used as a way to involve parents in children's education" (p. 113).

I definitely agree with the conclusion drawn from the study described above because when learning a language, children need the support of parents in the process. As teachers of English we can use a lot of strategies to involve parents and help children to learn with more enthusiasm and motivation.

Ballesteros, Jiménez and Smith (2005) also contributed to the field of home literacy practices with an interesting study that aimed at examining the social construction of readers and writers in Mexico. From their study it is relevant to mention the way some teachers at school dealt with writing practices. The authors affirm that "writing at school pays more attention to form than to content, whereas in the context of the community, attention is more focused on content than on form" (p. 20). The authors say that the reason this happens is because at school the students are expected to give right and conventional answers that focus on form rather than on content. If we teachers focus too much on formal aspects when our students write, we take the risk of killing their passion and motivation to write. It is better to let them use their imagination and their own way of conveying meaning.

So far I have cited some pieces of research and some opinions given by experts in relation to the participation of parents in their children's literacy practices in and outside the school context. However, parents are not the only ones who play a role in the children's literacy practices. Other family members, friends and the environment that surrounds the family play a key role in the literacy process.

The Importance of Networks in the Construction of Literacy

The knowledge that people get outside the school context is built and gained through networks. One instance of this statement is illustrated by Volk and de Acosta (as cited by Lankshear & Knobel, 2003), who conducted research to show that interaction outside of school does not occur between only parents and children. These researchers conducted an ethnographic study of three working-class siblings and their everyday lives. One of them was a proficient reader, the other was making average progress and the third struggled with reading. The three of them attended the same school and belonged to a Protestant church. The researchers found that siblings played an important role as mediators between home and school. The members of each child's support network also influenced their personal school experience. Volk and de Acosta (cited by Lankshear, C. & Knobel, 2003) suggest that "church literacy practices and adult help with homework served to induct all three children into literacy by enrolling them as 'active participants with more competent others' in learning "the language and behaviors valued in many classrooms". Based on their findings, the authors concluded that "teachers should make explicit to themselves and to the families the ways in which they define literacy in the classrooms, and to recognize the out-of-school literacies in which their students engage as significant resources to draw on in classroom based teaching" (p. 58).

In relation to Volk and de Acosta's study, Bhola (as cited by Gadsden, 2008) proposes a model of family literacy in which the family is the centre of the model and is located in a network of mutual relationships with multiple institutions such as schools and workplaces. This model not only represents a dual relationship, parents-children, but also involves the entire family; that is, siblings, grandparents, cousins, etc., and the context in which learners and families develop. All families are rich in traditions, beliefs and develop their own cultures. Evidence of this richness is represented, for example, at the time students go back to school after a period of vacation. They tell other students the places they visited, the people they met, the activities or celebrations they had with their families and so on. In all those situations, they learn a great deal and, with their comments and experiences, contribute to the development of the class.

Abouchaar and Desforges (2003) found, through the exploration of various studies, that pupil's achievement is also influenced by factors such as family social

class, parents' level of education and the family's level of material deprivation, and many other different factors. In regard to parental involvement, the authors maintain that "parental involvement in children's education has a powerful impact on their attainment and adjustment" (p. 12). I have detected that this happens with the children I have taught. In most cases, children who are accompanied by their parents and who receive their support are more motivated to go to school, have a good relationship with other students and teachers, are disciplined and get good grades. Additionally, Abouchaar and Desforges have stated that technology influences the students' achievement.

The use of ICTs in educational contexts and its relation to literacy has attracted the attention of researchers in Colombia and also in foreign countries. This interest has led researchers to explore and explain what the possible shortcomings and/or benefits of using ICTs in education are.

The Relationship between Literacy Practices in and out of School and ICTs

The amount of research carried out in the field of literacy practices in and outside of school is great. However, according to Hull and Schultz (2008), in recent years the explosion of new technologies and new media has exerted much more influence on literacy theories as well as practices at school. They assert that new technologies "make it possible for literacies to travel across space and time, complicating further the boundaries between school and out of school contexts" (p. 243). Students do not stop reading and writing once the day ends at school. They continue communicating with their peers by sending instant messages, chatting or sending e-mails. Besides, they belong to communities around the world by using blogs or groups through which they share their background and knowledge with people of different countries. In fact, students are learning more on their own because they find it interesting and easy to manage new technologies. For this reason, it is important for teachers to guide students to critically read the information they find on the Internet and incorporate their cultural practices into the classroom.

Beavis and Snyder (2004) acknowledge that new technologies are gaining popularity but insist we "still have much to learn about their nature and impact" (p. 13). The authors emphasize that "understanding literacy as social practice, embedded in situated contexts of use, is required to make sense of the cultural significance and

impact of the use of ICT" (p.17). It is true that ICTs have had an impact on literacy practices. However, we must take into account two important aspects: The first one is that because of socio-economic conditions not everybody has access to new technologies. The other one is that we must guide our students to use these technologies appropriately so that they take advantage of these resources to enrich reading and writing practices. Beavis and Snyder point out that "in situations where resources are scarce, the imperative is to find creative ways to do more with less" and they reiterate that with young people we teachers have to ensure "the capacity to assume a critical and informed approach" (p. 15).

The local study carried out by Quintero (2008) at a public university in Bogotá is an example of how technology could be approached according to Beavis and Snyder's proposal. She developed meaningful writing tasks towards the creation of a community in which students shared common aspects with people in a different culture. She used blogs as an alternative writing format and technology as a mediator to facilitate the design of the spaces. She came to the conclusion that writing by using blogs allowed students to express themselves freely and say what the world was for them, based on their thoughts and experience of living in it. This study is representative of the way technology is used to understand and approach literacy as a social practice.

The incorporation of new technologies into literacy processes has made researchers rethink the way literacy is defined. Hull and James (as cited by Hull & Schultz, 2008), conducted a project that connects recent research on literacy with theoretical understanding of semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, and cultural geography. The researchers conducted their work in the university community-based organization called "Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth". The main purpose of this work was to create "identity texts", constructed through spoken word performances, written narratives, photo collections, storyboards, musical compositions, animations, or digital stories with the purpose of fostering agency through semiotic resources. From the study, the authors concluded that "learning to communicate with words, images, sound, and movement, and being able to produce artifacts that can traverse geographical, social and semiotic boundaries" (p. 244) transform the definition of literacy. This transformation of the definition refers to the concept of "new literacies", thanks to the influence of new technologies.

Hull and James' proposal to redefine literacy is closely linked to Heath's (as cited by Hull & Schultz, 2008) proposal to "envision schools as an integrated system of learning environments" (p. 245). Heath explains that schools should be "central nodes" within a web of learning contexts for children which might include museums, playgrounds, libraries, and the like that are open all day, all year. It is an opportunity to open the space for learning, a different space from the four walls that surround the classroom. I have observed that in the process of learning a foreign language, my students find it more meaningful and enjoyable to have contact with the language in a 'real context'; for example, visiting a museum, a library, getting to know their city, being involved in projects or, in the case of children, playing in the playground. Regarding this idea Heath suggests "an ecology" of learning environments as a focus for teaching and learning, rather than schools alone. In that sense, young people become active rather than passive learners in society.

The relation between literacy practices and the use of ICTs in and outside the classroom implies going beyond and being aware that literacy also has to do with culture, race and, at the same time, a broader context that is globalization.

Local Literacy and Globalization

Having mentioned literacy practices outside of school, it is relevant now to focus attention on literacies in the classroom. Bloome (2008) argues that classroom literacy practices influence and are influenced by the contexts in which they exist. This author advocates three main changes that might influence and be influenced by classroom literacy practices: the integration of digital literacies into daily lives, increasing racial, cultural and linguistic heterogeneity and cultural and economic globalization.

Lankshear and Knobel (as cited by Bloome, 2008) claim that "large numbers of people outside of schools have taken new literacies, adapted them into their own uses, needs and interests, and created a series of cultural dynamics that are likely to influence the context of classroom literacies". The incorporation of new literacies into people's lives due to new technologies of information and communication has had a great influence on the way knowledge is viewed by learners and teachers. The digitalization era has given rise to a new kind of culture that has to be considered according to the educational context to benefit the learning processes within the classroom.

Bloome (2008) refers to racial, cultural, and linguistic heterogeneity as aspects that must be taken into account to create or adopt a multicultural curriculum with the purpose of redefining classroom literacy practices. This redefinition depends much on how changing demographics are incorporated in schools and how such incorporation is mediated by other social institutions at the local and even broader level. In the Colombian context, this has to be considered in detail since institutions that exert power over schools attempt to homogenize students and do not allow opening a space to create multicultural curricula. This situation happens both in the public and private sector, where standardization is considered the best way for institutions to educate students.

Regarding globalization, Bloome affirms that classroom literacy practices are influenced by the economic, cultural, and linguistic dilemmas, opportunities and problems globalization entails (p. 260). With the globalization phenomenon, parents have to prepare their children to interact and be informed about what people all around the world do. Furthermore, communities have to adapt themselves and to balance between the local and the global to incorporate globalization into their own culture. Due to this fact, the role that families and schools in a globalized world play is significant to avoid losing traditions and cultural identities in local communities. The question then is, How to do it? Wallace (2002) recommends that "as teachers of English, our best response to the global future of English is not resistance to the language which provides us with a living, nor even an apologetic defence, but a rethinking of what *kind* (Wallace makes specific emphasis on the '*kind*') of English best serves the needs of its users for the twenty-first century" (p. 101). English is spoken in many parts of the world but now it is well recognized that there is not a single way of speaking the language. Furthermore, the people who are learning this language do so for different purposes. Hence, our objective as teachers is to recognize what our students are learning the language for and get them aware of how important it is to use the language they think better fits their goals, needs and abilities.

Wallace invites teachers to reflect upon the methodologies they are using to teach. She solicits rethinking the communicative approach and task based learning methodologies that aim at preparing learners to deal with artificial and day to day talk. Instead, she propounds "teaching a kind of language which is not for immediate use, not to be taken out into the streets and the clubs, but which can serve longer-term needs" (p.112). We have many resources available to reach this goal. We can take advantage of tools such as ICTs, if our students use them every day. We can also make use of those experiences the students live outside the classroom and that are common

among them. Most important of all is having classes that are student-centered rather than teacher-centered. The students need to see that the language they are learning is meaningful and they also need to realize that learning a language goes beyond learning grammar or learning to communicate. Learning a language helps learners to be transformers and active participants of a society.

Throughout this paper I have mentioned the importance of relating literacy practices in the classroom to life experiences according to some authors and their research experience in the field. Bearing this in mind, I conducted a short exploratory study for a period of a month with a group of students in which I integrated reading and writing practices at school and the students' home environment.

Alan (2008) defines exploratory research as "the quintessential form of informal experimentation, accidental discovery, and spontaneous invention". He also affirms that in exploratory research, "researchers explore when they have little or no scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity, or situation they want to examine but nevertheless have reason to believe contains elements worth discovering". Some authors agree that in exploratory research the researcher finds little information on the topic studied. Streb (2009) states that exploratory studies allow researchers a high degree of flexibility and independence regarding the research design and the collection of data. This is one of the advantages I considered allowed me to develop the small-scale study I report here.

Literacy Practices in and outside School: A Meaningful Experience with a Small Group of Students from Extension Courses at a Public University in Bogotá

This study took place in the Extension Courses of the Foreign Languages Department at a public university in Bogotá, Colombia. The Foreign Languages Department offers English and French courses to different populations, both children and adults, who are interested in learning these languages. The children who take the courses start at an early age, between seven and eight years old. There are twelve levels and the students study for four hours every Saturday during one semester, five months more or less.

I worked with the students from the first level whose ages were between seven and eight. The main purpose of this small-scale exploratory study was to use stories

that students had to read at home as an input to foster the writing of short stories in the classroom. To achieve the goal, I gave my students a different story book every Saturday, for a period of two months. They had to read their book at home and their parents had to accompany them in the process. After the two months, and once the students had read an amount of five different books, I began to implement the writing of short stories in the classroom. This kind of writing was freestyle and I did not evaluate grammar in their compositions. The students wrote a total of four stories.

Once I finished the implementation I evaluated its impact. In order to evaluate this process I interviewed my students and their parents and collected the students' works, that is, the stories they created during the classes. I found some interesting and salient information that I will describe in the following lines.

In relation to the reading of the tales at home, the children said excitedly they had liked that moment because their parents, siblings or some friends had helped them with the readings, especially when they did not understand specific words. The children's parents also provided their opinions about the implementation of this project. They stated that accompanying their children was very important because they were interested in their children's development and because some of them learnt many things with their children. However, there were parents who had difficulties in the accompaniment because they had to work the whole day, but anyway they tried to follow the process. Most of the parents said that they were not good at English but they recognized that their children had showed advancement in their literacy abilities in English. They also said that at the end of the course the kids understood much more and were able to write at least short and clear sentences.

Apart from the information gathered from the students and parents, I observed the development of their writing in class and compared the kids' work with the information they provided. I found some significant patterns in their written compositions which I describe here.

Results: What the Students Gained from the Readings Done at Home

During the time the students were creating their stories they asked me a lot of questions about the way a whole sentence was written. However, they seldom asked

me questions about the vocabulary because they wrote stories that contained vocabulary they already knew. I noticed that most of the stories contained vocabulary related to animals. This was because the majority of the books they had at home told stories of animals and also because in class we had already studied lots of vocabulary related to wild, farm animals and pets, for example. Figure 1 is a sample from one of my students' work in which she integrates vocabulary previously seen:
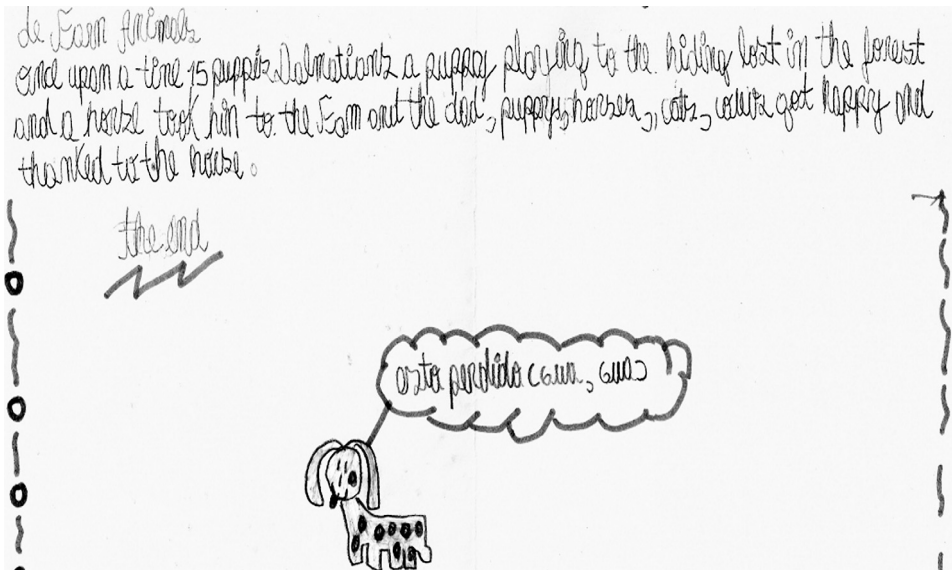

Figure 1. Student's sample 1.

The kids wrote their stories based on some characters they had seen in the tales or they adapted the original tales by putting in an important extra ingredient: their imagination. The adaptation of existing stories to create new stories was because their experience with reading was extensive and because of their previous knowledge. Figure 2 shows another example by another student.

Apart from the aspects previously underlined, I want to mention here what I found out in terms of the characteristics of the language the kids used in their
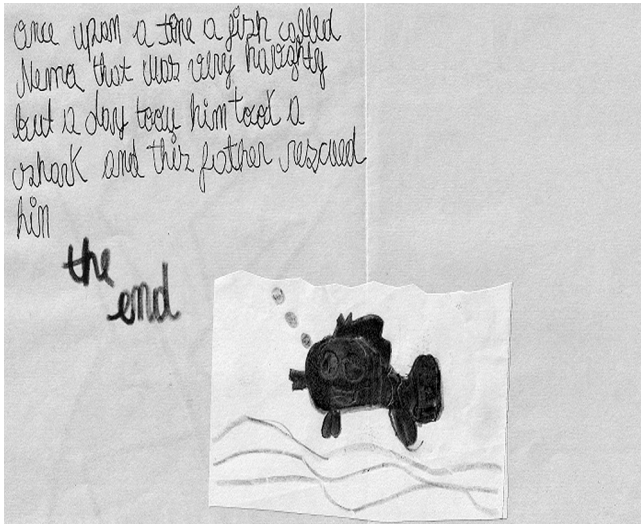
Figure 2. Student's sample 2

compositions and the way they guided the reader to understand their texts. Figure 3 illustrates the findings:
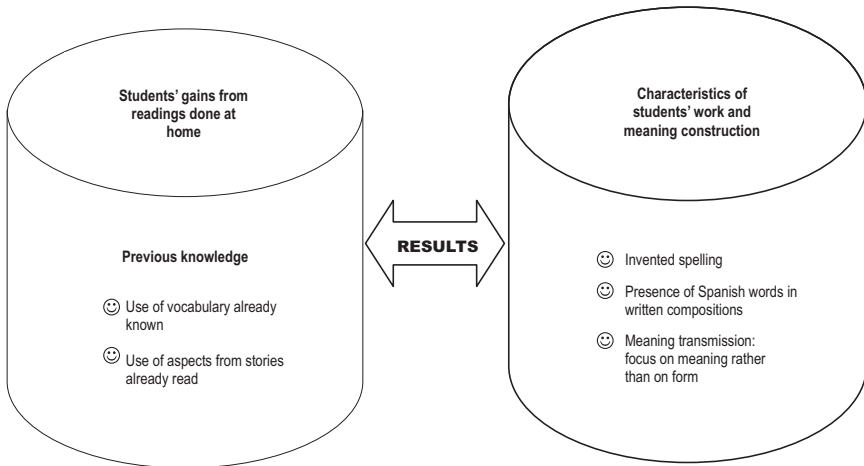

Figure 3. Main findings

The use of previous knowledge by the students while writing their short stories connects to their construction of meaning when writing. These two important stages are part of the process of knowledge construction while learning a language.

Characteristics of the Students' Work and Meaning Construction

The first remarkable characteristic of the students' compositions was their invented spelling as well as the presence of Spanish words. Considering the students' age and their writing development, invented spelling is part of this important process. In Figure 4 I cite one example of one of my students' invented spelling:
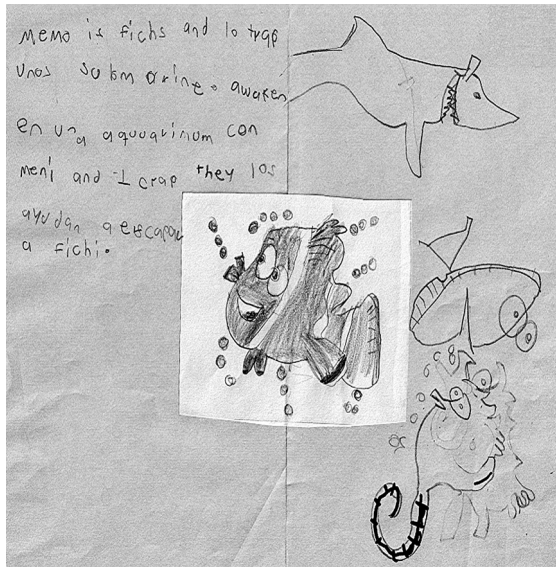

Figure 4. Student's sample 3

Besides evidencing the children's early spelling, the sample above reveals how children apply Spanish when they do not know a certain word in English. The use of both languages was very common in almost all the written texts. In relation to the use

of English and Spanish when creating texts in a foreign or second language, Clavijo, Freeman, and Garcia's study (2004) with a group of first and second grade bilingual children in a school in Tucson, Arizona, confirms that "the knowledge of English and Spanish grammar interacts in the process of becoming bilingual" (p. 115). The researchers observed the process bilingual children followed when writing the story "Caperucita Roja" to analyze the content of their texts and the use of punctuation. The texts were analyzed and it was found that English and Spanish were present in the writings. The researchers assert that "within the bilingual and Spanish texts several students used grammar and syntax of English with Spanish vocabulary" (p. 112).

The second characteristic in the students' writings was the way they transmitted meaning to the reader by focusing on meaning rather than on form. The small-scale project that I conducted with my young students focused on fostering the writing of short stories based on the input they gained from the reading of tales at home. In order to encourage the kids to write their stories, I did not ask them to produce grammatically correct stories but meaningful ones. The stories that the students created were clear and understandable. They did not focus on form but on meaning. In Figure 5 there is an example of one of the kids' work as she wrote it:
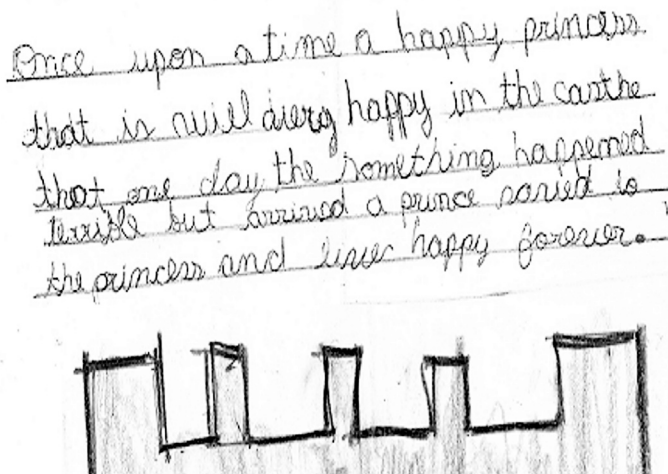

Figure 5. Student's sample 4.

In terms of content, this composition is very rich. Even though the author does not use grammatically complete sentences or perfect spelling, it is clear what the story is about. The input she may have gained from stories read before plays an important role in the creation of the story. In fact, by the time the student was asked what she had liked the most about creating a story, she said that she had gained a lot of vocabulary from some of the books she had read at home. The stories that the students created in my class were evidence of the knowledge they possessed due to the contact they had with the English language outside and also inside the classroom.

Ferreiro (2003) asserts that "the criteria for a well-structured text would have to change if we accept that we are in a moment of transition" (p. 51). She also affirms that "such changes will be more pronounced in creative literature than in argumentative academic texts". I agree with Ferreiro because I noticed that the stories the students created were not necessarily well structured grammatically to be understood by a reader. Those stories were abundant in content because the kids created them by adding elements of their creativity, imagination and previous knowledge. The sample shown in Figure 6, from one of my students, illustrates the previous statement.
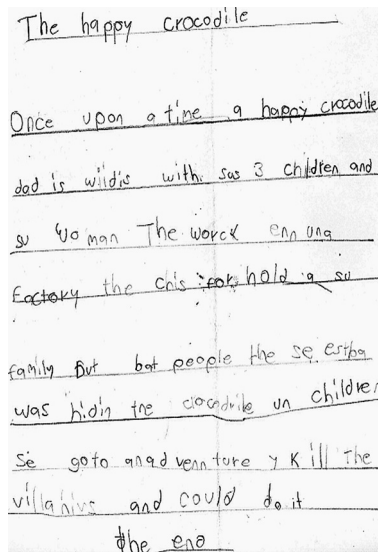

Figure 6. Student's sample 5.

On the back of the paper the student wrote:

G fue la autora del libro en sus aventuras esta es la mejor que a tenido esperamos que tengan mas.

With children I did not need to make grammar something explicit. That is what I experienced during the project and in class with the students. The children had the ability to grasp meaning without a specific and strict focus on form.

Conclusions

Having presented different studies and insights that researchers have gained researching literacy as well as my own experience in the field of in and out of school literacies, I conclude the following:

Involving parents, children and teachers in the learning-teaching process could be beneficial for everyone. As Ey, Smajlagic and Lawson (2006) state, "if strong home-school relationships are fostered, then perhaps student engagement is more likely" (p. 71). Similarly, Pitt (2000) argues that "schools need more help, and one of the aims of family literacy is to harness the support of the parents for the schools" (p. 116). Having parents engaged in the process of reading with the students from the Extension Courses was a meaningful experience for them and for me as a teacher. The parents showed interest in helping and supporting their children and the children were more interested in learning than before because they did not see the gap between their reading and writing experience in the course and at home. It was also a meaningful experience for me because it was easier to motivate the students to read and to write.

Additionally, the school should pay more attention to and take more advantage of the knowledge that the students gain outside the school. If we transform our classroom into a livelier and home-like environment, our students will enjoy and find their work at school more productive. Everything we teach our students must serve the purpose of applying this knowledge outside, in their real life context. That is why we have to understand their reality outside and take as much as possible from that reality into the classroom. I noticed that the students of the Extension Courses integrated in their writings many elements acquired from their experience outside the classroom. These elements included what they got from previous stories read, movies they had seen, their own living experiences and so on. I also noticed that they

took home the literacy experience they lived in the classroom and this was evidenced through the parents' comments and testimonies.

ICTs have gained importance in the development of literacy and the influence of globalization in the learning of the English language. Even though the use and incorporation of New Technologies of Information and Communication in our classroom are relevant, we cannot forget that this is only the means, not the end or the only tool we can rely on to teach. Technology can be used as a complementary instrument to offer a kind of variety to our classes. However, we must bear in mind the accessibility students have to technologies and also the role they play in the development of new literacies. In our Colombian context, not all students have access to computers or to other technological equipment, especially in public schools, or when they have access the teachers are not trained to use them. Hence, we cannot rely only on technology when teaching. When teachers have access to technology, this tool can be used to work on the reading and writing processes but without forgetting that libraries are full of books to read and that students can use also paper to express their ideas.

Globalization is another phenomenon that has brought about changes. Through ICTs we have access to information all around the world and English is the language that allows us to know what happens because it is spoken almost everywhere. However, this does not mean people cannot get information if they are not familiar with English. All languages must be equally important and English must be used as a means to enrich our cultural backgrounds, but not as a means to lose our own cultures and traditions.

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