Integrating Community-based Learning to Improve Academic Writing

Luisa Mercedes Pabón Montaño

Requirement for the Master's Degree in Didáctica de la Lengua

Director
Luz Mary Quintero
M.A. in Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés

Universidad Industrial de Santander
Facultad de Ciencias Humanas
Escuela de Idiomas
Maestría en Didáctica de la Lengua
Bucaramanga
2019

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RESUMEN

Título: Integrando aprendizaje basado en comunidad para mejorar escritura académica[*]

Autor: Luisa Mercedes Pabón Montaño[**]

Palabras clave: literacidad crítica, aprendizaje basado en comunidad, escritura académica, coherencia

Descripción:

Como educadores, nuestro papel es el de permitir un espacio de negociación donde el contexto y la experiencia de nuestros estudiantes sean tomados en cuenta. Asimismo, es nuestra tarea motivar a nuestros estudiantes a situarse en la conversación académica a través de la reflexión crítica que les permitirá hacerse miembros de sus disciplinas (Kapp & Bangeni, 2005). Es así como este estudio consideró cómo las metodologías basadas en material pueden dificultar el desarrollo de la literacidad en la educación superior y cómo permitir que los estudiantes negocies la construcción del discurso en el aula y en sus comunidades puede fortalecer su desempeño en escritura. Este estudio cualitativo con un grupo de docentes en formación fue un intento inicial para documentar qué aspectos del Aprendizaje Basado en Comunidad pueden ayudar a mejorar el desempeño en escritura dentro de una clase de composición. Haciendo uso de documentos de clase, rúbricas de evaluación, entrevistas y cuestionarios durante un periodo académico universitario, el proyecto de investigación-acción reveló que al situar la escritura académica en el centro de las comunidades, los estudiantes potenciaron su habilidad para construir relaciones semánticas que facilitaron la coherencia local y global de su discurso escrito. Los hallazgos también revelan que el aprendizaje basado en comunidad ofrece ambientes más interesantes para que los estudiantes desarrollen habilidades de escritura

[*] Trabajo de grado

[**] Facultad de Ciencias Humanas. Escuela de Idiomas. Directora Mg. Luz Mary Quintero

ABSTRACT

Title: Integrating Comunity-based Learning to Improve Academic Writing*

Author: Luisa Mercedes Pabón Montaño**

Key Words: critical literacy, community-based learning, academic writing, coherence.

Description:

As educators our role is to allow for that space of negotiation where students' backgrounds and experience are taken into account; moreover, it is our duty to encourage students to learn how to situate themselves within the academic conversation with critical reflection, which will allow them to become members of their disciplines (Kapp & Bangeni, 2005). From this standpoint, this study aimed at considering both how material-centered teaching approaches might hinder the development of literacy in higher education and how allowing students to negotiate the construction of discourse in their classroom and their communities might strengthen their written performance. This qualitative research study with a group of five preservice teachers from Licenciatura en Inglés UIS was an initial attempt to document what aspects of Community-based Learning could help improve written performance in a composition class, particularly with regard to the achievement of local and global coherence in an academic text. Drawing on data coming from classroom documents, assessment rubrics, interviews and questionnaires over a course of one academic term, the action-research project revealed that by situating academic writing at the heart of local communities, students potentiated their ability to build semantic relations that enhanced the overall unity of their written discourse. Findings also revealed that Community-based Learning offers more engaging environments for students to approach and develop their writing skills.

* Graduate Thesis

** Facultad de Ciencias Humanas. Escuela de Idiomas. Director Mg. Luz Mary Quintero

Introduction

Writing is yet another tool that has been used to perpetuate structures of power. In fact, Foucault would refer to "the writing of the 'writers'" as a "system of subjection," meaning that writing is also a way to fix the roles of subjects in their appropriation of discourse (1981, p. 64). Since educational systems are instrumental in the appropriation of discourse, anyone participating in them also occupies a role from which they either maintain or modify those structures of power embedded in it (Foucault, 1981, p. 64). As teachers, some of us unconsciously succumb to those dominant discourses and legitimize them (as cited in Janks, 2010, p. 52) when we ask our students to write about the topics suggested by course textbooks originating far away from our local contexts and realities. We easily impose our voices when we ask students to build their compositions on topics that we deem "fundamental" for their lives, neglecting the "hermeneutic perspective of situational understanding, which claims that a meaningful pedagogy cannot be constructed without a holistic interpretation of particular situations" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p.171); in doing so, our students' voices are silenced and deprived of the opportunity and right to become participants in the construction of discourse. It is our role, however, to allow for that space of negotiation where students' backgrounds and experience are taken into account; moreover, it is our duty to encourage students to learn how to situate themselves within the academic conversation with critical reflection, which will allow them to become members of their disciplines (Kapp & Bangeni, 2005). From this standpoint, this study aims at considering both how material-centered teaching approaches may hinder the development of literacy in higher education and how allowing students to negotiate the

construction of discourse in their classroom and their communities might strengthen their written performance.

It is critical for learning processes to start at the core of the community making it the focus of the journey; in fact, "combining community-based work with academic learning adds value particularly in terms of cognitive gain" (Wickersham, Westerberg, Jones, & Cress, 2016, p.19). Why should the development of literacy be the exception? According to James Berlin (1996), in literacy courses one of the primary aims is "to prepare students for critical citizenship in a democracy" (p.131). This statement is in consonance with the objective of tertiary education, where this project originated, as its mission is to prepare professional individuals who develop a sense of social awareness that enables them to contribute to the improvement of the communities they belong to (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, Educación Superior, 2018). Subscribing to this principle in its mission-statement, Universidad Industrial de Santander (UIS), which housed the group of students who inspired the idea behind this didactic intervention, aims at preparing professionals who understand their community and identify its problems to help it in the process of building viable solutions.

Thus, trying to meet UIS' mission and in the hope of transforming the traditional literacy teaching approach that I had been implementing in Academic Writing I at UIS since 2015, when I first started to direct the course, a didactic intervention based on Community-based Learning (CBL) was designed. The study was implemented with a group of five pre-service teachers who enrolled in the course during the second academic term 2018, as part of the undergraduate program Licenciatura en Inglés, offered by the institution. Framed in qualitative research, this project drawn on data coming from five different instruments that yielded results regarding how CBL engages students in more significant learning environments and how its social-driven

approach can enhance the production of coherent semantic relations in compositions since it favors the social quality of discourse.

Below, this study states the characteristics of the problem and the way it was identified in the course Academic Writing I. Then, it considers the significance of researching the problem with regard to the development of writing performance in higher education, the social nature of discourse, the commitment in education to promote active participation in the community and the need to transform pedagogical practices that are based on answers rather than questions (Freire & Faundedz, 2018). After that, the study presents its general and specific objectives and proposes a framework that considers the four theoretical pillars that support its arguments, namely critical literacy, CBL, writing as a social process and the coherence of discourse. The study then moves to an explanation of its research design and a description of the setting in which the pedagogical intervention took place. After that, the study includes a detailed description of the six cycles into which the didactic sequence divided. Last but not least, the study gives an account of the findings coming from the analysis of the collected data and arrives at a series of conclusions that derived from the implementation.

1. Statement of the Problem

In my teaching practice from the second academic term 2015 to the first academic term 2017, I was able to observe that when students from Licenciatura en Inglés UIS (LIUIS) reached the 5th term of their undergraduate program and with it Academic Writing I, they were still neophytes in the field of *formal writing*. Evidence of students' struggles with the basic principles of formal writing was traceable not only in their quizzes and exam results but also in the rubrics used to assess their compositions; even though students practiced and were provided with

feedback during the course, the criteria in their assessment rubrics would indicate a consistent difficulty in the achievement of clear thesis statements, topic and supporting sentences in their compositions (see appendix A). This would seem odd to the observer who could be quick to judge that an academic writing course should have provided students with basic instruction to start stating their ideas clearly in written form; nevertheless, the written comments in my students' essays and the results regarding the criteria in the assessment rubrics would indicate the opposite; for example, their written products lacked elements such as coherence, cohesion, style and readability. Reading a literature review about academic writing performance in higher education, I realized that this issue was not exclusive to LIUIS students. Doris Correa (2009) describes how several universities have dealt with the same issue; in spite of taking formal English as a Second and Foreign Language writing courses, college students "continue to struggle with writing academic papers and in particular with the adoption of an academic voice" (p. 104).

According to Correa (2009), genre theorists have pinpointed three possible factors that could interfere with successful performance in academic writing: lack of situatedness for writing, the disregard for writing context, purpose and audience and the failure to understand writing as a political process (p. 123). Confronted with this explanation, I could not help but wonder whether one of these aspects could be the reason why most students continued to exhibit absence of one of the most important principles of writing, that of coherence. Analyzing their compositions, I could observe that although students managed to produce three or four types of essays by the end of the course, the results in the rubrics administered for their assessment mainly showed low scores in the criteria corresponding to coherence and unity (see appendix B). This did not mean that students had failed to understand the concept of coherence, yet they

struggled to make the right connections among ideas in their texts so that they would exhibit unity.

Pondering about this matter, I acknowledged that there was an imminent need to find a pedagogical strategy that provided LIUIS Academic Writing I students with the opportunity to engage in processes that drove them to make accurate connections and helped them build coherent texts. It was at that point that I revisited "the lack of situatedness" mentioned by Correa (2009), and I asked myself: how could coherence in Academic Writing improve by involving learners in a meaningful process of exploration and understanding of their subject positions before those coming from the social contexts they wrote about? According to Berlin (1996), "The more the writer understands the entire semiotic context in which he or she functions, the greater the likelihood that the text will serve as an effective intervention in an ongoing discussion" (p. 130). If this was true then, to what extent could students' understanding of their communities, in other words students' readings of the world, help them improve their written performance?

2. Justification

Taking into account that the students on whom this study focused are active members of an undergraduate education program, it is vital for them to not only hone their written performance for academic purposes but also become skillful writers who can both recreate and transform the sociocultural milieu they belong to. In this respect, Van Dijk (1997) in Discourse as Social Interaction observes:

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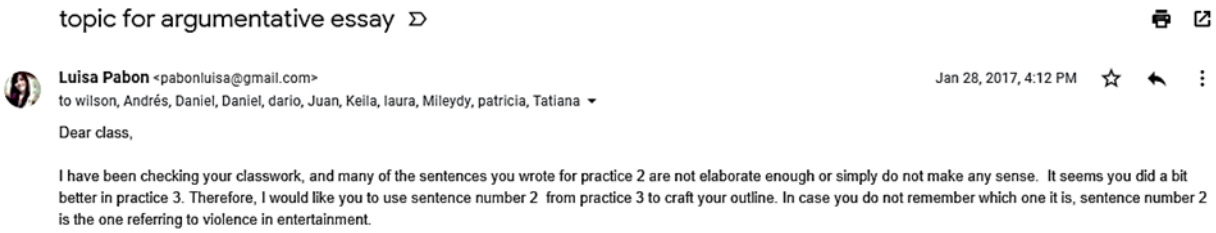
> Language users actively engage in text and talk not only as speakers, writers, listeners or readers, but also as members of social categories, groups, professions, organizations, communities, societies or cultures. They interact as women and men, blacks and whites, old and young, poor and rich, doctors and patients, teachers and students, friends and enemies, Chinese and Nigerians, and so on, and mostly in complex combinations of these social and cultural roles and identities. And conversely, by accomplishing discourse in social situations, language users at the same time actively construct and display such roles and identities. (p. 3)

Nevertheless, during four semesters, my LIUIS Academic Writing I students were not given the chance to use language to "actively construct and display such roles and identities" in their compositions because I was imposing the topics they had to write about. Figure 1 shows how when I found lack of coherence in students' texts, I resorted to prescribing the topic for their essays.


topic for argumentative essay

Luisa Pabon <pabonluisa@gmail.com> Jan 28, 2017, 4:12 PM

to wilson, Andrés, Daniel, Daniel, dario, Juan, Keila, laura, Mileydy, patricia, Tatiana

Dear class,

I have been checking your classwork, and many of the sentences you wrote for practice 2 are not elaborate enough or simply do not make any sense. It seems you did a bit better in practice 3. Therefore, I would like you to use sentence number 2 from practice 3 to craft your outline. In case you do not remember which one it is, sentence number 2 is the one referring to violence in entertainment.

Figure 1. Email sent to an Academic Writing I group during the second term 2016.

With regard to Van Dijk's idea of language users' role, one might wonder whether students' difficulty producing coherent texts could be linked to my use of a material-centered approach; certainly, they had to write about the topics suggested by the course textbook rather than about the social contexts they belonged to, could this be a reason why it was hard for them to situate

their social roles and identities? Citing Ann M. Johns, Correa (2009) remarks how an approach of this nature in the teaching of writing disregards the individuality of the writer as well as "their meanings, motivations and voices" (p.109). Behaving as an "authority or fact dispenser" (as cited in Correa, 2009), I never considered the possibility that students' lack of background knowledge on the suggested topics did not provide them with the necessary elements for the construction of coherence in their texts, nor did I consider that "context is crucial for the production of meaning" (as cited in McComiskey, 2000, p. 27). Moreover, the kind of teaching approach I was using in the Academic Writing I course was not in consonance with the fundamental principles that make part of UIS mission-statement. If UIS demands students' active participation to build collaborative environments and social trust that allow them to identify and solve problems in their community strengthening democracy, justice and social equity (UIS, 2018, p.18), then the pedagogical interventions that take place in the institution should regard "learning as a problem solving process that cannot be understood outside of the different collective contexts in which students interact and construct knowledge" (Schecter, Solomon and Kittmer, 2003, p. 83). This had been neglected by my exercise of social power, building discourse unilaterally, and as Van Dijk (2013) suggests, exercising control over my students' actions and minds, limiting their freedom to construct their own discourse by influencing their knowledge. Students were not agents in their learning process, but passive receivers of "knowledge."

Now, if UIS's prospective teachers are expected to be instructed and oriented in interdisciplinary work and in relation with the outside world (UIS, 2018, p.12), they "need to develop appropriate foundational knowledge about the social, psychological, cultural, political, and economic forces that affect the teaching and learning process for individuals and groups"

(Schecter, Solomon & Kittmer, 2003, p. 82). This means that Academic Writing I students should learn to situate their writing. However, this might be hard to achieve if they are not prepared to find connections among who they are as individuals, what their communities offer and what they are able to construe from their acute observations of and interactions with social forces. In this respect a less prescriptive approach to the curriculum (syllabus) for Academic Writing I could facilitate situated writing and provide a more "coherent and consistent programme of learning" (IBE, 2016, p. 28). According to UNESCO, curriculum design should allow "more space for the inclusion of locally relevant topics" as these bring advantages for learners and learning (IBE, 2016, p. 27).

3. Objectives

The focal point of this study together with what it seeks is embodied in the following general and specific objectives.

3.1. General Objective

Document what aspects of Community-based Learning help students improve their written performance.

3.2. Specific Objectives

- Describe students' explanations on what hinders or fosters the achievement of coherence in their written texts.
- Describe how students' compositions are situated at the core of community discourses.

- Verify to what extent textual coherence improves in the written texts of Academic Writing I students.

4. The Study

4.1. Theoretical Framework

According to Xiao-Lei Wang (2014), it is necessary for teacher education programs to prepare pre-service teachers "in knowing how to provide effective instructional support to help their students improve language and literacy skills" (p.28). Since this study departed from a problematic situation in a composition course in an English teaching program, whose participants will most likely have to provide instructional support to help their future students learn how to write in English, it is imperative to examine the subject of literacy and the different approaches that this study used as axioms to improve it, namely critical literacy, community-based learning, writing as a social process and the coherence of discourse.

4.1.1. Literacy and Critical Literacy.

Literacy has been defined as "the ability to read and write in a language;" however, there is more to literacy than the mere development of skills. In fact, the definition of literacy has evolved throughout time serving the purpose of different approaches such as the linguistic, cognitive and sociocultural ones (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Since content learning cannot be conceived of without language use, and therefore, literacy skills, it is necessary for students to become proficient in these areas (Wang, 2014, p. 27); it is especially necessary for LIUIS students who will not only use these as tools to perform competently in their academic life, but also integrate them as recurrent elements in their

professional life as future educators. In her book Understanding Language and Literacy Development and based on an extensive literature review, Wang (2014, p. 36) explains that literacy encompasses three main aspects. Firstly, it is "a social and cultural practice;" secondly, due to the spread of information and communication technology, literacy today is no longer limited to written text but it now includes visual, auditory and spatial elements. Finally, the aspect of "positioning" has come to play a major role in the understanding of literacy development; citing Freire, she states that language is never neutral; instead, language is a social construct, which means that the production of a text always relies on an individual's sociocultural values, beliefs, ideas and readings of the world. This final element is crucial for the present study as its objective is to determine whether students' understanding of their communities, in other words students' readings of the world, (not their teacher's) helps them improve their written performance.

Freire's advocacy of students' "creativity and responsibility for constructing his or her own written language and for reading this language" would play an essential role in the development of this project (1987, p.23). As stated before, as teachers some of us sometimes impose limitations on our students' development of literacy by, for instance, deciding on the topics they have to write about rather than giving them a say in the selection stage. In a way, we reduce literacy to "a process of teaching in which the teacher fills the supposedly empty heads of learners with his or her words" (Freire, 1987). The assumption that students are blank slates makes part of the patronizing discourse that deprives them of the opportunity to embark in the journey of critical reflection that their learning process should be. In this respect, it is imperative to understand that "learners are agents who may contest or transform … practices others attempt

to induct them into" (Duff & Talmy, 2011, p. 97) and that it is our job to encourage and empower them to achieve that goal rather than to perpetuate fixed structures of power.

> If students are to become critical members of, and contributors to, the discourse, rather than instrumental reproducers, they have to be allowed the time and space to engage with the messy process of exploring who they are in relation to the authoritative voices in the field. (Kapp & Bangeni, 2005, p. 112)

In his book Teaching Composition as a Social Process, Bruce McComiskey proposes critical analysis as a tool to help students problematize intrinsic or extrinsic subject positions they encounter in texts and at the same time he calls for written assignments that urge them to construct their own subject positions so that they may solve possible issues in their communities (2000, p. 29). Based on this idea, my didactic intervention had to be founded on a pedagogical approach whose rational considered the community as the starting and focus point of the learning process. After all, our communities make part of the world, and it is in the world that discourses are born. Offering students a chance to build their texts based on the different discourses at the core of their communities meant giving them a chance to explore and understand "the different relations people have to the world, which in turn depends on their positions in the world, their social and personal identities, and the social relationships in which they stand to other people" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 133). Having examined Community-Based Learning (CBL) during a piloting stage in an Academic Writing I course during the first academic term 2018, and being aware of the positive results it yielded in LIUIS' composition

process, I reckoned this approach would be the suitable one to integrate all these elements in the course.

4.1.2. Community-based Pedagogy. Community-based learning is "a structured approach to learning and teaching that connects meaningful community experience with intellectual development, personal growth, and active citizenship" (as cited in Russell-Stamp, 2015, p. 39). This CBL definition outlines four aspects that were essential for the development of the didactic intervention. First, this kind of pedagogic approach is not devoid of structure. This is vital because in dealing with a complex process such as writing, an academic writing course overall requires a framework that favors "the organization, selection, and display of knowledge consistent with the practices of a disciplinary community" (as cited in Correa, 2009, p. 117), in this case those required in higher education. Second, the cognitive gains at the core of the course are fostered by the direct contact there is with the communities that students inhabit. This is essential in composition, for "our communities' common-sense ways of thinking about the world speak through us and we reproduce them in the texts we create" (Janks, 2014, p. 1). Third, findings from different studies conducted in American universities confirm that CBL improves theoretical knowledge as well as learning outcomes and strongly enhances student's intellectual gains (Carlisle, Gourd, Rajkhan, & Nitta, 2017; Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014; Wickersham, Westerberg, Jones, & Cress, 2016). This feature is crucial for composition because although writing should be concerned with the student's "personal goals, purposes and voice" (as cited in Correa, 2009, p. 107), it would be unrealistic to claim that the process of learning to write is not marked by theoretical knowledge which has to do with the special conventions used to craft a text or that there is no need to differentiate types of text organization

in order to communicate ideas compellingly in our compositions. Last but not least, CBL stresses the urgency of articulating education with the development of active citizenship. This idea was one of the central concepts in Dewey's Moral Principles in Education (1909) and is also Freire's notion of the purpose that education should serve, in other words, that of an education for decision making and social-political responsibility (2011, p. 82). However, "in order to learn how to be citizens, students must act as citizens" (Melaville, Berg, Blank & Coalition for Community Schools, W. D. 2006, p. 1); that is to say, as teachers, we should promote learning settings that allow students to reach out to their communities, that allow them to identify their assets and problems to later take action and be active citizens; indeed, "education must connect subject matter with the places where students live and the issues that affect" them (p. 1).

Community-based pedagogies are also defined as "curriculum and practices that reflect knowledge and appreciation of the communities in which schools are located and students and their families inhabit" (as cited in Rincon & Clavijo, 2016, p. 69). This conception helps us to understand three more points. First, curriculum can be adjusted to the social context that surrounds the academic community, so if UIS mission is to engage its members in active participation to lead change in their community, should curriculums not reflect interest for the community? It ought to be noted that "the moral imperative that underlies the mission of public education [is] to develop active, engaged citizens who are able to participate in and contribute fully to a democratic society" (Melaville, Berg, Blank & Coalition for Community Schools, W. D. 2006, p. 1). Second, there is knowledge in the community which needs to be explored and put to practical use; this is especially pertinent in literacy processes because "to become literate is to gain access to the valued resources of the culture" (Moll, 1994, p. 201). These readily

available resources are what Luis Moll (1992) defines as funds of knowledge; he describes them as "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133). The concept of funds of knowledge was embraced in this didactic intervention aiming at transforming students' interactions with the social resources available in their communities into the sources they resorted to for the composition of their texts. It should be emphasized that although the undergraduate program where this study is situated aims at learning English as a foreign language, this does not imply that learners should be only concerned with knowledge coming from English-speaking countries. As stated by Rincon & Clavijo, "The problems students bring into the classroom represent an opportunity to reconcile the school with the real needs of society" (p.69). Third, families are fundamental to the learning process. There should not be a breach between the academic institution and the families in the community. "The school should work humbly in collaboration with parents and the community doing inquiry together in order to nurture learning and teaching practices that benefits (sic) students by creating meaningful practices that involve their reality, experiences, and communities" (as cited in Rincon & Clavijo, p. 70).

In Colombia, community based pedagogies have helped teachers to meet the curriculum standards in their courses while providing students with "multiple entry points and approaches to subject matter" (Sharkey, Clavijo & Ramirez, 2016, p. 313). In the area of literacy, CBL has helped Colombian teachers to help broaden students' vision of what literacy means; participating in this CBL experiences, students were exposed to different literacy practices that resulted in the creation of rap songs, videos, reports and reflections that were also shared on social networks (Rincon & Clavijo, p. 78). Also, Florez reports "language and writing improvements" of her

students after engaging them in activities that took advantage of "their own cultural richness" (2018, p. 204). Chapeton and Chala (2013) also agree that by having students participate in the social practices that surround them as members of society, they gain more control over their compositions as they become the means to showcase their voice and to convey what they are really interested in. In brief, Community-based pedagogy implicitly suggests that literacy, which is central to the learning process, should favor the element of agency to transform the community.

4.1.3. Writing as a Social Process. According to Chapeton and Chala (2013, p. 26), the teaching and learning of writing has been mostly concerned with "the linguistic dimension," thereby neglecting purpose, context, voice and audience. This is confirmed by Correa (2009) in her revision of pre-process approaches to writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) where instructors would make "a strong emphasis on grammar" but show "a disregard for the writer's personal goals, purposes and voice"(p. 107). Although these pre-process approaches would seem a ghost of problems past, the more social turn of process and post-process approaches to writing has not been able to debunk the early ideas of writing that were marked by linguistic uniformity. In fact, research studies conducted in universities in Bogotá inform that pre-process practices in the teaching and learning of writing still shape the development of this skill in composition courses. For instance, describing his composition course Nanwani states, "As far as the academic writing model at the core of our instruction, we were employing an Anglo-American style to academic writing, characterized by a linear rhetorical structure and principles" (2009, p.138); also, Chapeton and Chala suggest that the observations of their ESL classrooms indicated that "students' voices seemed restricted in

their discourse, as the purpose for writing was reduced to producing and submitting a product to be graded" (2013, p. 26). The findings in their studies call for the implementation of writing approaches that favor the social nature of this activity, in other words, teaching and learning to write as a social process.

McComiskey (2000) adverts to composition teachers that a writing course whose focus is the textual level of composing favors grammar and style but neglects the way in which rhetorical situations would influence the text; on the other hand, if a writing course focuses primarily on the rhetorical level, then it neglects the effect that other texts and social institutions have on students' writing process; moreover, a composition course that focuses only on the discursive level results in neglecting the writing process completely.

From this perspective, it is clear that there is need for an approach to writing that regards all these elements, and that is why a genre approach seemed appropriate for this didactic intervention context. Hyland (2007) says, "Genre refers to abstract, socially recognized ways of using language." Because Academic Writing I revolves around students' capacity to build arguments to support their point of view and because building arguments in formal composition belongs to a specialized genre, a genre approach helps the researcher-practitioner to provide students "with targeted, relevant, and supportive instruction" (p. 148). Such approach has been particularly useful for this study because "genre knowledge embraces both form and content, including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time" (as cited in Kapp & Bangeni, 2005, p. 114).

4.1.4. Coherence of Discourse. One of the objectives of this study would be to understand the reasons behind academic writing students' struggle to achieve one property that,

according to Van Dijk (1980), is the “most conspicuous” to define textual nature, the “semantic property of coherence” (p. 52). To do so, we must first address what coherence means and what its implications are in written performance.

The Oxford Essential Guide to Writing (Kane, 2000) briefly defines coherence as ideas fitting together, in other words making sense. Moreover, for a text to be coherent it needs to meet two criteria, namely those of relevance and effective order. For these to be attained, “every idea must relate to the topic,” and “ideas must be arranged in a way that clarifies their logic or their importance” (p. 95). This succinct definition of the criteria necessary to attain coherence seems to be embedded in Tierney & Mosenthal’s (1981) discussion of the conditions that a text must hold to achieve relative coherence. For them, two conditions seem vital to find a text coherent: first, “an overall structure permeating the text as a function of the argument of the text;” and second, “the signalling of relationships between terms of the argument (there are a variety of means, cohesive ties being only one)” (p. 26). The assessment of coherence in this didactic intervention is particularly driven by the function of the argument in the text which can be articulated with Van Dijk’s (1980) notion of the semantic relations in discourse. Van Dijk classifies two kinds of coherence: local and global. “Local coherence is defined for (pairwise) relations between sentences of a textual sequence” (p. 52); he later explains this connection in terms of semantic relations between the propositions that are expressed by pairs of sentences; furthermore, he remarks that the relation between propositions commonly happens “with respect to one course of events, one situation, one possible world, and so on” (p. 53). Van Dijk is emphatic about how local coherence is dependent on global coherence. Global coherence is defined as “the “theme”, “idea” “upshot” or “gist” of a discourse or a passage of the discourse” (p.52), and it is evident by means of semantic macrostructures that, at the same time, derive from

macrorules. Without macrostructures or themes, local coherence is unattainable. Now, where do students find the theme, idea or gist of their semantic products?

Various text analysis systems conceive of coherence "primarily as a top-down phenomenon" (Mosenthal & Tierney, 1983, p. 5). This would imply that in order to find themes (macrostructures), writers must resort to prior knowledge and input information for the creation of their semantic products (Bransford & Johnson, 1972), which are ultimately a by-product of their experience with the world; according to Bakhtin (1981), "For any individual consciousness living in it, language (this applies for written language, as he is discussing the novel) is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world" (p. 293). Freire and Macedo (1987) seem to support this theory when they assert that "language and reality are dynamically interconnected" (p.29). Also, Nunan (2007), wondering about the source of coherence, would appear to share the rationale behind Bakhtin's description of language as he rules out the possibility that coherence resides in language itself to place it "in the individuals who process the language" (p. 132). The reference here to "individuals who process the language" is critical for the concept of coherence in writing because it would embrace the idea that its construction is social and that it involves the writer's but also the reader's "notions of how a text can and should function in communication" (Mosenthal & Tierney, 1983, p. 4). In fact, Carrell (1982) suggests that in order to really learn about textual coherence, it would be necessary to undertake textual analysis from theories that start regarding "reading and writing as interactive processes involving the writer and the reader as well as the text" (p. 487); this is only reasonable given that language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (Bakhtin, 1982, p. 293).

4.2. Research Design

Below the reader will find a brief description of the way in which this study was conducted and an account of what it might entail in its academic context.

4.2.1. Type of Study. Because the present study deals with issues of "voice, power, participation, representation, inclusion and interests" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 26), the paradigm that best fits its structure would be the paradigm of *critical educational research* (p. 26). This study is, thus, framed within qualitative research, and it uses action research as design given that such type of approach converges with most of the pedagogical and theoretical approaches mentioned above since "it involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring [the personal] teaching context" (Burns, 2010, p. 2). The objectives of this study accommodate to the essence of action research in the sense that they aim "to intervene in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes and, even better, improvements in practice" (p. 2). It is precisely the want for "improvements in practice" in my composition class which motivated me to conduct this study. Obtaining solid evidence from this pedagogical intervention justified any adjustment or changes needed to enhance my students' experience with their literacy development in L2 in the future. Accordingly, the data collected in this study falls under the emic approach.

Moreover, as this study concentrates on the specific situation of Academic Writing I students from Lic. en Inglés UIS, action research meets the focus of the project which is "contextual, small-scale and localised" (Burns, 1999 p. 30). Also, planning, action, observation, and reflection, the four essential moments that characterize the cycles of action research according to Kemmis and McTaggart (as cited in Burns, 2010, p. 7-8) are evident in this study. Below there is

a description of the way in which these four moments took place during the didactic intervention.

This study started with the moment of *planning*. At this stage, I identified the issue I wanted to research, specifically, problems with coherence in the written texts of Academic Writing I students. I also documented my general observations of the situation and gathered theoretical support that refined my ideas on the focus that the research would have, that of community-based learning; this, in turn, gave me some pointers for further action. Just as Kemmis and McTaggart (2007, p. 276) suggest, this process would "involve a spiral of self-reflective cycles," and I realized this with the initial stage: the process of reflection had just started, and it would accompany every moment during the study to signal the points where changes would be necessary.

The next moment in the cycle was *action*. At this stage, a plan to collect data was developed. The documented observations and the piloting of some activities in the previous academic term helped me as a researcher-practitioner to decide on the necessary instruments to collect and observe progress during the study: classroom documents, questionnaires, interviews, assessment rubrics, and a personal journal; these are explained in detail below, in the section Data Collection Techniques. A pedagogical development for the implementation of the instruments was also designed (refer to Instructional Design) at this stage. It would be worth to mention that this pedagogical development was not prescriptive; on the contrary, it was built on the premise that curriculum should be "based on inquiry" (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 55); inquiry takes a conceptually-based approach to curriculum, and this means that its "goal is no longer to cover a particular set of information, but instead to build the knowledge necessary for providing the base from which to explore conceptual understandings that underlie that knowledge" (Short, 2009, p.

14). Approaching curriculum in this way afforded students with an opportunity to "find and examine questions significant in their lives" (Short, 1996, p. 22).

According to Burns (1999, p. 154), "An essential feature of action research is the 'reflexivity' which results from cycling backwards and forwards from data collection to analysis"; but, although observation and reflection were constantly part of all research cycles, it is necessary to remark that there was a moment when *observation* occurred from a more informed perspective. At this point, having examined in depth the theoretical principles that would guide the study, the pedagogical intervention was put into action, and the instruments served their purpose to gather the information pertinent to the study. Data collection took the whole academic term. After that, the collected data was analyzed and triangulated, so classroom documents were tested out against assessment rubrics, and these against interviews and questionnaires. Finally, there was a moment of final *reflection* which considered and evaluated the outcomes of the didactic intervention and its effectiveness facing the objectives of the study; this, in turn, led to the present report that gives a written account of the development and findings of the study as part of my "ongoing professional development" (Burns, 2010, p. 8).

4.2.2. Setting. As mentioned above, Universidad Industrial de Santander (public institution) houses Licenciatura en Inglés, the five-year undergraduate program where the problematic situation has been identified. Responding to one of the objectives of the program which is training pre-service teachers with an advanced communicative competence in English (Objetivos), students have to enroll in different specialized classes that sharpen their skills in the target language. Academic Writing I is one of these classes, and it was there that the pedagogical intervention was situated.

INTEGRATING CBL TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC WRITING

Academic Writing I is a compulsory composition course taken in the 5th term of the program, after the students have completed their formal cycle of English learning. As stated in the course syllabus (see appendix C):

> The course aims at raising awareness of the conventions of written academic literacy and at helping students to improve their writing ability in a variety of text types, focusing on sentence-level lexis and syntax, text coherence and cohesion, and appropriate style. In doing so, Academic Writing 1 is designed to enhance the student's ability to perform in all written tasks of the program such as course assignments, reports, essays, etc. In addition, this course encourages the individuality of the writer as well as his/her autonomy to reflect and organize ideas and his/her motivation to develop the ability to self-evaluate written assignments. This course also intends both to explore the difficulties students face in writing academic essays and to provide them with the elements necessary to overcome them.

Academic Writing I is a five-hour course which provides students with the tools necessary to master the most important principles of writing which should be evident in the compositions (mainly essays) submitted by the students throughout the term. The instructional material specifically concerning aspects and principles of formal writing for the course are based on Oshima & Hogue's Longman Academic Writing Series 4: Paragraphs to Essays, Fifth Edition which proposes a structured approach focusing on writing as a process.

4.2.3. Participants. The people participating in this study were five UIS pre-service teachers; four of them officially registered as students in Licenciatura en Inglés, while one registered in the new undergraduate program Licenciatura en Lenguas Extranjeras con Énfasis en Inglés. All participants had already completed at least two years of training in the program and were enrolled in Academic Writing I. Four of them were repeating the course, which they had taken and failed under my supervision the previous term. Only one participant was new to the course. They were in a twenty-to-twenty-four-year age range, three male and two female, who were expected to enroll in the course at a CEFR B2 level of English after having completed Advanced English. It is necessary to clarify that the number of participants in this study was the total number of students enrolled in the course; this was a rather small class compared to former classes were the number of students ranged from twelve to fifteen. For ethical considerations, every participant received a code to protect their identities; these were the codes used for the five participants throughout the intervention: BR, LQ, SC, SY and VP.

4.2.4. Researcher-Practitioner Role. Because the three-year pedagogical practice in Academic Writing I led me to the research question that the pedagogical intervention sought to answer, I assumed the role of both practitioner and researcher in this study. This researcher-practitioner role had certain implications; for example, as the teacher I had to present the research project to my students trying to prevent any kind of coercion into participation in the study; also, to reassure students that there would not be any kind of retaliation deriving from non-participation in or voluntary withdrawal from the study, I delivered and collected letters of consent to analyze their documents from the general and specific objectives in the study.

After receiving consent from the students, as a researcher–practitioner, I carefully explained the type of study and its characteristics to the participants. Also, I collected and analyzed the data of all the class given that all five students decided to participate in the project. As the data collected came from classroom documents that had to be assessed and that received a mark for institutional purposes, I had to be emphatic when reassuring participants that taking part in the study or abstaining from it would have NO incidence in their course marks or feedback, nor would it determine whether the class passed or failed Academic Writing I.

4.2.5. Data Collection Techniques. The data that provided the necessary information for the analysis in this study was collected using the instruments below. Because the objectives described focus on the improvement of aspects of written texts, most of the data collection techniques fall under the category of non-observational (Burns, 1999, p. 117-150), and only one is categorized as observational (Burns, 1999, p.85-86).

4.2.6. Classroom Documents. According to Burns (1999), "Collecting samples of texts over a period of time enables teachers to assess the progress which students make as well as to diagnose areas for further action in classroom research" (p. 140). The first classroom document used in this study was the lesson plans (see appendix D). These helped to organize the scope and sequence for the course, and were later vital to contrast what was projected for the sessions and how the class developed in reality according to the reflections kept in the observation journal. Given that writing is the focus of this study, the second instrument to use was precisely the documents produced by students. In this regard, students produced different types of texts throughout the academic term from simple tasks as the crafting of topic sentences to more

elaborate tasks like the crafting of paragraphs and essays; however, only the most elaborate tasks in the course such as compositions of outlines, paragraphs and essays were taken into account as the base for the analysis in the study. Accordingly, three paragraphs, three essay outlines and three types of essays (logical division of ideas, cause and effect and argumentative essays) provided the necessary information to evidence any improvements in the quality of each student's composition; in total, forty-two classroom documents were analyzed as one student did not submit two of the tasks. Also in this category, there is a collection of personal logs that students kept in their research of the issue that they decided to write about. All instruments received a code; these can be found in the table below.

Table 1
Coding for Classroom Documents

Paragraphs	PN-PI (Paragraph Number- Participant) e.g. P1-BR, P2-LQ
Outlines	ON-PI (Outline Number- Participant) e.g. O1-BR, O2-LQ
Essays	ET-PI (Essay Type- Participant) e.g. LDI-BR (Logical Division of Ideas-Participant) C&E-LQ (Cause & Effect- Participant) ARG-SY (Argumentative- Participant)
Personal Logs	PI-LOGN (Participant-LOG Number) e.g. LQ-LOG01, SY-LOG08, BR-LOG05
Lesson Plans	LP-SN (Lesson Plan-Session Number) e.g. LP-S01, LP-S22

4.2.7. Interviews. Since Academic Writing I tries to help students find their voice and identity as writers, it focuses on the individuality of the writer. Before going into collaborative writing, which they undertake in Academic Writing II, students are expected to go on an individual introspective analysis of their weaknesses and strengths; as these are very personal processes of reflection, the outcomes/information product of the analysis is seldom socialized. Conducting interviews in the classroom helped me to gather introspective data that refined my understanding of my learners' needs and struggles in their writing process. Furthermore, interviews were the means to achieve one of the objectives of the study which was to document the aspects of Community-based Learning that help students improve their written performance. These interviews were deliberately planned as semi-structured because they allow the researcher to "make some kind of comparison across ... participants' responses, but also to allow for individual diversity and flexibility" (Burns, 2010, p. 75). The interviews were conducted after students had completed the first cycle of writing which addressed the composition of paragraphs and at the end of the term after students had finished the second cycle of writing which addressed essays (see appendix E). As the group of participants was small, all the interviews were conducted individually. Interviews were codified as follows:

Table 2
Coding for Interview Transcription

Interview	TIN-PI (Transcription of Interview Number-Participant)
Transcriptions	e.g. TI01-BR, TI02-VP

4.2.8. Questionaries. Dörnyei recommends the use of questionnaires to collect demographic, behavioral and attitudinal data from participants (as cited in Burns, 2010, p. 81). Aiming at the collection of this kind of data, three questionnaires (see appendix F) were administered during the intervention. At the beginning of the term, one questionnaire was implemented to collect the factual information that helped to better describe the participants in the study in terms of background, expectations and habits regarding composition. The questionnaire also helped to establish learners' beliefs regarding their level of proficiency as well as their level of motivation at the beginning of the course. To trace whether these two last aspects improved or remained the same, another questionnaire was administered at the end of the term. These questionnaires had response scale and open-ended items that allowed students to better indicate how they felt about their level of motivation and proficiency at the beginning and end of the course. To facilitate the compilation of answers and the generation of statistics, the questionnaires were created with the Google forms tool, and they were shared with students online. One more questionnaire with scale and open-ended items was administered at the end of week five, once students had taken their first field trip as a group to map the community and once they had documented their observations of the issue using personal online logs with photos and short descriptions. The aim of this questionnaire was mainly to collect students' opinions on the degree of relevance that community mapping, observation logs and field trips had for their writing process. These instruments were codified as shown below:

Table 3
Coding for Questionnaires

Questionnaires	QN (Questionnaire Number) e.g. Q01, Q02

4.2.9. Assessment. Rubrics During my previous 3-year pedagogical practice in Academic Writing I, I had used a set of guidelines that took the shape of rubrics to evaluate students' work, monitor their learning and make them aware of the criteria used during the process. These rubrics (See appendix G), initially taken from Oshima & Hogue's Longman Academic Writing Series 4: Paragraphs to Essays, Fifth Edition , had been re-shaped and improved to make them more consistent with the course needs. In this respect, Knoch (2011) points out that the process of creating writing scales is usually intuitive which means that rubrics are often adaptations of other existing rubrics. For the didactic intervention, rating scales underwent new modifications (See appendix H), with more detailed descriptors for the assessment of paragraphs and essays, thereby facilitating the achievement of higher rater reliability and constituting a stronger basis to provide students with more sound feedback (Knoch, 2011). The rubrics used to assess outlines were not modified. It should be clarified that both old and new rubrics were designed as analytic scales as they provided "more diagnostic information about a writer's ability" (Knoch, 2011, p. 83). Based on what I have experienced in my pedagogical practice, the use of rubrics in the assessment of writing is vital, for it is reassuring, in the way that it helps learners perceive their work to be assessed with objectivity and their scores to be the product of meeting established standards rather than the product of satisfying their teacher's personal opinions and judgments; in language assessment this is

referred to as face validity (Brown, 2002, p. 26). In total, five kinds of rubrics were used in this study one for outlines, one for paragraphs and one per each type of essay. The table below showcases the way in which these instruments were codified.

Table 4
Coding for Rubrics

Rubrics for Paragraphs	RPN-PI (Rubric for Paragraph Number- Participant) e.g. P1-BR, P2-LQ
Rubrics for Outlines	RON-PI (Rubric for Outline Number- Participant) e.g. RO1-BR, RO2-LQ
Rubrics for Essays	RET-PI (Rubric for Essay Type- Participant Initials) e.g. RLDI-BR (Rubric for Logical Division of Ideas-Participant) RC&E-LQ (Rubric for Cause & Effect- Participant) RARG-SY (Rubric for Argumentative- Participant)

4.2.10. Observation journal. Burns (1999) suggests that observational note-making can be a useful way to document and analyze "classroom events, behaviors and reflections" (p.85). In this regard, keeping an observation journal helped me to document attendance, to verify to what extent the lesson planning during the course had or not been achieved, to document my reflections after the sessions and finally to keep a record of the modifications that the lesson plan underwent. This observation journal was created using the digital tool Google forms (see appendix I), which by the end of the course generated accurate statistics regarding the number of people who attended the course during the term and the percentage of lessons that went according to what had been planned. The observational journal was codified as follows:

Table 5
Coding for Observation Journal

Observation Journal	OJ-SN (Observation Journal-Date) e.g. OJ-Aug31

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Since this study required human participation, certain measures had to be taken in order to protect the integrity of every participant to whom the research project made oath of confidentiality. To comply with this, the study was regulated by statutory law 1581 issued by the Colombian Congress with which the parameters for the protection of personal data are defined. Also, this study abode by the regulations created by CEINCI UIS (Ethics and Scientific Research Committee) for research projects on social sciences GIN.07.

Accordingly, the three basic ethical principles for research on humans were followed. To meet the principle of respect for persons every participant in the study was treated as an autonomous agent; that is why voluntary informed consent was provided to whomever wanted to take part in the research (refer to appendix J); this means no one was forced to participate in the study, even when it was conducted in the course where the participants were enrolled in. Moreover, to meet the principle of beneficence participants were guaranteed they would suffer no harm as result of the study; on the contrary, they would benefit from it in the sense that the study always looked forward to helping them improve their writing skills and to providing them with more efficient strategies to overcome problems related with composition. No harm in this study also meant reassuring students that if they ever wanted to withdraw from the study, they would not be subjected to any kind of retaliation, especially in their course scores. Finally, to

meet the principle of justice, the participants of this study were reassured that their selection depended only on reasons related to the research question *What can be done to help Academic Writing I students build coherence in their written texts*? Not a single participant was selected on the ground of compromised position. Furthermore, every participant was treated equitably, which meant that the assessment of their written performance was fair and just and not liable to judgments on aspects including but not limited to race, beliefs, gender or political affiliation.

4.4. Pedagogical Intervention

As it was stated above in the participant description, the vast majority of the students who took part in this study had taken and failed Academic Writing I (AWI) the term previous to the new pedagogic intervention. This meant that, as their former teacher, I was familiar with the participants' writing skills and their level of proficiency product of the assessment that had been conducted the term before. However, to verify to what extent my diagnosis of students' problems in AWI correlated with their individual perceptions in terms of needs for the course, a needs assessment was conducted before designing and implementing the pedagogical intervention. For this purpose, students answered an online questionnaire (see appendix F) about their beliefs regarding their background and proficiency in AWI as well as their expectations for the course. The analysis of the information collected by means of this instrument paved the way for the curriculum design and the implementation of the didactic sequence.

4.4.1. Curriculum Design. Short & Burke (1991) regard curriculum as an organizational device that goes beyond the scope and sequence guides pre-established for a course by a textbook or the school. They state that the curriculum "is the orchestration of a set of

beliefs about learning, knowing, and social relationships" (p. 6). The curriculum design in this study had to be articulated with its main objective which was to find out what aspects of CBL helped students improve their written performance, and in the same vein, it had to hold to the idea that language learning is indeed a matter of social interaction; according to Zuengler & Miller (2006), learners are able to appropriate language by interacting in sociocultural activities that are meaningful because these help them to "gain control over their own mental activity" (p. 39). In this regard, it was vital for the AWI curriculum to be based on social interaction and to involve students as active participants in its construction. For this purpose, students were "involved as decision makers themselves through having real choices in the kinds of learning experiences in which they engage(d)" (Short & Burke, 1991, p. 5). Doing so did not mean that the competencies and contents set for the course by the Language Department in its syllabus (see appendix C) were going to be obliterated; on the contrary, developing the course curriculum in this way only proved that its scope was true to what students need in terms of knowledge to gain proficiency in formal writing. There was, however, a noticeable change in the sequence that the curriculum had previously conceived; this owed to the fact that all the activities and content planned for the course always derived from students' needs.

Below, the reader will find a detailed account of the organization and development of the curriculum and how it gave shape to my pedagogical intervention.

4.4.2. Didactic sequence. The pedagogical intervention was conducted in one academic term from August 6, 2018 to March 27, 2019. Due to a long national strike in favor of the defense of public higher education, the academic term would appear exceptionally long according to the above dates; nonetheless, the term actually took sixteen weeks as foreseen in

the academic calendar. These sixteen weeks were divided into three two-and-one hour sessions a week which generally took place at a computer laboratory where students had all the technological tools to create, share and store documents using the file storage service Google Drive. There were forty-eight sessions in total throughout the semester. During this period of time, community-based activities were intertwined with academic writing tasks in six cycles that overlapped and complemented each other; these were called Community Interaction Cycles (CI) and Academic Writing Development Cycles (AWD) respectively. The main objective of the Community Interaction Cycles was to engage students in a learning experience that provided them with the opportunity to understand their reality to later write about it; according to Freire & Faundez (2018), it is possible to read reality as if it were a text and, this process should be simultaneous to that of writing always based on inquiring and interpreting the world. To do so, Antonio Faundez (2018) states, intellectuals should depart from everyday actions, from the community and from themselves. This, he adds, will allow them to eliminate the affection for conceptual models that are alien to their reality but that are validated and perpetuated as superior by adhering to them and not exploring their own reality. On the other hand, the Academic Writing Development Cycles aimed at identifying problems in students' compositions to provide them with the necessary tools to improve their writing skills and achieve the proficiency required to build elaborate texts, as it is the case of essays. These series of cycles developed as shown in table 6. A comprehensive description of the cycles is found after table 6.

Cycle 1: Learning about Community Issues from Local Newspapers and Needs Assessment

This cycle developed in one week. From CI, the objective of this cycle was to situate students writing, so the first session students were informed that they would have the freedom to choose the topic they were going to write about during the whole course and that I would not assign it as I had done the previous term. To choose their topic, students read local newspapers that were handed out in class; each of them found a topic that dealt with an issue that they considered relevant because it affected their community. On the second session, each student presented their topic and a discussion was held to take a vote on the issue that, in their opinion, was most pressing to research as a group and to write about during the term. Among the topics students brought there was the fight for abortion in Argentina, which was discarded because the source discussed the problem in a community students did not belong to; there were also the felling of trees at a local public school to build a new road interchange, and the influx of Venezuelans in Bucaramanga. Eighty percent of the group voted for the migratory phenomenon against twenty percent who voted for the fight for abortion.

From AWD, the objective of this cycle was to identify students' needs by means of the needs assessment questionnaire (see appendix F) and to verify to what extent the teacher' diagnosis of the problem in AWI correlated with students' perceptions of their needs. Although, the analysis and results of the questionnaire will be later discussed in the data analysis section, it should be highlighted that sixty percent of the class perceived the achievement of coherence as their main issue when it came to writing in both English and Spanish, their native language (figure 2).

Figure 2. Needs Assessment survey

During this cycle the teacher created a Google Drive folder which contained bibliographic material that students could consult during the course. When students had access to the Drive link, they were asked to create personal folders in it to organize the information they would collect during the term and to upload their written assignments. These personal folders were also useful for the teacher to upload assessment rubrics for each student after submission of tasks.

Cycle 2: Community Mapping and Paragraphs

This cycle took three weeks. From CI, the main objective of this cycle was for students to understand community mapping. This was not problematic because four out of the five members of the class were already familiar with the concept, having worked with it the previous semester. For this mapping, students chose Venezuelan migrants as their target community. Bearing this in mind, each student started to look for traces and evidences of Venezuelan migration in Bucaramanga; the record of both traces and evidences was kept in the form of personal online logs that students updated and uploaded weekly to a personal folder on Google Drive. Every log

had a photograph that students had taken of groups of Venezuelans in different areas of the city, like their neighborhood or even places in their way home. These photos were accompanied by a short description in English of what had been observed in situ; this included time and place of the photo. Figure 3 is a sample from one of the students' logs (LQ-LOG04).

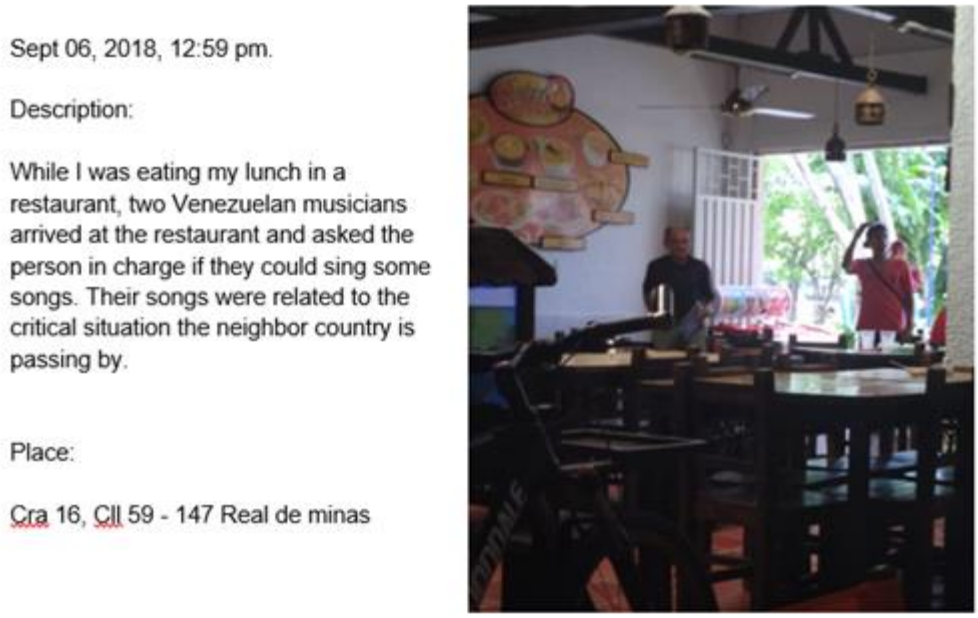


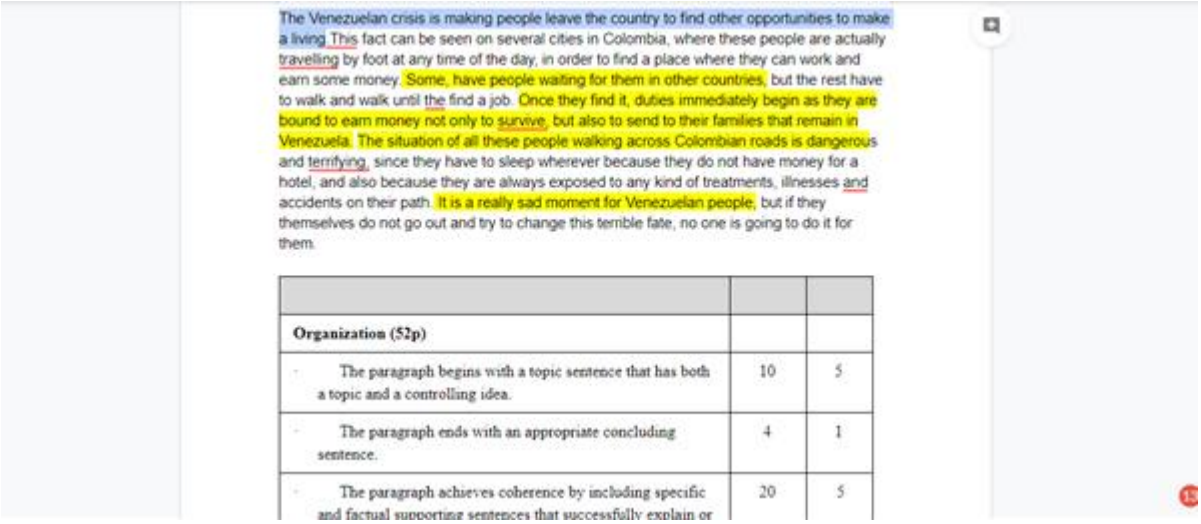
Figure 3. Entry 4 in LQ's log folder

In this cycle students and teacher also took their first field trip as a group to map the areas surrounding UIS in search of traces of the migratory phenomenon. Mobilization was not an issue given the size of the class; having such a small group facilitated the use of the teacher's car for the trips which helped the students to move faster and map more areas; in fact, three neighborhoods close to UIS were visited and mapped (figure 4). During the field trip, students focused on barber shops and beauty parlors in the nearby areas because those were the places where migrants typically worked. Although students were only asked to observe and take notes,

"they went on asking people about the influx of Venezuelans in the neighborhood" (OJ-Aug31). Students took pictures and notes of the answers that local and migrant interviewees gave them; these were later systematized by students in their personal log folders. Little by little, students created a record of their research in the community, which would be used as documentation for the supporting ideas in their compositions.

Figure 4. Photographs of students in their first field trip as a group to map the community

From AWD, the objective of this cycle was two-fold: it was necessary to identify the problems in students' compositions and make them aware of these issues to then reorganize the curriculum structure based on students' needs. To achieve this, students were asked to write a paragraph about Venezuelan migration taking into account the information they had found in the news articles discussed in session two.



The Venezuelan crisis is making people leave the country to find other opportunities to make a living. This fact can be seen on several cities in Colombia, where these people are actually travelling by foot at any time of the day, in order to find a place where they can work and earn some money. Some, have people waiting for them in other countries, but the rest have to walk and walk until the find a job. Once they find it, duties immediately begin as they are bound to earn money not only to survive, but also to send to their families that remain in Venezuela. The situation of all these people walking across Colombian roads is dangerous and terrifying, since they have to sleep wherever because they do not have money for a hotel, and also because they are always exposed to any kind of treatments, illnesses and accidents on their path. It is a really sad moment for Venezuelan people, but if they themselves do not go out and try to change this terrible fate, no one is going to do it for them.

Organization (52p)		
The paragraph begins with a topic sentence that has both a topic and a controlling idea.	10	5
The paragraph ends with an appropriate concluding sentence.	4	1
The paragraph achieves coherence by including specific and factual supporting sentences that successfully explain or	20	5

Figure 5. Photo of one of the students' paragraphs and assessment rubric

The analysis of the paragraphs by means of the assessment rubric showed that texts lacked organization, sentence structure, cohesive devices and mechanics; for instance, figure 5, taken from P1-SC, shows that the sentences highlighted in yellow did not successfully explain or support the topic sentence. Thus, taking these aspects into account, the curriculum was reshaped to address each of the problems by guiding students through the appropriation of writing principles such as paragraph structure, topic sentences, parallelism, supporting sentences and cohesive devices. A comprehensive list of the writing principles taught in every cycle can be observed in table 1, which summarizes the organization and development of the didactic sequence.

Cycle 3: UIS Funds of Knowledge and Paragraphs

This cycle lasted three weeks. From CI, the objective of this cycle was for students to access the funds of knowledge available at UIS to continue gathering information through the inquiry

of Venezuelan migration in the city so they could use it as support in their compositions. Using "broader and more diverse sociocultural resources, more abundant funds of knowledge" (Moll, 1994, p. 202) helps build intellectual significance. To attain this goal, students attended a talk given by a Venezuelan professor who had migrated to Bucaramanga years before 2013 when the economic implosion in Venezuela started (Borger, 2019). The talk was a brief historical account of Venezuela's origins from the Spanish conquest to the recent socioeconomic crisis which intertwined with the professor's family background, personal motives to leave the country and personal views on the political spectrum in Venezuela. As a result of this exercise students recorded and systematized the interview, which they later used to draw ideas for the outlining of their paragraphs. On the other hand, students watched a tutorial video to learn how to access bibliography on UIS data bases. After this, some of the students read scholarly articles they found pertinent for the research of their topic and created summaries which they uploaded to their personal Drive folders so that they could use them as support for their texts.

From AWD, the objectives of this cycle were the same as the ones in cycle one. This cycle started with students writing a second paragraph that described the problems that Venezuelan migrants faced in Bucaramanga. The information used for the second paragraph came from students' mappings, in other words, the observations and photographic records kept in their personal log folders. Again the analysis of the paragraphs using the assessment rubrics indicated the modifications that the curriculum had to undergo to help students tackle the problems in their compositions. Among the writing principles addressed in this cycle there were problem sentences (e.g. fragments, run-on sentences, comma splices, etc.), types of sentences (e.g. simple and compound), kinds of logical order and outlines for paragraphs. One important principle students realized about in this cycle was that of citation. A good deal of the information in

students' compositions also came from their personal research on the internet that mainly concerned news articles, yet students were not giving credit to the sources in their texts and risked the presence of plagiarism. Learning about direct and indirect citation provided students with the tool to solve this issue. Finally, students wrote their last paragraph, using all of the principles learned during the first seven weeks. The assessment of these compositions showed improvement in the aspects addressed during the cycle including coherence. Figure 6 is a sample of the second paragraph students wrote (P2-BR); the sentences that attest to students' observations have been highlighted.

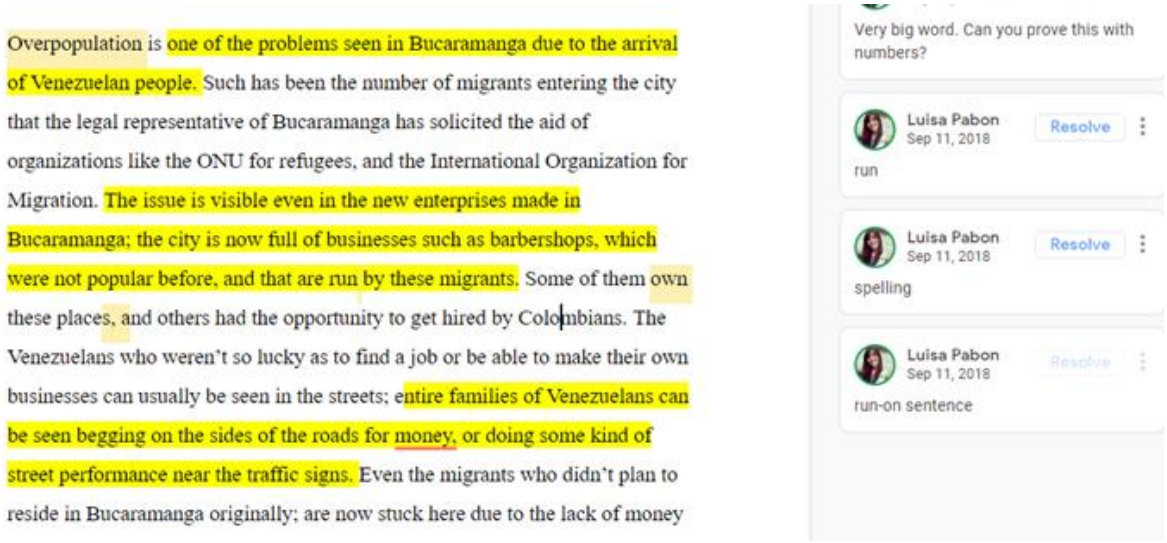


Figure 6. Photo of one of the students' paragraphs and teacher's written feedback

Cycle 4: City Funds of Knowledge and Essays

This cycle developed in three weeks. The objective of this cycle was for students to access the funds of knowledge offered by the city through the local authorities. To achieve this, students took a second field trip to collect official data on the influx of Venezuelans in Bucaramanga. The trip took four hours, which allotted students enough time to visit three local

authorities: Migración Colombia, SIJIN (Seccional de Investigación Criminal de Bucaramanga) and Secretaría de Salud (municipal department of health). At these places, students interviewed the directors of the departments and gathered information regarding official and recent statistics or quantifiable information that described the migratory phenomenon in the city. As students moved forward in their research of Venezuelan migration in Bucaramanga, they read more and more news articles to inform their writing; the record of these sources was kept in their personal folders, and although it was accessible to everyone in the group, the access to the sources was not efficient. For this reason, students were introduced to Wakelet, a free online platform that allows people to collaborate saving, organizing and sharing "content from across the web" ("Wakelet – Save, organize and share content", 2019). With this digital tool, the systematization of sources and data was expedited, but overall it benefited all the class in the way that it allowed everyone to get instant and visual access to the sources that other members of the group were using to support their compositions. Figure 7 showcases the collection of sources created by AWI students using Wakelet.

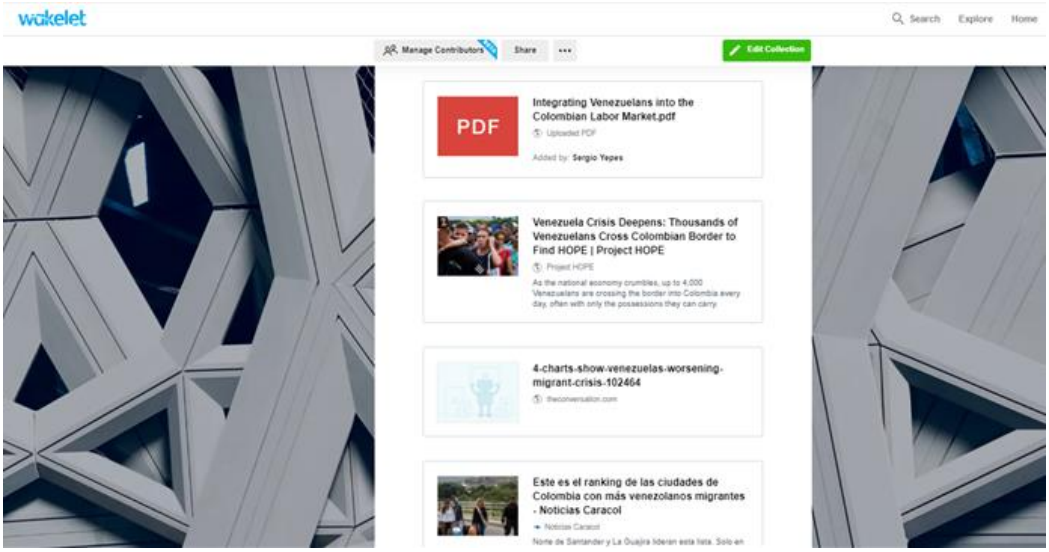


Figure 7. Collection created by students using the digital tool Wakelet

From AWD, the objective of this cycle was to provide students with the necessary tools to write an essay where they described the ways in which the migratory phenomenon was observable in their community. To attain this goal, students were guided through the structure of logical-division-of-ideas essays (LDI essays); some of the instruction concerning LDI essays was provided via tutorial videos the teacher created and shared when the national higher education strike started, the first week of October, 2018. Among the most important writing principles students learned during this cycle there were the structure of thesis statements, the structure of introductory, body and concluding paragraphs and the structure of essay outlines. After practicing these concepts, students were assigned writing an outline for this type of essay; however, the task overlapped with the beginning of the national strike. During the strike, four out of five students completed and submitted the outline for their LDI essay. The assessment of these documents showed that the organization of the outline obeyed to cause and effect structure rather than logical division of ideas; consequently, the teacher provided online written feedback and guided students to describe the migratory phenomenon rather than its causes and effects. Figure 8 shows proof of this analysis (O1-VP).

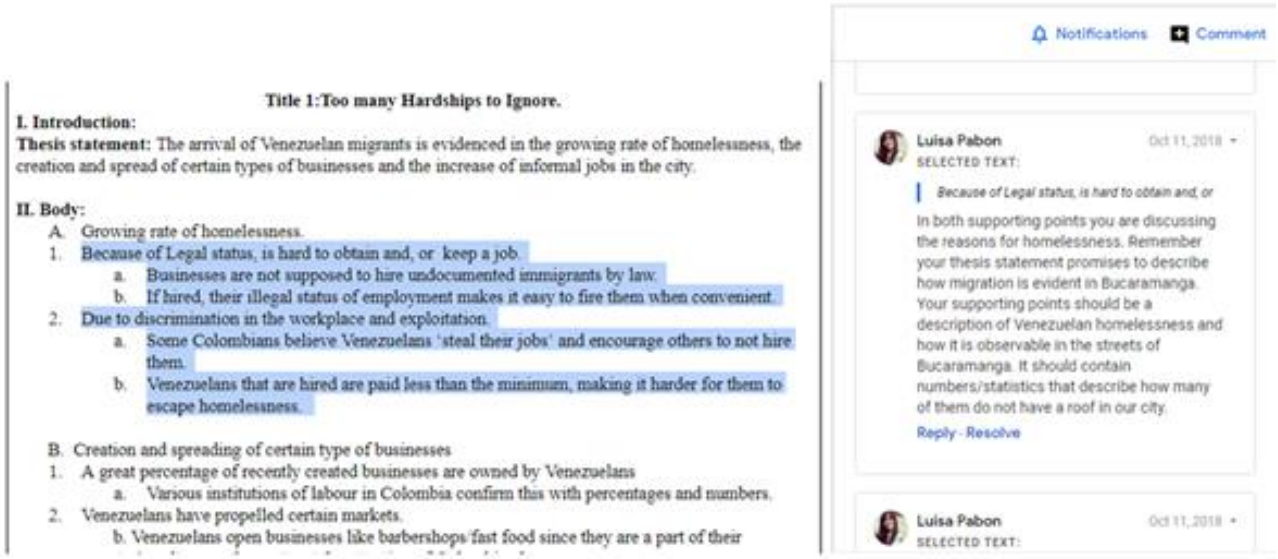


Figure 8. Photo of one of the students' outlines and written feedback

Once academic activities resumed in January, after a three-month strike, students started to work on their LDI essay draft. For two weeks, students wrote at home and in the classroom while they received one-on-one feedback and guidance to correct problems that mostly concerned the aspect of coherence. After this period of time and several editions, students submitted their first essay which was assessed and showed improvements in the connection of ideas.

Cycle 5: Doing Interdisciplinary Work and Essays

This cycle took four weeks. From CI, the cycle aimed at developing integrative learning by encouraging students to interact with UIS members that had studied the migratory from their disciplinary field. To achieve this objective, students interviewed two students from the Social Work program at UIS whose practicum developed in the midst of a community of Venezuelan migrants who had participated in a social assistance program run by a private institution in the

city and the local foundation *Entre Dos Tierras*. Additionally, students attended a talk given by a literature professor from the Spanish and Literature program who discussed the concept of *diasporas* and their origin. The professor also shared his knowledge on *Diasporas in Latin America* and their presence in literary works and musical pieces. All the information product of these exercises was recorded and systematized by students using the aforementioned digital tools, and it was also used in the last two written assignments of the course. Figure 9 is a sample from the second essay written by one of the participants (C&E-SY) which reflects ideas taken from one of the talks in this cycle.

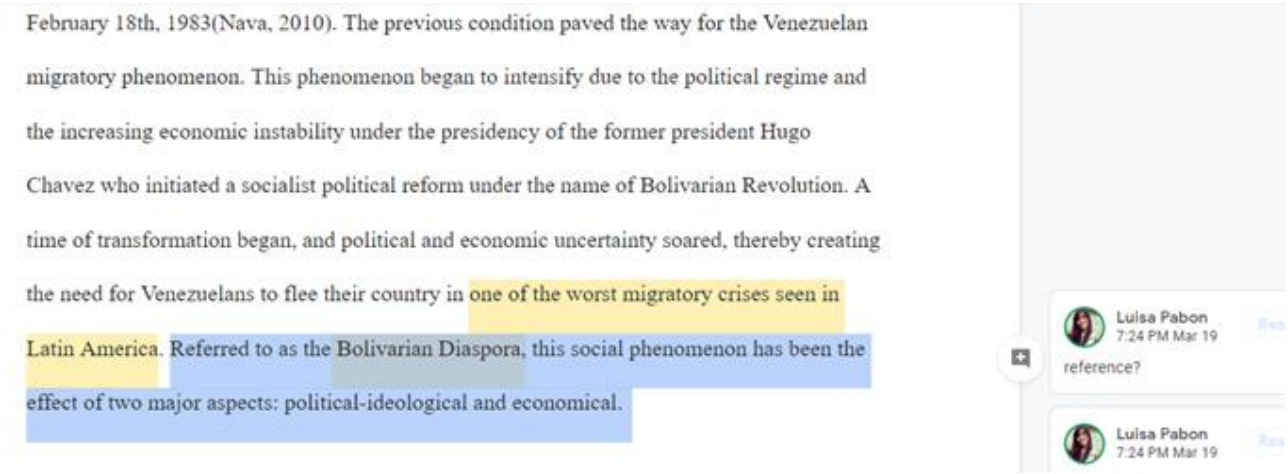


Figure 9. Photo of one of the students' essays and written feedback

From AWD, the purpose of the cycle was to provide students with the necessary tools to write an essay where they identified and described either the causes for or the effects of Venezuelan Migration in their community. To attain this goal, students were guided through the structure of cause and effect essays (C&E essays); this implied writing principles regarding collocations typical of this genre as well as block and chain organization. Once students had explored and practiced these concepts, they were to write and submit an outline for their C&E

essay. The assessment of C&E outlines showed improvement in the organization of text overall; still, some of the outlines continued to indicate that students struggled with coherence at some points. This excerpt taken from the observational journal highlights this issue:

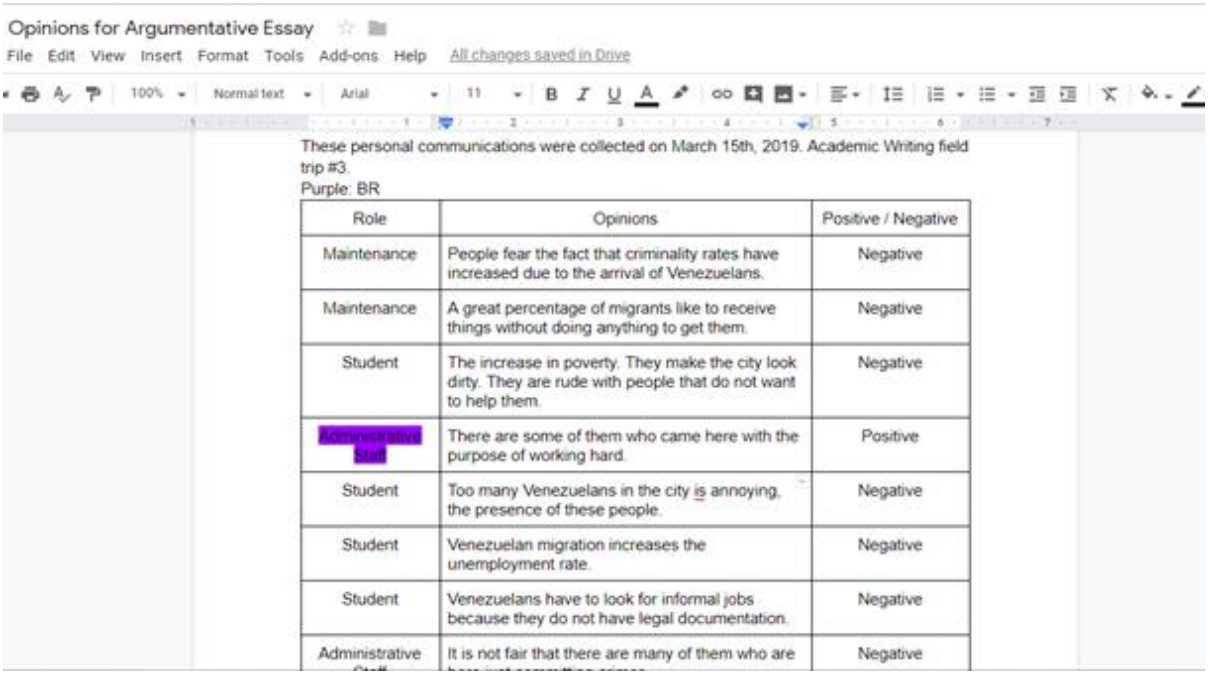
> LQ is advancing slowly. He seems not to be able to get out of the incoherent loop in his outline. I have provided feedback regarding how his supporting points need to back up his topic sentences, but every time I ask him what the problem is between topic sentence and supporting sentences his answer is 'I don't know'. This is repetitive, and I'm not sure whether the problem is he actually does not know or whether he is not reading his sentences carefully enough. (OJ-Mar06)

After analyzing and assessing, results were shared with students who worked in class on how to connect their ideas not to go off the topic while the teacher supervised and provided feedback on the changes proposed by students. After this, students worked on their drafts at home and in class constantly receiving feedback on their writing. After submission and evaluation of their C&E essay, students were made aware that their writing performance was improving, and that most of them were little by little tackling issues with coherence.

Cycle 6: Exploring the Academic Community Stand and Essays

This cycle lasted the final two weeks of the term. This cycle aimed at students developing a critical stand regarding the phenomenon they had been researching throughout the academic term. Freire (2011, p. 55) explains that a critical stand implies that individuals understand their position in their context; it also implies their involvement and integration with reality as well as

their objective representation of it. Bearing this in mind, students proposed a survey to collect UIS members' opinions about the influx of Venezuelans in the city which they would compare and contrast with their own stand vis-à-vis that of their community. To do this, students went on their last field trip. This took two sessions and consisted in students interviewing different members of their academic community regarding the phenomenon. Students decided that to have a more consistent idea about UIS members' stand, it was necessary to interview people who belonged to the different groups or categories that the community is divided into; as a result, students identified six groups (students, professors, administrative staff, security team, cleaning ladies and maintenance staff). For this field trip, the group divided in pairs, but as they were an odd number the teacher paired with one of the students. The group split and covered different areas of campus, asking UIS members *What is your opinion about the presence of Venezuelan migrants in Bucaramanga?* All the answers were recorded and transcribed in one single document that they created on their Google Drive course folder. The collected opinions were categorized as positive or negative attitudes concerning the migratory phenomenon, and they would later be used in students' final essay as ideas that they wanted to rebut. Figure 10 is a snapshot of the document where students systematized the collected data.



Opinions for Argumentative Essay

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These personal communications were collected on March 15th, 2019. Academic Writing field trip #3.
Purple: BR

Role	Opinions	Positive / Negative
Maintenance	People fear the fact that criminality rates have increased due to the arrival of Venezuelans.	Negative
Maintenance	A great percentage of migrants like to receive things without doing anything to get them.	Negative
Student	The increase in poverty. They make the city look dirty. They are rude with people that do not want to help them.	Negative
Administrative Staff	There are some of them who came here with the purpose of working hard.	Positive
Student	Too many Venezuelans in the city is annoying, the presence of these people.	Negative
Student	Venezuelan migration increases the unemployment rate.	Negative
Student	Venezuelans have to look for informal jobs because they do not have legal documentation.	Negative
Administrative	It is not fair that there are many of them who are	Negative

Figure 10. List of personal communications students gathered in their last field trip

From AWD, the objective of this cycle was to provide students with the necessary tools to write an essay where they took a stand about Venezuelan migration in their community. To attain this goal, students were guided through the structure of argumentative essays (ARG essays); this included the two-fold nature of ARG essay thesis statements which includes two opinions, one coming from opponents (in this case UIS members' collected opinions) and one proposing the writer's stand (in this case AWI students' individual and personal stand). As practice, students had to revise complex sentences as well as the concept of opposing arguments versus rebuttals. After this, students wrote and submitted an outline for their ARG essay where their position in relation with the influx of Venezuelans was evident. The assessment of these documents showed major improvements in organization and coherence, which was communicated to students in class via one-on-one conferences as usual. Once feedback was

shared, students started to write their ARG essay draft, also receiving guidance in class whenever necessary. Finally, students submitted their final essay whose assessment showed major improvements in students' writing performance.

In brief, these six cycles summarize the way in which the pedagogic intervention developed. Still, it must be highlighted that, due to the national strike, the didactic sequence was interrupted at the beginning of week nine and that the time gap to resume academic activities lasted nearly four months; this, I reckon, drove me under a great deal of strain and made me fear that the objectives of the intervention were not going to be attained, especially because I was unaware that the academic calendar was to be modified, in my experience, in an unprecedented way. However, the pertinent modifications to the academic calendar allotted students and teacher enough time to complete all the cycles congruously.

4.5. Data Analysis and Findings

Obeying to the nature of action research (Burns, 1999, p. 153), this section moves away "from the 'action' components of the cycle" to focus on the systematic observation and reflection upon the data collected during the intervention that helped to answer the research questions. Thus, this section gives account of the analysis resulting from the collection of data product of the didactic intervention carried in the UIS undergraduate program Licenciatura en Inglés, with a group of five Academic Writing I students during the second term 2018. As it was mentioned in the previous sections, this study used five types of instruments to obtain data. The instruments served to collect data corresponding to both students' writing performance and students' metacognition with respect to their process in Academic Writing I (AWI). Regarding students' writing performance, the instruments that yielded data were classroom documents

among which there were three paragraphs, three outlines, three types of essays and their corresponding assessment rubrics as well as some of the entries coming from my observation journal. As stated before, soft copies of compositions and observation journals started to be collected as early as week one of the academic term. On the other hand, it was the interviews and questionnaires which generated data for the analysis of students' metacognition about their process in AWI. To respond to interviews, students were given the chance to use their native language (Spanish) because the questions required an introspective look at their learning process, which demands clear thinking to express their ideas and feelings and which could be better achieved by some students in their first language (L1). In research "conducted by Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001), the group reported that they almost always had more ideas and a greater amount of clear thinking in L1" (as cited in Pan, Yi-chun, & Pan, Yi-ching, 2010, p. 90). Furthermore, three questionnaires were administered at the beginning, middle and end of the course concerning a needs assessment survey, a strategy effectiveness survey and a self-assessment survey, correspondingly.

According to Burns (1999), the first two steps in the process of data analysis is assembling and coding the data. To attain this goal, the organization of all the data coming from the instruments was structured as follows. All the instruments were codified and divided into folders that were stored on Google Drive, the online free storage service provided by Google. First, as all three questionnaires had been designed using the tool Google Forms, statistics regarding the scale-response items in the surveys were instantly generated and saved to the cloud which made their analysis easier. Also, the tool grouped open-ended answers by questions facilitating the process of information classification and interpretation for the researcher. Second, the observation journal was also designed as a Google Form and it had two sections: attendance to

and reflections about the sessions; however, once the didactic sequence had been implemented, only the notes regarding modifications of the lessons and reflections about them were printed as PDF documents, classified by dates and stored in folders labeled with month and year. This organization was very useful for the analysis and interpretation of data given that the intervention developed from the second half of 2018 to the first trimester of 2019. Third, interview questionnaires were also codified and stored in the cloud; interview one had two questions, and interview two had six. All questions dealt with metacognition in AWI, and the answers given by students were transcribed and stored as eight individual word documents in the cloud to be later analyzed and interpreted according to the objectives of the study. Finally, forty-two compositions were codified into three categories (paragraphs, outlines and essays) and also stored in the cloud; additionally, forty-two rubrics were codified, stored and used to examine compositions in respect to the second specific objective of the study.

The analytic process had a two-fold development. First, the analytic process adjusted to open coding "related to conceptual categories" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 214); here categories derived from the specific objectives of the study and the theoretical framework. Second, data analysis used axial coding that allowed for the grouping of data according to the "categories that reflected commonalities" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 214). The table below shows the product of both codings which gave birth to three main categories; findings for each of these categories are described in detail in the next section.

	Objective	A priori Categories	Emergent Categories	Subcategories
Specific	Describe students' explanations on what hinders or fosters the achievement of coherence in their written texts	Hindrances	Procedural	Absence of Proof Reading
			Facultative	Lack of Concentration
		Aids	Procedural	Formal Writing Principles
			Facultative	Meaningful Community Experience
	Describe how students' compositions are situated at the core of community discourses.	Representations of the world	The material world	World Cognition
			The mental world	Individual beliefs
			The social world	Social Cognition
	Verify to what extent textual coherence improves in the written texts of Academic Writing I students.	Improvements	Global Coherence	Semantic Macrostructures
			Local Coherence	Semantic Relations between Propositions

Figure 11. Categories and Subcategories

4.5.1. Hindrances and Aids to Achieve Coherence. The analysis in this study started from the moment participants answered their needs assessment survey. The needs assessment results indicated that there were two main issues students were struggling with and that needed to be addressed. The first one correlated with the problem identified by the researcher-practitioner; according to the survey, 60% of the group perceived that the most difficult aspect about writing was that of coherence. These results can be verified in the graph below (figure 11).

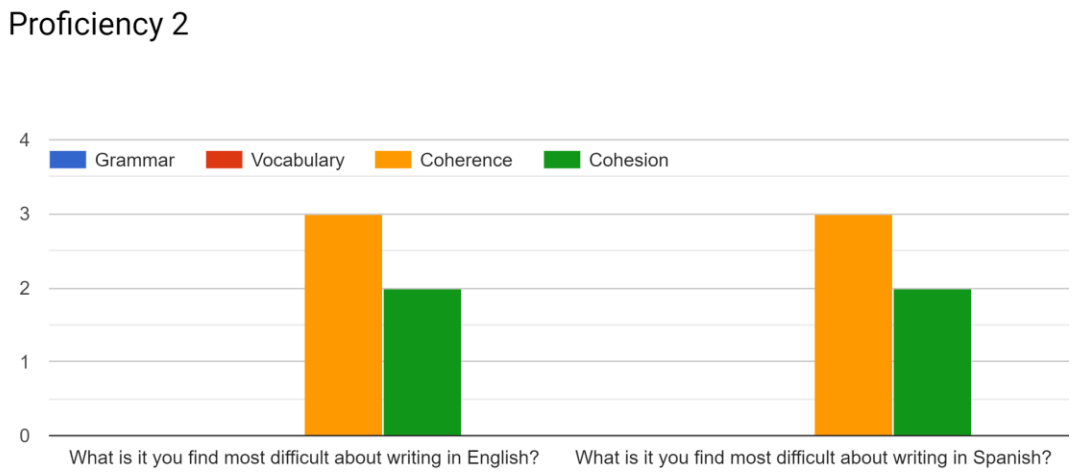

Figure 12. Taken from needs analysis survey

Because the teacher and students' perception did not provide enough evidence to validate the problem, it was necessary to trace this problem in a written product. That is why students were asked to write the first paragraph for the course at the end of week one. The analysis of the compositions by means of the assessment rubric corroborated the issue. As it can be observed in the below snapshots of their rubrics, students mainly struggled with the use of supporting sentences that successfully explained or proved the topic sentence; this probably had to do with students not being able to recall the semantic macrostructure they had planned for their text, which is also evident in the rubric that indicates students often went off the topic to discuss ideas different from the main one.

Organization (52p)		
· The paragraph begins with a topic sentence that has both a topic and a controlling idea.	10	7
· The paragraph ends with an appropriate concluding sentence.	4	4
· The paragraph achieves coherence by including specific and factual supporting sentences that successfully explain or prove the topic sentence, including at least one example.	20	13
· The paragraph achieves coherence by focusing and discussing one main idea.	5	3
· Ideas are arranged in logical order, which enhances coherence	3	2
· The paragraph achieves coherence by establishing a smooth sequence of ideas that makes the writer's points easy to follow.	6	4

Figure 13. Taken from RP1-SY

· The paragraph begins with a topic sentence that has both a topic and a controlling idea.	10	10
· The paragraph ends with an appropriate concluding sentence.	4	1
· The paragraph achieves coherence by including specific and factual supporting sentences that successfully explain or prove the topic sentence, including at least one example.	20	10
· The paragraph achieves coherence by focusing on and discussing one main idea.	5	3
· Ideas are arranged in logical order, which enhances coherence	3	2
· The paragraph achieves coherence by establishing a smooth sequence of ideas that makes the writer's points easy to follow	6	3

Figure 14. Taken from RP1-BR

Now, this was an aspect that students repeatedly struggled with during the whole course; assessment rubrics for different tasks, the online feedback students received on their compositions and the reflections coming from the observation journal indicate that attaining

coherence was indeed challenging for students. For example, excerpts from the reflections record that one-on-one feedback sessions generally focused on giving guidance to students on how to make their supporting sentences back up the topic sentence in their texts:

> We worked on the corrections proposed by VP for BR's paragraph. We gave it a look and, together, checked topic sentence and supporting sentences. VP's supporting sentences still did not support BR's topic sentence ... I pointed out that most of them had a similar problem. (OJ-Sept14).

> During the first hour, I worked with LQ while the others continued correcting their drafts. LQ's draft exhibits a great deal of coherence issues, mainly off-topic sentences, ideas that do not connect with his topic sentences or thesis statement. (OJ-Feb04)

> Students almost completed their outlines; some of them (SC and LQ) had trouble with the supporting points that backed up their topic sentences. After feedback, they were able to see where the problem was and worked on corrections for the rest of the class. (OJ-Mar01)

Another evidence comes from the analysis of the assessment rubrics for the cycle of essays which shows that even after having gone through revision and one-on-one feedback, 40% of the group were still in between 50% to 75% of the total score for the criteria that evaluated the property of coherence in their compositions (for details refer to 10.3). With these findings, it is not surprising that 80% of the group still perceived coherence as the most difficult aspect to

attain when writing in English at the end of the course, as it was manifested in the self-assessment survey they took (figure 14).

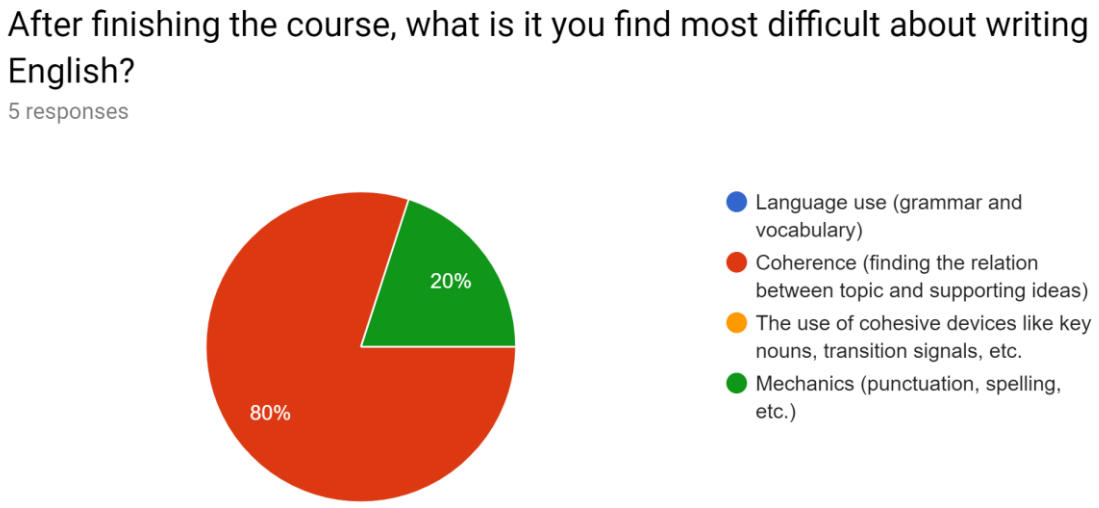

Figure 15. Taken from self-assessment survey

However, to attempt to help students overcome this obstacle, it was necessary to understand what was preventing them from maintaining the semantic macrostructures they had proposed for their compositions. To do so, it was imperative to not only rely on the teacher's presuppositions and observations but to encourage students to reflect about their learning process and to identify the possible aspects they felt were hindering or helping them to achieve coherence; this idea is supported by Freire & Faundez (2018) who state that a person participating in a permanent learning process has to be a great self-inquirer. In this respect, the analysis of the interviews as well as some of the annotations in the observation journal generated two a priori categories: *Hindrances* and *Aids*; the interpretation of the collected data indicated that the elements that either helped students to achieve coherence or that prevented them to do so could be grouped

into two emergent categories that had to do with *procedural* or *facultative* characteristics of the process. Procedural characteristics would entail the steps that students take in the writing process, for example writing an outline or putting a writing principle into practice; on the other hand, facultative characteristics would consider those situational or contextual characteristics that would enable students to write, for example talking to people knowledgeable in the topic. The analysis and interpretation of data coming from the first and last interviews revealed that 60% of the participants felt that the procedural origin of hindrances to achieve coherence had to do with absence of proofreading. Proofreading is necessary to achieve proficiency as a writer; according to Royal (2004, p.), "Most proficient writers take at least three drafts to finish short writing works." In fact, Kane (2000, p. 34) states "as a rule, the more you draft, the better the result." But drafting requires revision, and revision requires rereading what has been previously written. From the analysis of interview, it could be drawn that students were not following these procedural steps. At the end of the cycle of paragraphs, students acknowledged their disregard for proofreading. Comments similar to " in my case I just write it and I don't really let's say review it umm or take a look" (TI1-SC) were used by other two participants in the interview when answering to the question *What do you think prevents you from identifying that some ideas in your text do not support your topic sentence*? And some of the recollections from the observation journal would indicate that the teacher felt similarly about this issue:

> LQ is advancing slowly, he seems not to be able to get out of the incoherent loop in his outline. I have provided feedback regarding how his supporting points need to back up his topic sentences, but every time I ask him what the problem is between topic sentence and supporting sentences his answer is 'I don't know'. This is repetitive, I'm not sure whether

> the problem is he actually does not know or if he is not reading his sentences carefully enough. (OJ-Mar06)

On the other hand, the interpretation of data suggests that students perceived that hindrances to attain coherence also had a facultative origin. Four out of five participants mentioned that what was preventing them from identifying that they were going off the topic was their lack of concentration:

> Yo diría que porque siempre vivo, no sé, distraído, entonces siento que pongo pues es lo que es y ya. (TI1-LQ)

> Yeah, to be honest, I think it has to do with this. Sometimes I just don't find the concentration to do this because I am really tired. (TI1-SC)

Regarding the aspects that students perceived as helpful to achieve progress in terms of coherence, it was also found that factors were procedural and facultative. The analysis of both interviews indicated that 100% of the group credited their improvements to their understanding of formal writing principles; as formal writing principles are a series of steps that should be followed to attain an objective, these were identified as the procedural factor. In this respect, some attributed their progress to outlining and some others to specific rules regarding the structure of writing; the annotations in the observation journal would also suggest that the more students outlined, the more effectively they connected their main ideas to the supporting ideas. These findings are ratified by the comments below.

> I think something that has helped me to go again into the path of the cohesion and coherence is to try to go to the outline and to pay attention to the information that we have gathered so that I actually can hmm observe whether I'm in the topic or if I am off topic. (TI1-SY)

> Pues, eh sí, básicamente entonces eh entre más como específicas se volvían las reglas podía entender un poco más qué es lo que, pues qué es lo que se estaba requiriendo que yo escribiera. (TI2-VP)

> I was taken aback by BR's work, she actually brought a very coherent outline, with full sentences and not only topics. I told her I was very proud of her and her work. (OJ-Mar01)

As for facultative aspects that enhanced the achievement of coherence, the data coming from interviews and from the strategy effectiveness survey confirm that retrieving a semantic macrostructure from a meaningful community experience definitely potentiates the learners' ability to build semantic relations. Freire & Faundez (2018) argue that true science is that one that departs from what is concrete, in other words reality, and goes back to the concrete through the mediation of the concept. In this respect, students commented:

> Keeping record of other people experiences has proved to be useful when trying to make a coherent text from loose ideas. (Q02-VP)

En este semestre como que todos nos sentamos, elegimos el tema y además de que el tema que elegimos sobre los venezolanos y la migración venezolana está bastante, o sea hay mucho tema de que hablar en estos momentos por lo que se ve tanto, entonces se me hizo como o sea bastante relevante porque lo vemos en la comunidad todo el tiempo, o sea todos los días en la calle uno ve un venezolano en un puente en un semáforo, por eso se me hizo bastante relevante y pues la escritura se me hizo mucho más fácil. (TI2-BR)

4.5.2. Representation of the World in Students' Compositions. The second issue reported by the needs assessment students took at the beginning of the term had to do with their difficulty to come up with ideas to write about. This might be connected to what Freire & Faundez (2018) call the pedagogy of the answer; in this kind of approach, learners get used to prefabricated answers found in textbooks which annihilate creativity, the ability to invent and reinvent and the advancement of knowledge. Findings suggest that 60% of the group perceived the conception of ideas to write about as a hard task, as shown in figure 15.

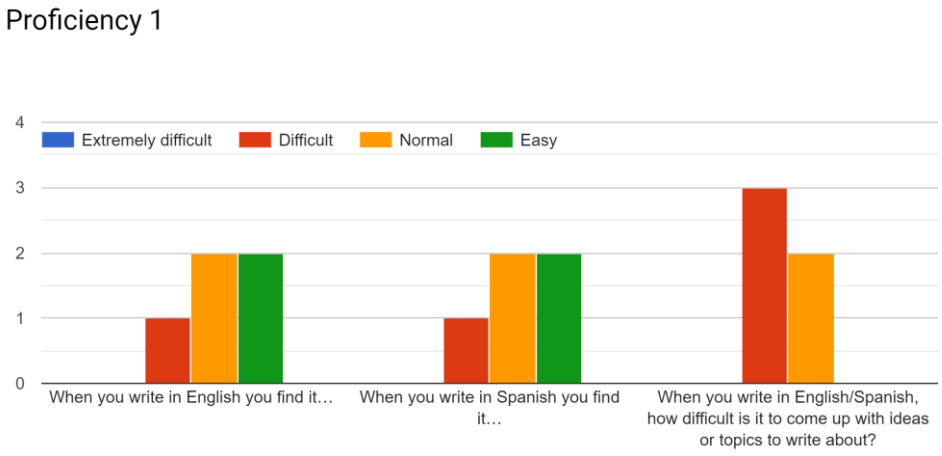

Figure 16. Needs assessment survey

Blumer (1969, p. 4) states that “the meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person;” bearing this in mind, it was critical to offer students a learning environment that facilitated the formation of meaning through social interaction, a learning environment that viewed “meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (p.4). Now, people represent these meanings through discourse; “we read and write only within a Discourse” (as cited in Kapp & Bangeni, 2005, p. 112), so students in this course had to be guided to embrace the process of writing in a structured way that did not neglect its very nature, that nature that tells us discourse represents “aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the ‘mental world’ of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world” (Fairclough, 2003, p.124).

Attempting to meet these principles, the didactic sequence was conceived in a way that allowed students to reach to those representations of the world from start to finish of the course; that is why the second a priori category product of this analysis was named *Representations of the World*. During the didactic intervention, students chose their writing topic from local newspapers, collected information through the observations and mapping of their community, attended talks with community members who were knowledgeable in the topic, and interviewed community members to collect insights on the phenomenon they were researching. This data collection process intertwined with their writing process as all students’ compositions were in one way or another connected with the information resulting from these activities. The analysis of the way in which writing developed in the course showed that this exercise encompassed the

three aspects of the world mentioned by Fairclough (2003) in his description of discourse: *the material world*, *the mental world* and the *social world*; these became the emergent categories through which data coming from students' written texts were organized.

The first emergent category came about from the analysis of students' compositions which showed that discourse does depart from descriptions of *the material world*. Fairclough (2003) states that discourse represents the world as it is or as individuals perceive it to be. This became apparent in the data coming from at least four of the instruments used in the study. For example, the excerpts below taken from students' paragraph represent their cognition of the material world; all of them described aspects that were observable in students' community and that became evident to them as they did the community mapping and started to keep their observation logs.

> The issue is visible even in the new enterprises made in Bucaramanga; the city is now full of businesses such as barbershops, which were not popular before, and that are run by these migrants. (P2-BR)

> In Bucaramanga, Venezuelan migrants struggle with sanitation. This issue is mainly reflected in two specific places of the city which are Parque del agua and Megamall. First of all, many of these migrants are found in Parque del agua suffering health problems. As an example, Venezuelan women go to Megamall restrooms to clean their hair in the washstands. (P2-SC)

> The influx of Venezuelan migrants has caused tensions between the migrants and the locals due to the displacement of Colombian workers, the insecurity levels, the minor cultural differences and the mediatic influence. (P3-VP)

> Ergo, Venezuelan migrants who take a regular job displace Colombian workers who would not accept less than the actual minimum wage in Colombia, which ranges from $700.000 to $800.000. (P3-SY)

These texts recall actual events developing in the city like Venezuelan migrants experiencing trouble with sanitation or Venezuelans displacing Colombian workers; also, the texts mention objects from the material world like the washstands at the restrooms of a shopping mall; finally, places in which the material world is divided also stand out in the excerpts like the case of Parque del Agua, Megamall and barbershops.

Another instrument that showed how students' written discourse was situated in the material world was essays. All of the Logical Division of Ideas essays submitted by the class showed traces of what Fairclough (2003) describes as "the processes, relations and structures of the material world," and, thus, of students' world cognition. This can be verified in the excerpts below when students mention the growth of homelessness and the spread of businesses in the city; these two indicate students' awareness of the need for housing or shelter as a natural characteristic of communities and the awareness of society being built on economic systems.

> Secondly, Venezuelan migration is observable in the growth of homelessness in Bucaramanga. Venezuelans are living under bridges or in the streets; during a field trip led

by UIS Academic Writing students around neighborhoods in the city last August, it was possible to spot how homelessness is spreading. For instance, migrants decided to assemble tents in Parque del Agua and to stay there until they were evacuated. (LDI-BR)

Another visible instance of migration in Bucaramanga would be the creation and spread of businesses managed by Venezuelans. Indeed, one can tell when a certain business is run by Venezuelans before entering depending on the nature of the services or the products being offered. Nowadays, for example, it is not strange to find barber shops in almost every block in Bucaramanga and this is no doubt influenced by the Venezuelan presence in the market ("El negocio de los venezolanos en Bucaramanga", 2017). (LDI-VP)

Parks and traffic lights are also a place in which homelessness is revealed through the proliferation of migrants. As part of a personal journal (SY PERSONAL LOG 3) a taxi driver was interviewed about the current situation seen in traffic lights; he affirmed that the current situation is rather complex due to Venezuelan migration. (LDI-SY)

Data coming from interviews and questionnaires demonstrates that students' writing process is enhanced when they write from the knowledge they have "about what they can see around them" (as cited in Hyland, 2009, p. 45). Also, data confirms Rincon & Clavijo-Olarte's (2016, p. 70) postulate that by "including students' context in their school programs, their learning practices become more meaningful." In their comments, students mention how going on field trips, first, facilitated their process of writing in the way that they were a tool to confirm or

transform assumptions they made about Venezuelan migration and, second, provided them with a great deal of information that they could use as support in their compositions.

> Seeing everything made everything easier, because it was not my imagination trying to say how bad or good was the situation of these migrants. (Q2-BR)

> Going on a field trip was helpful because we could live the hard reality that is around us, also look for real information about our topic. (Q2-LQ)

> OK, primero debo decir que en cuanto a los field trips siento que tuvimos la posibilidad de poder tener la información de cerca de una fuente confiable, de una fuente que sabíamos era confiable, que sabía que nos iba a servir para el tema del cual estábamos escribiendo, eh porque teníamos información pero esa información en realidad eran presunciones y era pues ideas que estaban vagas pero con los field trips tuvimos la posibilidad de poder ver qué era lo que si era de verdad la información que nos servía, que era confiable y que era real era tácita y por otro lado pues la información que realmente no nos servía. (TI2-SY)

> En mi caso fue muy relevante y se me hizo más fácil escribir el ensayo que lo que me pasó el semestre pasado que fue un tema que pues no sé, como que llegué a un punto en el que no le encontré el por qué escribir sobre eso, entonces en este semestre como que todos nos sentamos, elegimos el tema y además de que el tema que elegimos sobre los venezolanos y la migración venezolana está bastante, o sea hay mucho tema de que hablar en estos momentos por lo que se ve tanto, entonces se me hizo como o sea bastante relevante

> porque lo vemos en la comunidad todo el tiempo, o sea todos los días en la calle uno ve un venezolano en un puente en un semáforo, por eso se me hizo bastante relevante y pues la escritura se me hizo mucho más fácil. (TI2-BR)

The second emergent category developed from the idea that representations of the world also come from *the mental world*; this is what Fairclough (2003, p. 124) refers to as "thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth." Van Dijk (1993) calls these representations *Models*; they embody personal opinions and experiences but also "instantiations of social knowledge and attitudes" (p. 111), and they are a "crucial cognitive interface" that mediates the personal and social dimensions that discourse has. The analysis of students' argumentative essays and observation journal would stand as an instance of how these models mediate between discourse dimensions in the sense that they describe individual opinions that either juxtapose or support those of other actors with regard to what Van Dijk (1993) calls *particular episodes.* For example, the thesis statements that each student wrote for their argumentative essays resulted from the exercise of interviewing community members on their personal opinions about the presence of Venezuelans in Bucaramanga - this would be the episode in question; after carefully analyzing the list of opinions they collected, each student chose one of those ideas to rebut not only in their thesis statements but in the construction of all their arguments along the essay. This exercise is an example of how models are activated and work as a cognitive interface to allow communication. SY's thesis statement, for instance, acknowledges the existence of a group-based attitude when he mentions UIS members' position with regard to aiding Venezuelan migrants, but at the same time, his thesis statement represents his personal opinion of how people in Colombia need to help themselves before they can aid others (this is maintained throughout all the arguments in his

essay); in this sense, there are two models one social and one individual mediating in the creation of discourse. The other four thesis statements work in the same way.

> Although some people claim that Venezuelans' presence can bring benefits to the country, it is observable how they are not contributing to the prosperity of Colombia. (ARG-BR)

> Although it is evident that Venezuelans are going through the worst dictatorship of the decade, the Colombian government is taking advantage of their situation to generate a smoke screen for important Colombian issues. (ARG-LQ)

> Although some Venezuelans have committed crimes and taken resources illegally or have resorted to begging expecting Colombians to solve their current situation, there is proof that many of them have actually found ways to survive honestly and to contribute to the Colombian labor force. (ARG-SC)

> Even though some community members from Universidad Industrial de Santander think Venezuelans should receive all of our help, we should first focus on improving our current situation. (ARG-SY)

> Although the arrival of Venezuelans may present a harder situation regarding employment for Colombians, the anger geared towards immigrants 'stealing jobs' is nothing but reactionary. (ARG-VP)

Finally, the third category emerged from Fairclough's (2003) idea that representations of the world also derive from *the social world*; this is called social cognition by Van Dijk (1993). He explains that social cognition consists of "socially shared mental strategies and representations that monitor the production and interpretation of discourse" (p. 108); these representations comprise not only knowledge but also attitudes and ideologies that are shared by members of a group. The analysis of data found the presence of group-based social representations in students' compositions. These had recorded the attitudes of locals towards Venezuelan migrants, the knowledge shared by locals on the events that had triggered the influx of Venezuelans in their city and the sociopolitical ideologies there were in the country concerning the phenomenon. The ideas found in students' compositions indicated that the more students interacted with their community, the more aware they became about social byproducts like xenophobia or commiseration towards immigrants that result from shared beliefs in the community which are the group-based representations found in the following excerpts.

> The expectations that Bumangueses have about the migratory phenomenon usually create distance between the two populations, generating a social problem on a larger scale such as xenophobia. This social problem is caused because the government has not adopted policies that integrate the massive migration of Venezuelans who tend to be stigmatized by acts caused by only a few. The discriminatory facts range from just making fun of their accents to denying them work or even a place to sleep. (C&E-SY)

> Second, due to the insecurity that Venezuelan migrants have caused in the cities of Colombia, many locals are looking at them with contempt; also, Colombians attack

> Venezuelans saying that migrants are thieves, murderers, and usurpers of the public space; for example, last January hooded people threw Molotov bombs in front of a group of Venezuelan migrants that were living in a coliseum in the city of Cucuta. (P3-LQ)

4.5.3. Improvements in Textual Coherence. The last a priori category resulted from the need to verify the extent to which coherence, the aspect identified as problematic by both teacher and students, improved after having implemented a didactic intervention based on community based learning. Therefore, this category received the name of improvements, and it had to be analyzed from the theoretical principles that support this study regarding the aspect of coherence, namely Van Dijk's postulates of global and local coherence; these two, in turn, arose as the emergent categories for the last part of the analysis. The data to be analyzed at this stage came from the essays written in cycles 4 to 6 of the didactic sequence. The decision to only take these documents into account had to do with the fact that, in cycles 1 to 3, students were still learning to tackle problems with sentence structure (e.g. sentence fragments, run-on sentences, etc.) which would entail negative impact at the level of local coherence even if the semantic macrostructure was kept all along the text. These issues had to be addressed to make sure that the analysis would be done on texts that were written by people who had received formal instruction on the principles of writing, and who knew how to tackle structure-related problems. Consequently, only essays and their corresponding assessment rubrics (see appendix G) yielded the data for this part of the analysis.

Before going into details regarding the findings about improvements in students' textual coherence, it is necessary to explain the structure of the assessment rubrics used in the intervention and the procedural or functional details of their use. Apropos structure, assessment

rubrics consisted of five sections *format, mechanics, content, organization and language use*. Each of these sections contained specific criteria in the form of statements or descriptors regarding the properties evaluated in the section (e.g. *The paragraph begins with enough clear general statements that introduce the general topic of the essay*.); descriptors were assigned a score following the ones suggested by Oshima & Hogue's (2014) rubrics for a total of 100 points. The criteria corresponding to the assessment of coherence belonged to the *organization* section, and together added up to a score of 24 points out of the 52 points allotted to the section. To assign scores during assessment, the maximum score per criterion had to be divided by the number of paragraphs in the body of the essay; all essays contained three body paragraphs, so if the maximum score in the criterion was 12 points, 4 points were the maximum score per paragraph. Once this was done, it was necessary to count the number of sentences a paragraph had. Then, there was a count of the number of sentences that presented issues with coherence; it should be emphasized that this exercise was carried once per criterion. To give a score, a rule of three was created using the maximum score per criterion and the number of sentences per paragraph; for instance, if the number of sentences in the paragraph was 7 and the maximum score in the criterion was 4, all 7 sentences had to meet the properties in the criterion to assign the 4 points; in this way if 5 sentences met the criterion, this number was multiplied by 4 and divided by the number of sentences in the paragraph, in this case, 7. This would give a score of 2.85 out of 4. The scores per paragraph were then added up, and this would be the total score per criterion. In this way, if a student scored 2.85 in all three paragraphs their score for that criterion would be 8.55 out of 12. This system was time consuming but gave each student fair evaluation because the number of sentences per paragraph written by each student was not always the same.

This could benefit rater-reliability having specific parameters to follow should the compositions be assessed by different raters in the future.

The four criteria corresponding to coherence in the essay rubrics were divided on the basis of what Van Dijk (1980) defines as global and local coherence. The two descriptors regarding local coherence were based on "semantic relations between sentences, hence relations between propositions expressed by these sentences" (Van Dijk, 1980, p. 53). The first descriptor that assessed local coherence read: *Each paragraph achieves coherence by establishing a smooth sequence of ideas that makes the writer's points easy to follow*. In this respect, Van Dijk (1977) explains that in order for discourse to express continuity, it is necessary that the sentences in the text express those semantic relations "between old and new information" (p. 94). This continuity is what he calls *linear* or *sequential* coherence which would stand for the "relations holding between propositions expressed by composite sentences and sequences of sentences" (Van Dijk, 1977, p. 95). The analysis of the essays showed that by the end of the course one student still struggled to achieve sequential coherence. While all her partners scored 3 out of 3 in this descriptor, she got 2 out of 3, which would indicate that at least one sentence in each of the three body paragraphs did not meet the parameters for sequential coherence. The following is an excerpt from one of her paragraphs:

> First, UIS members who support the arrival of Venezuelans in the country claim that there are some of them who came here with the purpose of working hard; however, migrants can take jobs such as coffee picking, but they do not want to do it. It is a fact that formal employment in the country is low, but these migrants still have the chance to find a job. As an example of this, cities in Colombia with coffee plantations are always looking

for people to work as coffee pickers. In the second semester of the year 2018, about 80,000 coffee pickers were needed to collect the crops in Antioquia (Eje21, 2018.). (ARG-BR)

In this paragraph, for example, the student needed to connect her illustration with the idea that Venezuelans were reluctant to take the jobs available in the Colombian labor market. However, the example was not sequential in the sense that it did not prove that Venezuelans were not willing to take these jobs, but only that there were jobs in this sector. Thus, the properties (Van Dijk, 1980) expressed by the sentences that function as an example are not sequentially coherent although they refer to the same individual, Venezuelans.

The second descriptor that assessed local coherence read: *Information in the paragraphs is arranged in logical order, which enhances coherenc*e. Regarding this, Van Dijk (1980) states that semantic relations also have a conditional nature; this means that "the first fact allows, probabilizes or necessitates the subsequent fact ... one fact may precede, co-occur, and follow... or one fact may be a link with other possible worlds" (p. 53). By facts he refers to fragments of a possible world. The analysis of essays indicated that by the end of the course, students had achieved the connection relations in the propositions found in their sentences. All five students scored 3 out of 3 in this descriptor. The excerpt below is an illustration of this achievement.

Some UIS members claim that Venezuelans should receive help from us as they gave it to us when violence in Colombia forced us to migrate to Venezuela. Although it is true that a few years ago Colombians migrated to Venezuela because of violence, it is also true that the Venezuelan economy at that time provided a favorable environment for both Venezuelans and Colombian migrants, but that is certainly not the case of Colombian economy which does not have the means to provide both Venezuelans and Colombians

with the necessary means to thrive. A clear sign of how the economy does not allow us to help migrants is the effect that the migration phenomenon has on the most vulnerable populations from both nations. According to El Heraldo (2018), the Colombian government will have to allocate almost 0.5% of its Gross Domestic Product in order to assist Venezuelan migrants in sectors like education and health. (ARG-SY)

In this excerpt we see how the first sentence, the topic sentence -highlighted in yellow, provides the background for the concession used in the subordinate clause - highlighted in green- of the following compound-complex sentence. In the same vein, the subordinate clause is linked to its main clause -highlighted in blue- and to the previous sentence by one possible world or situation, in this case the migration of Colombians to Venezuela. Then, the main clause in the second sentence provides a new world for the second independent clause - highlighted in orange- and the third sentence to connect - this latter highlighted in turquoise; this new world is the economy in both countries. Finally, the fourth sentence - highlighted in pink- is allowed by the third sentence sharing properties that belong to this new world; in other words, the gross domestic product is a property of economy.

On the other hand, the criteria that assessed global coherence were based on Van Dijk's (1977) notion that discourse also has a level of global organization which works on the relations of whole sets of sentences. Van Dijk & Kintsch (1983, p. 189) say that "notions used to describe this kind of overall coherence of discourse include topic, theme, gist, upshot or point." Now, the first descriptor referring to global coherence read: *Each paragraph achieves coherence by discussing one subtopic which is clearly stated in its topic sentence, whose controlling idea supports the thesis statement*. This descriptor mainly suggests that the controlling ideas in the

topic sentences of each paragraph in the essay should share the same argument, the gist, advanced in the thesis statement at the end of the introductory paragraph. The idea of argument repetition to build a coherent structure is included in Kintsch and Van Dijk's 1978 processing model (as cited in Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983, p. 44). The analysis of students' compositions shows that 4 out 5 met all the properties for this criterion scoring 3 out of 3. The thesis statement together with the topic sentences from SC's argumentative essay have been drawn as an example of this achievement.

Thesis statement: Although some Venezuelans have committed crimes and taken resources illegally or have resorted to begging expecting Colombians to solve their current situation, there is proof that many of them have actually found ways to survive honestly and to contribute to the Colombian labor force.

Topic sentence paragraph 1: Firstly, some people at UIS fear that criminality rates have increased due to the arrival of Venezuelans, and it is understandable that they think about such a serious judgment because criminality is generally associated with the rising level of homelessness in any city. However, criminality rates have remained almost the same as they were before this migration.

Topic sentence paragraph 2: Secondly, some people from UIS maintenance staff think that a great percentage of Venezuelan migrants like to receive things for charity without performing any job, even though most of these migrants only perform this activity during the first days after their arrival but later find a job.

Topic sentence paragraph 3: Last but not least, some workers at UIS claim that only the poorest and non-professional Venezuelan people were the ones who came to Bucaramanga. However, many skilled professionals from Venezuela are working in the city; that is the case of attorneys, economists, and teachers.

The structure of a thesis statement in an argumentative essay is generally that one of a complex sentence; in it, the independent clause clearly states the writer's stand about one topic while the subordinate clause contains an opposing point of view on the same (Oshima & Hogue, 2014). When reading SC's thesis statement, it becomes apparent that the gist of the statement lies in the independent clause - highlighted in yellow- and that it defends the idea that not all Venezuelan migrants are criminals or beggars; on the contrary, many of them have contributed to one specific sector in the country. By repeating this argument in all three topic sentences and making it evident in the rebuttals, the student builds global coherence successfully. To be more explicit, the first topic sentence argues that criminality rates in Bucaramanga have not changed because of migrants but that they have stayed the same; in this way, the student repeats the argument that Venezuelan migrants are not criminals. This also seems to be the case for topic sentences 2 and 3 which repeat the argument that not all Venezuelans are beggars in stating that Venezuelan migrants do not always live from charity as they soon take jobs, even as skilled professionals. Similarly, the rest of the group achieved global coherence using argument repetition in the topic sentences that supported the gist of the thesis statement.

Finally, the second criterion for global coherence read: *Each paragraph achieves coherence by including specific and factual supporting sentences that successfully explain or prove the*

topic sentence (facts, examples, statistics, direct or indirect quotations and paraphrased or summarized information). This descriptor finds its support in Van Dijk & Kintsch's (1983) explanation that the coherence of discourse "cannot be fully explained only in terms of local relationships between propositions: (but that) Higher level meanings are necessary to establish some form of global organization or control" (p. 194). From this, it can be understood that even local relations of pairwise propositions obey to a higher structure, a macrostructure. In this case, supporting sentences are connected to topic sentences in their argument, but topic sentences, as described above, support the argument in a thesis statement, which together create global coherence. Van Dijk & Kintsch's (1983) state that macrostructures "are often directly expressed in the discourse, for example, in titles, thematic sentences, and words or in summaries" (p. 193), and their presence is also evident in discourse in the use of cohesive devices and topic-comment articulation. Findings coming from the analysis of the last essay indicate that 3 out of 5 students met 80% to 100% of this criterion with scores of 8/12 and 12/12 correspondingly. One student achieved 74% of the criterion with a score of 8.9/12, and only one of the students stayed behind meeting just 25% of the criterion with a score of 3/12. This latter resulted from the impossibility of tracking macrostructures in the essay because paragraphs were left incomplete. The excerpts below were taken from VP's argumentative essay body paragraphs and concluding paragraph; these stand as examples of thematic sentences that are ruled by the macrostructure of the text.

> **Sentence from body paragraph 1:** Even taking the aforementioned situation of *marginalized employees* into account, the fact is that most Venezuelans that migrated to Colombia are *working informally* and only a portion of them are *actually employed*.

Sentence from body paragraph 2: many other precarious conditions that the *Venezuelan workers* have to endure do not account for *stable employment*, and certainly do not affect the possibility of Colombians finding such in the city.

Sentence from body paragraph 3: Many locals *express negativity* towards Venezuelans because they don't see the benefits of allowing immigrants into the country, but that's only because most of them are not the kind of Colombians who actually get to see and reap *the fruits of the exploitation of migrants: Bosses* and Capitalists.

Sentence from concluding paragraph: In conclusion, *there is still no excuse* for *xenophobic expression* towards Venezuelans.

The words in italics in these sentences show traces of topic-comment articulation with the gist of the passage. In her thesis statement, VP alleges that the anger that Colombians express towards Venezuelans claiming that they are "'stealing jobs' is nothing but reactionary" (ARG-VP). Words like *marginalized*, *express negativity*, *exploitation*, and *xenophobic expression* presuppose "the anger Colombians express towards Venezuelans" (ARG-VP). This would support agree with Van Dijk & Kintsch's (1983, p. 194) theory that "pronouns, connectives, adverbs, topic-comment articulation, word order, and so on, often presuppose previous underlying macropropositions and their elements." Another example found in the sentences below is topic-comment articulation among the words *employees, working informally, actually employed, Venezuelan workers, stable employment and Bosses* with the possible world "stealing jobs."

The previous findings suggest that most of the participants in this project did show improvement in textual coherence. Table 8 summarizes students' progress in the criteria that assessed coherence for each of the three essays that they submitted. According to this data two participants showed progressive improvement which is the case of LQ and SY, who went from 13 points to 21 points and from 21 points to 24 points respectively in their first and last essay. BR's improvement, on the contrary, wavered, but this might have been related to how short the period of time to revise essays and receive feedback was for the last task in comparison with the previous ones (for details refer to cycle table of the didactic sequence). VP's results confirm that in effect procedural reasons aided her to achieve coherence; as it was mentioned before, she attributed her progress in coherence to understanding the principles of writing. Finally, SC's scores did not shift; the result for the first essay is null given that he did not submit his composition. He managed to submit two essays by the end of the course, but these did not provide sufficient information, as shown below, to confirm that there was improvement in his textual coherence.

Table 6
Scores for Criteria Corresponding to Coherence

Participant	**LDI Essay**	**C&E Essay**	**ARG Essay**
BR	22.6p/24p	22.4p/24p	19.9p/24p
LQ	13p/24p	18p/24p	21p/24p
SC	0p/24p	15.2p/24p	15p/24p
VP	24p/24p	23.5p/24p	24p/24p
SY	21p/24p	23.5p/24p	24p/24p

5. Conclusions

This study departed with the aim of documenting what aspects of community-based learning helped a group of preservice teachers improve their written performance. Under a qualitative research frame, data was collected and analyzed with reference to the research question *To what extent could students' understanding of their communities, in other words students' readings of the world, help them improve their written performance?* The interpretation of data yielded consistent findings that provided an answer to the research question within the scope of three specific objectives. The following are the conclusions drawn after the process of analysis was completed.

With respect to students' descriptions on what hindered or fostered the achievement of coherence in their written texts, it was found that there were procedural and facultative factors that both prevented or aided students in the process of finding and building the connections among the propositions in their compositions. It was traced that the procedural factor that most affected students in their writing was absence of proofreading; by skipping the step of revision in the process of writing, students limited their development of proficiency affecting the coherence in their discourse. Also, it was found that the facultative cause for students' problems with textual coherence had to do mainly with their difficulty to concentrate at the moment of writing. On the other hand, it was also drawn from the analysis that the procedural origin of students' improvements in coherence had to do chiefly with their understanding of the group of principles that govern formal writing. Students credited their progress to learning how to outline or to use specific rules concerning structure. Moreover, there were conclusive findings about how the main facultative reason for students' improvement in the aforementioned aspect was situating

their writing in a meaningful experience of interaction with the community. Findings revealed that interacting with the community, students felt more engaged with their writing process. Some of the benefits of this experience revolved around students not only being able to withdraw content but also being able to effectively structure them in a coherent whole. This is one of the ways in which community-based learning appears to have helped students in the development of their writing skills.

These findings evidence the importance of giving students the responsibility of reflecting about the actions they take to achieve learning goals. Freire & Faundez (2018) state that it is necessary for students to discover the dynamic relation between word and action, among word, action and reflection. The introspective look students gave at their learning process by means of the instruments also led them to an introspective inquiry on what they were attaining as writers; Freire & Faundez (1982) believe that inquiry is essential for any individual who intends to become a teacher, it is essential to ask.

Regarding the ways in which students' compositions were situated at the core of community discourses it was found that social interaction was the engine for students to recall and produce meaning in their written discourse. This finding was supported by Fairclough's (2003) idea that discourse is basically representations of the world in its different dimensions: material, mental and social ones. The analysis of students' texts provided definitive evidence of these three dimensions. First, passages appeared to present instances of what Fairclough (2003) describes as structures of the material world in their naming and account of actual elements and processes observed and withdrawn from the communities that students mapped during the didactic intervention. Second, texts also exhibited traces of what Van Dijk (1993) calls *models*, personal beliefs, attitudes or knowledge about particular episodes in the lines that represented their stand

before the influx of Venezuelans in their city. Third, students' compositions were undeniable proof that discourse also derives and is interpreted from social cognition (Van Dijk, 1993). An unmistakable sign of this was the presence of group-based social representations in students' compositions like the xenophobic attitudes of many locals towards Venezuelan migrants.

Concerning the extent to which textual coherence improved in the written texts of Academic Writing I students, it was found that 80% of the participants showed progress in the construction of semantic relations in their compositions at both local and global levels, the levels in which discourse expresses its connection and continuity according to Van Dijk (1980). Findings confirmed that, by the end of the didactic intervention, 4 out 5 students achieved linear or sequential coherence by effectively creating relations between the propositions expressed by different sequences of sentences in their texts, thereby building local coherence. In the same vein, 100% of the class attained local coherence successfully building conditional semantic relations in reference to what Van Dijk (1980) calls possible worlds. Furthermore, the analysis of students' essays provided conclusive findings with regard to the attainment of global coherence; 80% of the class used argument repetition to maintain the gist at the core of the macrostructure of their texts. Also, with respect to the macrostructures that provide the frame for the global coherence of discourse (Dijk & Kintsch, 1983), data analysis concluded that at least 60% of participants used cohesive devices and topic-comment articulation effectively that correlated with the gist in their thesis statements. These were significant advances compared to the results obtained by the students in the analysis of their first composition (refer to 10.1).

The following are other findings that resulted from my exploration of sociocultural perspectives in Second Language Acquisition and the realization of how they connected with the study I was conducting in Academic Writing I (AWI). One of the findings was that Halliday's

(as cited in Álvarez, 2016) "functional view of language" was also present in the way students built their texts in the course. Students' compositions were indeed "embedded in a context of situation" (as cited in Ballard, 1980). Furthermore, Halliday's (as cited in Álvarez, 2016) three general functions of the language were evident in AWI students' writing process. Through their compositions they expressed and represented their experience in a community they belonged to (ideational function), they also built a relation with their readers, in this case their classmates and teacher (interpersonal metafunction), and they made use of linguistic principles to craft organized and coherent texts (textual metafunction).

Another realization that sparked product of my readings was how multimodality was present in the approach chosen for my didactic intervention. This was a concept that I had not given much consideration and that I had probably discarded because I did not quite grasp its gist. Although multimodality was one of those words that recurrently appeared in the articles I read concerning community-based pedagogies, I can acknowledge consciously that my understanding of it went as far as only associating it with the use of technology in the classroom. After reading Álvarez (2016), I was made aware that the concept of multimodality cannot be ignored with regard to communication because its very nature is multimodal. During the didactic intervention in AWI, students mapped their community to trace the presence of Venezuelans in the city and to identify the characteristics, causes and effects of the growing Venezuelan migration. To document their observations, students kept weekly online logs, writing short descriptions of what they had observed regarding the topic; they took photos to accompany their texts, thereby enhancing meaning making by creating "intersemiotic coherence between the linguistic mode and the visual mode" (Álvarez, 2016). Also, they recorded interviews with members of the community who helped them to understand the issue from different angles, and they used these

personal communications as documentation sources for their compositions. Thus, students actually explored, documented and contested a social issue aided by multimodality.

The strategies used by students in their writing production confirmed the idea that "the semiotic resources we choose to use are instrumental in conveying our meanings or worldviews" (Álvarez, 2016). Community-based pedagogies support this view of communication; in fact, Rincón and Clavijo (2016) state, "Community-based pedagogies and multimodalities represent new alternatives to achieve meaningful practices for students, especially in communication and self-expression." Better discernment of how all communication is multimodal and of how it was present in AWI students' writing process has certainly broadened my perspective about the ways in which composition can be potentiated.

A third conclusion that resulted from the exploration of sociocultural theories in SLA would be the latent possibility to exploit intercultural awareness in AWI. Álvarez and Bonilla (2009) state, "In the context of language teaching, teachers should enhance the development of cultural awareness in order to promote intercultural speakers" or, in this particular case, intercultural writers. The fact that the writing topic chosen by the students dealt directly with the growing presence of an ethnic group in their community could have potentiated the discussion of cultural representations and cultural issues such as stereotypes and xenophobia, which manifested as a persistent preoccupation in students' compositions. Students' texts reflected that as students explored a social issue embedded in their community they shifted into more competent intercultural subjects because they were transcending the simplistic and naïve interpretation of the Other culture (Álvarez and Bonilla, 2009), that one of the Venezuelan migrant. The possibility that students embraced by observing and talking to Venezuelan migrants is one where they recognized the existence of the Otherness. Also while writing their texts, students opened

their minds to identifying and contesting the meanings that circulated in their community. In doing so they adopted a dialogical view for the discussion of the phenomenon they were writing about, which turned out to be highly cultural. Also they encouraged me, their teacher, to adopt a more intercultural perspective for AWI. Indeed, "The view of culture in language teaching from an intercultural perspective supposes a progression from monological to dialogical views to understanding culture" (Álvarez and Bonilla, 2009).

As a teacher-researcher, strengthening my understanding of sociocultural theories was crucial to enhance the implementation of my didactic intervention supported by community-based pedagogy. Relying on a community-based approach for academic writing means not only acknowledging that learning to write is a social practice but also encouraging students to become active agents in their communities. Learner-writers who understand the way language works and who use it consciously to shape their relationship to the world will be able to adopt a more critical stand in their compositions. As Berlin (1996) states, "We want students to begin to understand that language is never innocent, that it instead constitutes a terrain for ideological battle." Teaching writing without acknowledging the spatial, social and historical variables in which the creators of texts are embedded implies describing learning as a homogenous process from which all outcomes can be anticipated. This, in turn, leads to focusing on deficit approaches that eventually take a toll on learners and the way they engage in their communities of practice.

6. Limitations

The implementation of this study faced significant limitations that at some point seemed to be an immediate threat to the completion of the didactic intervention. The first obstacle for the

development of the didactic sequence was definitely absenteeism; this probably owed to the fact that all the sessions started at 6 in the morning, and students found it difficult to make it on time as more than half of the group lived at least one hour away by bus from campus. The record kept by means of the observation journal indicated that 4 out of 5 students surpassed the barrier of 20% absences. For a course of 80 hours, this meant that 4 students missed more than 16 hours of classes, without including holidays, days off and strike days. The main problem with this was that the students who attended one session were not the same who attended the next one. With no convergence of students in class, advancement in terms of content was really slow and it certainly became frustrating for me as a teacher. The second limitation for the implementation of the pedagogical intervention was the almost four-month long national strike undertook nationally by public universities. This not only interrupted the didactic sequence but it put a stop to the new and difficult discipline of writing that students were just developing. The final limitation was my failure to find a reading audience for my students. This also had to do with the national strike; once academic activities resumed the other members of faculty that I consulted were so worried about finishing their own courses that it was unthinkable to add any more work to their classes. A reading audience would have strengthened the objective of the course to produce and interpret discourse in the social world, and it would have given the intervention a more dialogic turn from the angle of literacy.

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