

Chapter I

Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is in many ways a vast realm where a lot has been done throughout the years. The voices of many experts have risen to lend their unique perspectives in the different problems that come from teaching a foreign language to groups of diverse origins and of different ages. Experiments have been done, and projects have been conducted which have contributed to the availability of valuable knowledge and information. This study examines one small region of that realm, one part that has been visited often in the past only this time the participants are secondary students in an EFL class in a Latin American city.

This research study centers on Journal Writing in EFL. Chapter I offers a brief overview of the problem, its scope and the procedures selected to approach it. Chapter II offers the literature review, which in addition to being devoted to Journal Writing, also but also covers aspects of journaling that are tied to the pedagogy of language learning. Chapter III describes the processes followed in the research, the role of the participants and the assessment procedures used especially at the end of the study. Chapter IV reveals the primary findings and secondary findings, whereas Chapter V includes discussion of the results, a quick analysis of the implications for the EFL teaching practice and some final comments.

Interest in the problem

The saying that goes: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” is usually attributed to Lao-Tzu, the founder of Taoism, (604- 531 B.C). It tells you that no

matter how big your ambition is, it begins with something as humble as a simple move. And though those words may be true, finding the right path to follow constitutes the real challenge because there is always more than one way to do things and it is always a bit hard to decide the right thing to do. The possibilities, and implications, for the teacher who wants to conduct research are many and potentially overwhelming; so personally I would say that the traveler in the famous poem by Robert Frost (*The Road not Taken*), who only had two options before him, had it easier.

In my case, it took me a while to think of a good research project and the procedures I would follow besides all the other considerations that cannot be overlooked when getting ready for such an endeavour. After much consideration, I made up my mind and landed on something related to one of my favorite activities: writing.

There are several reasons for which I chose to write about journal writing. Though some of my fellow teachers often look suspiciously at journal writing, I prefer to think that using it or not in your class is a matter of personal choice as it is every other point included in any didactic unit we elaborate. Before I began this project I asked informally my other colleagues how they felt about using journals in class. Some told me they found journals “a bit too personal, unstructured or informal to assign in the classroom”; for others, student journals are “too difficult to assess”; and for still others “journals simply serve no practical pedagogical purpose”. There were of course those who thought “it was a nice activity to use when teaching writing.”

The present research study has been designed to explore the teaching practice of using Journal Writing in class as a technique to teach English and to learn what perceptions EFL students have about learning English with this technique. It was my intention that my EFL students learn to write in English with a sense of purpose, and I needed an instrument,

something that involved writing. Thus I wondered: “Are journals a valid tool to use in EFL?” In my own experience, writing awakens many things inside me, and it is excellent for processing knowledge that is not being used. In a class where one of the most important targets is to have students write decent academic papers, journal writing could perhaps be a useful tool to boost my students’ capacities to generate ideas and to increase comfort with the process of writing in a second language.

I have read a lot about the use of journals in class and most of those readings are commented on in the review of the literature (Chapter II). In those readings I have found surprising pieces of information. One example of something I learned was that journals could be applied in a variety of fields of expertise existing in the world (for some reason, I had come to believe that only explorers, researchers and teachers used journals). In fact there are many people out there who are using journals, more and more often in electronic form, because the benefits of journaling are many. Journals have the power to activate reflection. Doctors, researchers, engineers, chefs, even those who did not write in the past are writing journals regularly and discovering how it serves them to better their own practice. Perhaps, the recent appearance of the now popular *blogs* comes as an expression of the necessity to express feelings, everyday needs and events and finally to reflect on the same.

In spite of what is happening to journals in the electronic world, it is rewarding to see that journals are more than an educational tool. In fact, if we are to believe what Boud (2001) says, it seems that for those who teach Reading and Writing in another language the fact that journals are excellent for creating in our students the habit of reading and writing only adds to the value of journals.

One example of the benefits of journaling can be seen in the work of Progoff (1993). It indicates that intensive journal writing has become a way to better aspects of our personality that needed to be explored. This self-exploration of who we are, what we really want and where we can go leads to the discovery of dormant and hidden capacities of each individual, a discovery that could change that individual's life. In fact he shows how this has already happened many times. Intensive journal writing has been structured and given the form of a method by that renowned psychologist, Progoff.

There is a case when journals are used for meaningful purposes other than improving an educational aspect, and it is not the only one since the case of the *Freedom Writers* (Gruwell, 2006), which also shows us the complexities and the promising aspects of the use of journals brought to individuals to be the leverage that releases all that potential trapped in their inner selves.

In order to carry out this research study I worked with groups of high school students. The high school where the students attend is a private. The participants are all students from sixteen to seventeen years old. They are in fifth course in an Ecuadorian high school. At this point, most Ecuadorian schools have already formed student cohorts, a customary practice for when a student is promoted from third course to fourth. The criteria applied for this group formation is the result of the students' own personal choice of their future careers and the opinion of the DOBE (*Departamento de Bienestar Estudiantil*: (Department of Student Welfare) of the school.

They are also EFL students, who in most cases have been exposed to the target language ever since they were in primary grades. For being one of the forty participants in this project this is a fundamental, perhaps pivotal, condition since these students are EFL

students, it was necessary for the purposes of this project that they also had an acceptable mastery of the language.

This high school, which provided the setting for this research study, closely oversees the language acquisition process of its students by following a method created specifically for that school, manages to position most students, not all, at a similar level of proficiency that guarantees they are able to participate in a journal program like the one designed for this project. The first three years students of Básico (as they are called according to the Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador) do not receive classes in complete groups. Each cohort is split in two, then each subgroup receives a class of Reading and Writing, another of Grammar and one more which is different every other day so one day they go to a computer lab and the next to a special center called Enrichment Center where they further practice what they have learnt in the other classes (similar to the Self Access Centre of the British Council). Also, they have a different teacher every time. The purpose of dividing them into groups is to facilitate the learning process. Next, when they are promoted to *Diversificado* no group is divided, instead they receive a certain number of subjects in English such as Economics or History, Theory of Knowledge and Language B

The school granted permission to develop the project using time of the classes during the period of a month or so. The two groups chosen were made up by twenty members each. The participants were either fifteen or sixteen years old and they all had a high intermediate level of English proficiency. Both groups also had the same major [*especialización*]: Engineering [*Ingeniería*.] This last term defines the type of instruction they receive in relation to other groups so if your major is Humanities [*Humanísticas*] the emphasis of your instruction is in social studies whereas Experimental Science [*Experimentales*] emphasizes the study of biological subjects. The two groups in this

project, both chose engineering, which stresses the study of the exact sciences such as math and physics. Each group worked with the same English Language teacher. The difference in the instruction administered was in the use of journals. Only one of the two groups worked with journals.

The research design for this project is qualitative, but in some ways also quantitative. I will use not only a pre-survey, a post-survey but also a personal journal and the journals of the students themselves as basic sources to have a somewhat clear perspective of what EFL students perceive journals to be when used in a language acquisition program such as the one they have been involved with and their personal estimation and opinion of the effectiveness and value of this teaching strategy. The pieces of information that have been retrieved are to be analyzed, interpreted and reported.

Purpose of the Study

This action research project aims to explore and describe the perceptions of EFL students regarding the process of using journal writing to offer ideas that could be used to improve the management of journals and activities that accompany them in EFL language learning. The outcome of this project should raise teachers' consciousness of the role of a type of writing other than writing academic essays. In addition, this research study is expected to create awareness of the great potential of journal writing as a tool to motivate EFL/ESL students to write.

Research Questions

1. How do EFL secondary students perceive journal writing as a tool for developing their English proficiency?

2. What are the research driven principles and practices for teaching and learning journal writing for the purpose of language learning?
3. How does a group of Ecuadorian secondary students respond to the research driven practices for using EFL journal writing?
4. How can the influence of journal writing on the learning outcomes of the participants in this study be described?

Probably there is more than one way of thinking about journal writing in relation to learning and for that we can look at how journals reveal what their writers have assimilated, see how writers have learned to express themselves in journals, or discover how journals can help other people to learn.

One other important purpose for this study is precisely to see how individuals, in this case a group of EFL students can use journals to improve their own learning. The process of discovering how journals can assist their writers to learn is commonly described in terms of how journals can create reflection and then practice (Boud, 2001).

Spalding (2002) has conceptualized reflection as a process of making experience into learning, that is, a way of exploring experience in order to learn new things from it. As teachers we may hope that our students are engaged, and find relevance and meaning in their study high school studies in my case, and that they discover what Cremé (2008) calls the ‘intellectual love’, that is love for your ideas and the product of such ideas.

Perhaps if these techniques prove to be useful, I could use them to create awareness in my students of their potential to do their own learning and become what Lapan (2002) labels self-regulated learners. That would be a great achievement because a self-regulated learner does more than passively consume information that has been presented to them. In the learning process, they create strategies, goals, and meaning for what they have learned.

In addition, self-regulated learners can monitor and influence their own actions, of course with certain limitations. They can also use standards to assess the adequacy of their learning and make changes if necessary, and perhaps most importantly, these learners can create self-regulating processes to improve their academic purposes and performance.

Eventually students like these learn to take the spotlight for themselves rather than letting the teacher “conduct the show” entirely by himself or herself, all this figuratively speaking. They also develop audience-awareness” that is that they care for those they are writing for and keep in mind that there is a person on the other side trying to understand them and it is their duty as writers to ease that intent as much as they can. However, student compositions traditionally are written for the teacher. Ward (2009) indicates that students’ motivation may be enhanced when they write assignments for audiences of peers within the classroom or outside the campus. What happens then if there is an audience other than the teacher is further explored in Chapter III.

Fulwiller (1982) and others believe in the use of reflective journals as a pedagogical strategy for evaluating student learning, which is also related to working with culturally diverse topics, one of the things promoted by the high school where this study happens. In the end, I want to focus on connecting the course objectives, learning outcomes, instructional format, and reasons for using reflective journals with my students’ every day practice so they develop a “sense of purpose” because it’s important they know why they're writing.

If our students’ purpose in writing is to please their instructor or to get a better grade, that may not be enough. Many teachers devise strategies to persuade their students to write for a larger community something that allows students to feel that more than one person is going to read their works, and truly that is good motivation in itself to do well, to

communicate clearly however not enough in the end. There is something important out there, something all our students should be made aware of and that is the knowing that all these efforts in education, and particularly in EFL, are actually part of a greater design, a picture so large we cannot see it though is right there in front of us. This is an image where all mankind stands together because only in that way we will be truly strong rather than remaining apart. It in this aspect where journal writing really helps: in allowing journal writers to see, understand and accept their inner selves in order to make a stronger individual out of it, one with a vision that lets see beyond the boundaries and ties of a simple life.

General Statement of the Problem

Cremé (2008) implies that writing is an essential part of academic success, and yet many students lack motivation and confidence in their ability to write. Motivation, creativity, and accuracy in the area of writing, are addressed by Boud (2001), who states that before you write you should read a lot more, suggesting that input is necessary before there is any output. According to Mc Donald and Roselli (1997) writing is considered a productive skill, which is an outcome of reading. There are also several indications that the common belief among my colleagues that the citizens of the research setting are “non-readers”, One of the local journals, *Expreso*, published on April 22, 2007, printed the results of a survey they conducted .They reported that 50% of the city’s people who were interviewed had not read one single book in the year before and another 21 % said they read one or two books a year but no more than that.

The inhabitants of this city do not seem to be regular readers, but these facts may not be true for children whose parents can afford the cost of private education and whose children attend institutions, which have a curriculum that is strong in both reading and

writing in both L1 and L2. The institution where this project took place is among those where second language reading and writing are required in the curriculum.

The lack of cultural interest in reading and writing underscore the usefulness of journal writing, may be a useful tool for motivating EFL students to write, more, with increased skill and enjoyment. The present project aims to explore the assumption that journaling will improve the English reading and writing skills of a group of high school students in Ecuador. It seems, based on a thorough search of the literature that little has been explored inside the EFL field of Ecuador on the topic of using journal writing to improve English reading and writing skills.

Operational terms

EFL: English as a Foreign Language. EFL students are students who are learning English in a non-native English environment.

ESL: English as a Second Language. ESL students are students who are learning English in an English-language environment.

L1: Abbreviation for mother language or first language.

L2: Usually another language commonly spoken in the same country of the L1 speaker.
e.g. In Ecuador, Quichua is L1 and Spanish is L2, though only in certain regions.

An L2 speaker can speak another language besides his mother tongue.

Journal: an assignment to record perceptions, opinions and ideas and also a place where we come to reflect about ourselves

Diary: a journal also, only more private in nature.

SLA: Second language Acquisition

Target language: language the learner is attempting to learn.

Chapter II

Literature Review

In my research I found a lot of information about journal writing coming from diverse sources. Journal writing is quite popular among EFL and ESL teachers, and yet the only thing I could not find is a unifying theory, a common system that puts together all the criteria. This chapter reviews the information relevant to the topic of this research study. I especially focused on the use of journals not only in EFL classrooms but other settings as well for journals are adaptable and versatile tools. In addition, I have also reviewed literature on peer review and the use of music in the classroom, features that are intertwined in the procedures that were followed in carrying out this research.

The site www.dictionary.com says a journal is a daily record as of occurrences and experiences, or observations. A newspaper, especially a daily one, is also a journal and the same can be said of a periodical or a magazine, particularly one published for a special group, learned society, or profession. Basically, most dictionaries say that a journal and a diary are really the same thing while a few others mention that a journal is indeed a diary but only if it is private in nature and that a journal is not a magazine either, for the word journal “refers to a serious, scholarly publication, most often peer-reviewed.”. There are of course, more poetic approaches to the concept of journals. For example, Cortright (2009) says that the word "journal" may mean different things to one hundred different people; Mio & Barker-Hackett (2003) have called journals *reaction papers*; for Fulwiler (1982) a journal is both a formal rigorous assignment, and, at the same time, a place for students to practice imaginative thinking. My definition of journal writing that I have formulated for the study, based on the definitions of the experts is that a journal is an assignment to record perceptions, opinions and ideas and also a place where we come to reflect about ourselves.

Journaling in an EFL classroom

Experts have studied many different aspects of journal writing in the EFL classrooms. Some of the aspects covered in the literature review are frequency requirements, types and sizes of journals, error correction, the use of prompts, purposes of journaling. What a teacher does is to ask students to write in their journals with a frequency that varies according to the needs of each group. Every time they write they should do it with a sense of purpose therefore having interesting topics, and good writing prompts to write about is a must. What students write is called an entry. Entries can be created on a regular basis, daily or frequently, depending on each group's needs.

The journal entries are usually kept together in a notepad, though also a notebook or folder may do. Scott (2009) advises using small journals which, can be tucked into a purse for example or carried in a hand, so they can easily be taken everywhere. The important thing is to write so learners can improve their writing or demonstrate to themselves that they indeed can write. At Eureka, a site hosted by Kent University and designed by Christine Cugino, they say daily regular writing practice is a general strategy for writers at all levels, and that this type of practice is particularly appropriate for beginning writers.

Lewis (2009) recommends that learners date each journal entry. In addition, teachers should give learners strategies to use to get the words down even when they do not know how to spell; such as, write down the first letter of the word and draw a line or write the word as best one can. The creators of Eureka have stated that journals are not writing assignments to be corrected or graded, but should be used for communicating and writing practice. The student may elect to revise and extend some of the journal entries into more formal assignments rather than start working on a new idea, which in the end might be more practical and timesaving.

In order to write an entry, students should receive writing prompts. According to Stein (2006), the designer of www.tooter4kids.com, a prompt may be a sentence to complete, a question to respond to, or even the writing of poetry. Here are some examples provided in the same site on a page under the “Writing Links” link entitled “Journal Writing”. Some of these topics are more elementary school appropriate than high school appropriate:

The foods I dislike are...

When I grow up I want to be... (Why?)

Is there an event that took place in your life that has changed you? Tell me how.

Tell me about your pet (s). If you don't have any, what kind of pet would you like to have?

I was most angry when...

I was most happy when...

I was most disappointed when...

My favorite holiday is... Tell me why

The number of possible prompts is almost infinite and the only limit is perhaps that of confidentiality. As a recommendation, Lewis (2009) is against having students write about whatever they want since the resulting writing is usually irrelevant and unfocused. There are those who would disagree with this last point such as Lapan (2002), who says that our students should be responsible for their own learning and should develop their own learning strategies by themselves. He also claims that self-regulated learners achieve more, and are more satisfied with their work, and perhaps the same could be said about journal writing so learners who make their own decisions regarding this practice become higher achievers and are more pleased with their work as a result. An illustration of this point is

found in the work described in the book *ESL Writing: Learning, Reflections and Adjustments to American Life*. There Mc Donald and Roselli (1997) ask the following question: “How do immigrants and refugees adjust to American life and how do they become American?” According to them, one of the ways is through the ESL education they receive at adult schools operated by institutions such as the San Diego Community College District and part of that instruction they receive involves the use of journals.

Types of Journals

In my research I found several “types” of journals, most of which are listed here. Emmons (2007) classifies journals in three basic groups, personal, dialectical and creative:

Personal journals are primarily for recording daily events, thoughts, and reflections. These may include self-analysis, discussion of personal beliefs or goals, and evaluation of real-life situations. In this type of journal, free form writing is acceptable, and less attention is paid to writing conventions such as grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Dialectical journals can be written in many ways, but generally have the same format as double-column notes. These journals are meant to aid in analysis and encourage meta-cognitive processes. They are flexible and can be used in any discipline (including English, medicine, science, social studies, and math). In the left hand column, students insert facts such as the summary of an article, observations about an experiment, historical details, or steps in a mathematical equation. In the right hand column, students write their responses, thoughts, questions, and conclusions concerning the factual material in the left column.

Creative journals are designed for those who love to use their imagination. These journals are often used by professional writers and in English classes, but can

also be used in other disciplines. This journal gives the student a chance to write creatively through poetry, fiction, and narratives. Students might create a fictitious journal for an imaginary character or historical figure, and write fictional newspaper articles as well (p. 1).

It seems that the needs of the students are in the end what dictates how we should use journals in EFL classrooms or how they are classified. The Saskatoon Public Schools host a website called Instructional Strategies Online, which has an entire section devoted to journal writing. The authors of the site maintain that journals can be adapted precisely to fit the needs of the classroom and offer the following classification:

- a. Personal journals are journals that allow students to write about their feelings, opinions, and expressions.
- b. Dialogue journals are conversations in writing, often between the student and the teacher or classmates.
- c. Reading response journals are used to capture students' reactions to books. The entries might include questions, letters to characters, predictions,
- d. Math Journals provide students with opportunities to explain their thinking about solving math problems and learning math concepts.
- e. Science Journals are a great way for the teacher to have a better understanding on how the students are thinking about the science lesson and incorporate personal ideas with observation and interference
- f. Art Journals give students a place to explore and document their personal creative processes. (p. 2)

The potential uses for this type of recording document are numerous and “new types” of journals can still be invented. However, according to an analysis of the literature, the

dialogue journal is the most commonly used type of journal in EFL/ESL classrooms.

According to Peyton (1998), a dialogue journal is a book in which each student develops a private written conversation with the teacher for a period of time such as a school year or semester. She writes that journal use over time works better than using them for short periods. Usually, the teacher reads the entry written by the student and comments. The student in turn responds to the teacher in written form. The exact focus of the comment may depend on the purpose of the journal is.

About Journal Writing

Journal writing is one of several techniques teachers used to help their students improve their writing skills. We write journals for many different reasons prompted by many different purposes. In exploring what has been done and said about journal writing regarding its usefulness as perceived by students, I first turned to *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms* by Richards and Lockhart (1996) where journals are described merely as documents with written responses to teaching events. The primary function of a journal according to these experts is to record what happens in the writer's closest area of experience. If what they write centers on their classrooms Richards and Lockhart (1996) call those "classroom experiences".

According to Boud (2001) when we write in our journals we may want to capture an experience, record an event, explore our feelings or make sense of what we know. He says that journal writing can be viewed through many different lenses: as a form of self-expression, a record of events, a form of therapy, or a combination of these and other purposes. He views journal writing through the lens of learning, as another form of reflective practice, a method to find meaning in events and experiences and make sense of the world and how we operate within it. Boud also claims that journal writing can be used

to re-envision what we do and how we do it. It can be used in formal courses, professional practice, and many other areas. It also fulfills a journal writer's desires to let other people see what he or she saw in something and lets us see that because we are all different and so are our perceptions of the world.

For Lewis (2009) journal writing is more than "just setting your students loose with a blank pad of paper." She claims that an effective journal writing program does not mean you just sit back and relax while your kids write with no clear plan. She advises using well-chosen journal topics, listening to classical music, and working with checklists to make the most of your students' daily writing time. In her class, students write in journals every day for about twenty minutes. By writing every day, Lewis aims at her students gaining fluency while getting a chance to practice important punctuation, spelling, and style skills in context. Most days, she gives them a specific topics to write about; though not on Fridays when her students "free write," which means they get to write about whatever they want. Lewis thinks that with proper structure and inspiration, students will come to cherish journal writing time as one of their favorite times of the school day.

Journal writing is also called journaling by Pavlina (2007) who says that journaling is one of the easiest and most powerful ways to speed up your personal development, and for that you only need to get your thoughts out of your head and put them down in writing. Pavlina believes journaling provides students with a way to learn things about themselves that they might not have known. For him, there is more for students in journaling than only recording a personal diary of their thoughts and experiences, In fact, he believes that the power of this activity goes far beyond verbal photography.

Boud (2001) says that journals are potentially as unique as the authors they belong to. He also says that journal writing and learning are closely related. For him there are

many ways of thinking about journal writing in relation to learning. Journals have in fact several other essential functions because they also show that their writers have learned, how writers have learned to express themselves, how journals can help other people learn. Individuals can use journals to enhance their own learning. Boud remarks that such learning is the result of one unique characteristic of journal writing which is its capacity to create space for reflection. In other words, the more you reflect the more you learn and precisely journal writing facilitates reflection.

More definitions of Journal Writing

(Lea, 2010) says that journal writing help to make meaning of life's events and can help improve our communication with others. According to her whether we are writing or speaking, our goal is to communicate our thoughts and feelings. When journal writing, you have the freedom to convey vague ideas and give them definition and form, to rescue feelings and examine and nurture them into a form that makes sense. One technique she recommends to make better use of classroom journals is to create the habit, at the end of each school year, to have students read their journal entries written at the beginning of that school year. According to her, to recall where one was a year ago, their hopes and dreams and fears, see their progress, what they were working on, what was going on for them emotionally. Both the teacher and student have to reflect and the teacher should find patterns as well.

Giogia (2011) says that keeping a journal leads to self-discovery, insight and problem solving. When a person writes down thoughts, feelings and reactions to people and events, and then comes back to what he/she has written down, there is potential for clarity of thinking and criticism of one's own behavior. Then, journaling can be an effective path leading to personal growth. This introspection opens the door to a bigger understanding of

actions and relationships and ultimately might be the cause for positive changes. She recommends to use journals as a way to deal with everyday problems and especially avoid negative thinking. Ultimately this author says that: “gaining insight through journaling might salvage one’s own feelings or those of others.” Though this author specifically does not refer to journal writing in the context of an EFL classroom, the implications easily to the conditions of student journal writers who can join the experience of learning through the reflective condition of journal writing.

Tuan (2010), who says that classroom writing is essential academic writing, believes that journal writing is a tool that helps to reach and improve this goal. He believes that journal writing help learners “write better and better day by day” since it provides learners with free opportunities to write what they wish whenever they feel like writing. Tuan advises to use essays in the form of pretest and posttest as instruments to measure students’ writing proficiency level in terms of fluency and accuracy. For fluency Tuan means the ability to produce language in real time whereas accuracy is the ability to avoid error in the production of the language. Tuan seems to consider fluency and accuracy as prominent indicators of the efficiency of journal writing as a technique. Whether he came to that conclusion personally or as a result of his own research is not stated in the literature review of his project.

Journaling and reflective teaching

In my research I learned that Fulwiller (1982) says that a journal can be both a formal rigorous assignment and a place for students to practice imaginative thinking. Also journal writing, in the widest sense, is an interdisciplinary learning tool with a place in every classroom; it is not only for the English teacher any more than numbers belong to the math teacher or speaking belongs to the language teacher. When I read that I thought this

concept presented journals under a different light. In the past I used journals in composition and literature classes as outside assignments, but did not use them often in the classroom itself, preferring to let students write on their own. Some students used them well, while most never really figured out what kind of writing they were supposed to do in them. Lewis (2009) says that journals work when students use them actively, and in connection with writing.

Reflection is used by the EFL teachers to improve their own practice. Farrel (1998) says that reflective practice is becoming a dominant paradigm in ESL/EFL teacher education programs worldwide. As he says reflection in teaching refers to teachers subjecting their beliefs and practices of teaching to some degree of critical analysis. Farrell says there is one way to promote reflective practice for experienced EFL teachers and that is through journal writing. Farrell sought to investigate in what ways regular journal writing promotes reflective thinking. His study focused on three experienced EFL teachers in Korea who came together weekly to reflect on their work. The process included regular journal writing by each participant. The study examined what the teachers wrote about in their journals; and whether the level of reflection was descriptive or critical. The teachers' journal entries were studied and coded according to the topics they wrote about, and these served as a measure of critical reflectivity. The results though not dramatic showed that:

1. Teachers wrote about the problems faced in their teaching, their personal theories of teaching, and they described their approaches and methods;
2. Two of the teachers were reflective in their orientation to teaching, the other teacher was not.

Bailes C., Hulsebosch P. and Martin D. (2010) probably agree with Farrel. They examined the content of reflective journals written by six deaf pre-service teachers during

their student teaching in classrooms with hearing students. In doing so, the authors analyzed and compared the journal entries to the established literature on student teaching. Not surprisingly results indicated that these student teachers focused on many of the same issues mentioned in the literature on reflective teaching with hearing student teachers—pedagogy, teaching strategies, and relationships with students—and these student teachers often did so by incorporating key elements of deaf culture into these categories.

Journal Writing: Assessment and Grading

Harmer (2004) indicates that journals make students reflect and bring them into introspection since they are writing essentially for themselves, though of course, the teacher may at some point request that material for evaluation purposes, or to communicate with them personally, individually or directly. A popular belief is that writing must be done voluntarily and should ideally be the product of the writers' decisions to communicate their ideas to other, which is precisely what Conroy, Marchand & Webster (2009) try to demonstrate when they say that the only thing all students need to write is proper motivation. Other principles and concerns surrounding the use of journal writing for language learning, according to Lapan (2002) and Varner and Peck (2003), include the treatment and quality of feedback, error corrections, follow up, conferencing, learner empowerment, confidentiality, the inadvertent role of teacher as counselor, and trust. How can a secondary student, a middle teen, open up to a person who looks more like a father figure than a reliable friend?

As expressed by Harmer (2004, 125): "Students must feel empowered by writing journals rather than seeing this task as yet another learning chore". When we give our learners this sensation of power over what they can do to learn English it is then easier for them to understand they can do their own learning.

Here is an example provided by the work of Wong, Kember Chung, & Certed, (1995) who decided to assess reflective journals. For them the concept of reflective learning has been widely adopted in many of the teaching curricula today. They claim that reflective learning is of particular relevance to the education of professionals because it encourages students to integrate theory with practice, appreciate the world on their own behalf, and turn each experience into learning experiences. While educators seem to have accepted the educational benefits of reflection, research into reflective learning suffers from a lack of reliable methods for assessing whether reflection takes place and the level of any reflection. That study attempted to develop and test coding systems for written reflective journals based on models of reflective thinking. The reflective journals submitted by the students were used to study content analysis and the findings suggest that student writing can be used as evidence for the presence or absence of reflective thinking.

This is in a way a form of grading, but the reliability of that (the act of grading) is questioned by others. Mahoney (2010) says that an important concept in the process of journal keeping is that the student has to feel safe. Many teachers report that when they allow students to write with freedom, without any grading of any sort, then is when the real benefit of journal writing is seen. Journals are a way for a student to share as an individual, and each entry is consequently the product of that individual. Walker (2006) feels the same way and yet she says it is important to incorporate some form of grading into the whole activity. She says that if the instructor chooses to integrate journal writing into a course, unless the journals have an effect on the grades, students will put very little effort into their writing. In other words, adding a grade to the journals puts value to them and establishes their importance. Apparently 10% to 20% of a grade is what she suggests, though it is up to the individual instructor to weight the journals accordingly or in some way to ensure that

students feel the journal writing assignments matter and are of significant value. Walker also claims that these journals can be a commitment for the student as well as the instructor, but they can potentially provide valuable insight and reflection. The strength of journal entries is related to the students' motivation toward their own learning processes. If a student is motivated, the process will be seen as an investment instead of time consuming. In order to grade more effectively, Werder (2007) advises to establish standards known to both, the teacher and his students, a rubric or “simple criteria sheet” on which the instructor will base assessment and assignments.

In my research I found several rubric sheets. All of them were different in terms that they emphasized different aspects of journal writing. Below there is one that I especially liked which emphasize process and content over grammar and vocabulary. It can be accessed through the following link, :

<http://imet.csus.edu/imet1/julie/webquest/text/driverslog.htm>

JOURNAL WRITING RUBRIC

Category	1	2	3	4	Your Score
Evidence of Daily Writing	Many entries are entirely absent	Some entries are missing	All entries are present, but some reflect partial, haphazard engagement	All entries are carefully constructed and presented in their entirety	1
					2
					3
					4
Organization	Pages are out of order and/or physically detached from notebook	Pages are dated and easily navigable	Pages are dated, well-ordered, and titled accordingly	Journal is navigable according to subject, topic, title, and date so thoroughly that no clarification by the author is necessary.	1
					2
					3
					4

Topical Relevance	Entries have no relation to subject of focus	Entries are related to subject of focus and include extraneous, unrelated content	Entries are related to subject of focus, and include supporting or related content	Entries display full, in-depth engagement with relevant topics and draw personal connections	1
					2
					3
					4

The site where I found it is called Internet Masters of Education Technology and is apparently part of an educational initiative of the Sacramento State.

Here is another rubric that I found interesting.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Category	4 - Exceeds Standards	3 - Meets Standards	2 – Standards Barely Met	1 – Standards Not Met	Score
<i>Completion of Discussion Questions</i>	Student has attempted to answer all discussion questions.	• Student has attempted to answer most discussion questions.	• Student has attempted to answer some discussion questions.	• Student has attempted to answer few discussion questions.	
<i>Effort</i>	Student’s response is very detailed.	• Student’s response has some details and depth.	• Student’s response is limited in detail and depth.	• Student’s response lacks any detail and depth.	
<i>Organization</i>	• Journal entry is logical and effective.	• Journal entry is generally logical and effective with a few minor mistakes.	• Journal entry is somewhat illogical and confusing in places.	• Journal entry lacks logical order and organization.	
<i>Accuracy</i>	• Student uses grammar, spelling, word order, and punctuation correctly.	• Student usually uses grammar, spelling, word order, and punctuation correctly.	• Student has some problems with spelling, word order and punctuation.	• Student has significant number of errors in grammar, spelling, word order, and punctuation.	

This one does not use prompts but several “discussion questions” to which students must respond. The teacher then assigns a score according to the criteria give, and the score is in a range that the teacher decides. I found this rubric in the following link:

<http://charter.mercedlearn.org/docs/rubrics/Journal%20Writing%20%20Rubric.pdf>

Some Problems with Journal Writing

According to Walker (2010) the use of journals has two possible negative aspects. First, there is the potential for the teachers to hurt students' feelings with criticism. Second, there is the loss of instructional time needed to teach course material.

For the first, Walker suggests a simple remedy: do not criticize. For the second, Walker advises being strict with the use of time by limiting journal writing to a ten-minute maximum. Another option is to assign topics related to the central topic of the class. For example, you can ask students to write a definition of some general concept at the beginning of the class period, something related to the central theme of that day's class, and at the end of the period, when a new aspect or perspective about the general concept has been taught, students can be asked to describe how their own perception has changed as a result of what they learned.

According to Sebranek (1997) some teachers fail to use journal writing correctly because they rely entirely on themselves. This attitude is known as the Mug and the Jug approach, a model invented by Rogers (1969) that has been around for quite a long time. This approach was first mentioned in the book *Freedom to Learn* by Carl Rogers who presents it as the idea that teachers are knowledge-givers, so they play the role of jugs that constantly fill up mugs, while students are mere recipients of that knowledge just in the same way as mugs are filled up by jugs. According to Rogers, this old model of education

minimized the student to the role of a simple receiver of information. Such an approach could affect the way student journals are handled since in most classrooms it is the teacher who makes decisions on how to manage class activities. Even today, high schools have been accused of relying heavily on the Mug and the Jug model (Burden, 1999). The assumption that it is all right for teachers to have complete control over what students do in class has endured for a long time, but these days there are those who believe in practicing the opposite and giving up part of that power of making decisions, so students can play a more active and responsible role in their own learning. This idea of students doing their own learning is backed by authors such as Cotten (1995) who said about the topic: "By becoming aware that a text is not just a store of information, students realize they too are authorities on a subject." According to this we could help our students into being more original so they do not see themselves as borrowers of other people's ideas. Once students learn to reflect on what they read, Cotton expects that students could augment their written responses by using more substantive reflections.

Having poor writing prompts to write about might be another problem. Hopkins (2008) defines a prompt as a sentence to complete, a question to respond to, or a quote to explain. A prompt should be teacher-tested and good enough to motivate students to write. The teachers he interviewed gave him some suggestions:

If I were the teacher, I would...

If I could give one piece of advice to any person in history, that'd be...

Describe a dream that you had recently. Provide as many details as possible.

The best lesson my parent (or any relative) ever taught me was...

In sum, taking into consideration our students' cultural background is necessary when using journal writing: what they know and what they do not know of the culture of

the target language may affect their responses. For Boud the conditions under which journal writing takes place represent another problem. This aspect can have a powerful influence on what is produced and the extent to which writers can engage in critical reflection. If journals are to be used in courses, great care needs to be taken about how they relate to assessed work. There should be separate space and time for reflective activities as well as graded activities. Kember D. and Kelly M. (1993) seem to support this need to make sure there is enough of both things since they express concern for the amount of work assigned to a project. Students' workload should be administered reasonably so it can be effective but not disheartening and overwhelming.

Boardman (2010) says that journals can be tools for free writing and that they can be used throughout the day, at different times of the day and for different purposes. According to her first a student must decide what type of journal he or she will use and it is also advisable to think about the purpose of the journal and how to use it. The Saskatoon Schools in their web page called Instructional Strategies Online differ from Boardman and recommend students' journals to be loose-leaf notebooks or folders because "individual pages should be contained in some way so that they are not lost over time". This website also suggests not grading or correcting the writing in journals: only finished pieces should be used for grading and instead the teacher could comment on students' writing, offer suggestions, remarks, questions, and encouragement whenever possible. Sometimes students will respond to the teacher's comments. Teachers should avoid asking students to use journals simply as a way to record the day's events since that could encase those students in a routine of writing diary entries without reflection or real purpose. Teachers can reduce this by encouraging students to write about a variety of topics and take what they feel are the better entries and develop them into finished pieces. Furthermore, journals

should offer students the opportunity to reflect on their world and expand their awareness of what is happening in their lives. For many students journals should be a rich source of ideas for writing and for those reading what their classmates have written is yet another way to connect with their classmates when effectively they become peer reviewers.

Another problem with journals circles around the issue of privacy. Harmer (2004) says that journal writers know beforehand that while basically they are writing for themselves, later on teachers may evaluate that material if previously requested. Consequently, students might set a limit to their introspective expression if they decide not to insert their real thoughts because they don't really want to entrust their teacher by revealing their thoughts about their inner selves. This is something Gruwell (1999) tried to avoid in her students so what she did was to let her students decide what to share in their journals with the premise that they knew their teacher could potentially decide the content of their journals with the rest of the class. Perhaps Harmer forgot to consider this specific detail when he wrote that journal writers' primary audience is themselves claiming that journals may lead students into introspection.

The aspect of confidentiality in Journal Writing

The NEA (National Educators of America) adopted in 1975 a Code of Ethics of the Education Profession with two principles: Commitment to the Student and Commitment to the Profession with the purpose to establish rules to self-regulate ethics in their practice. When a teacher uses journal entries to get knowledge about a student's personal information, that is obviously not ethical and goes into direct violation of what is stated in literal eight of the code of ethics which says: "the educator shall not disclose information about students obtained in the course of professional service unless disclosure

serves a compelling professional purpose or is required by law”. That statement also includes data obtained by reading student journals.

Hopkins (1999) wrote an article about journal writing that was revised and published in 2008 by the designers of www.educationworld.com. The article included opinions of several teachers who shared their experiences and results after using journal writing in their own classes. Many of them agree on another important aspect of journal writing: confidentiality. Students will not open up if they know from the beginning their production is going to receive a score or even worse it could be exposed to others.

One of the teachers quoted by Hopkins said: “Journal writing provides students an opportunity to improve writing skills and a chance to 'vent' in their writing. As long as the students know that what they write remain confidential, they will share with you amazing things" (page 2). Also according to these teachers in Hopkins’ study, journal writing seems to work well most of the time, though there is a series of problems both big and small that keep it from being an ideal tool. Perhaps the main problem is to determine an appropriate means of measurement and assessment that go beyond faculty perceptions, and also it is necessary to find a way to establish limits to what a teacher can ask in the form of prompts that if not thought out carefully may end up in undesirable circumstances as in the following case reported by Jenkinson (1994) in 1990 in seven cities of the U.S. (from Oregon to New Hampshire) hundreds of angry parents protested what they perceived to be some of the wrongs perpetrated by public school teachers.

The U.S. Department of Education conducted hearings across the nation, giving citizens the opportunity to testify on proposed regulations for the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment, commonly referred to as the Hatch Amendment. Grieving parents and teachers denounced courses, teaching methods, and specific assignments. Many of the

protesting parents accused the schools of invading student privacy in sex and drug education classes, in counseling sessions, and in English classes. Some of the parents denounced any questions and/or assignments that call for students to express their feelings or opinions about anything. They gave hundreds of examples of questions and activities through which teachers invaded the privacy of students and/or their families. Here are only a few:

Are you going to practice religion just like your parents?

Who has the last word in your family?

What is your parents' income?

Do you believe in a God who answers prayers?

How important is making-out with a girl?

Jekinson calls this an “invasion of privacy”, a charge that cannot be dismissed lightly. He recommends teachers, counselors, and administrators consider carefully the classroom questions, activities, and assignments that call for the revelation of private information about students and/or their families and advises educators to ask themselves questions like these:

- What objectives are being served by the questions, and other activities?
- Why must anyone know this particular information?
- How will it be treated?
- Who will have access to it?
- What harm might result to students or their families if other teachers, students, or administrators have access to the information?

Sometimes students reveal private information without any questions being asked, secrets about themselves and their families because they trust their teachers. When such information is volunteered, it is certainly not an invasion of privacy; however, it is imperative that such information be treated confidentially, except in the case of child abuse, which goes under legal jurisdiction.

Benefits of Journal Writing

Journal writing in EFL classrooms is an activity essentially brought by the teacher. In the past, teachers also decided the topic, the time and everything else about using journals in class and the students had to follow instructions and remain quiet. Today those behaviors seem to be changing: most experts agree that students could benefit from receiving some of the power and responsibility in decision-making as a measure that could help them become better and also more independent, (Lapan, 2002). For Lapan, today, more than ever, schools must empower students to improve their academic achievement and become motivated, lifelong autonomous learners. Vockell (2000) says that students at almost any age are capable of taking charge of their own learning. This learner autonomy could reflect a shift in attitude that may manifest in other aspects of their own school activities such as journal writing. Learner autonomy may lead to student empowerment, which could allow the students to decide what to write about, and who to write to.

Felder & Soloman (2009) said that active learners tend to retain and understand information best by doing something active with it, and that something could be discussing it, applying it or explaining it to others. Fulwiller (1982) says journals are also very adaptable tools. Teachers in all subject areas and all grade levels find it easy to add more writing to a class by using journals. Even class size may not be a problem because this kind of informal writing, if handled properly, does not take more teacher time than necessary.

Journals can be skimmed, read thoroughly, or not read at all, depending on the teacher's interest and purpose. Personally, I haven't found this flexibility in other types of documents which is yet another reason why I chose journal writing over other types of writing as the center of this project

One of the other beneficial aspects journal writing seems to have is how it puts together what Sebranek (1997) calls content, meaning concepts, theories and so on, with student feelings. The practice of journal writing should foster learning experiences regardless of what students are studying at the moment, in instances both emotional and intellectual. In other words, if one student is receiving instruction in Algebra, the impressions received can be written down along with opinions on how the new material was presented, how relevant it was to the student's eyes and what expectations it causes when that knowledge is put into practice. We can see here that the students' perceptions are important for evaluating not only the output but also the input provided in class during journal writing sessions.

Journal writing is a technique often used in other fields. Apparently, this happens for the reflective attitude it requires since journals are based mainly on experience. As an example there is the work of Barry and Singer (2001) of the University of West Florida who wanted to reduce maternal psychological distress in mothers whose babies were treated in Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU) by using journals as a therapeutic activity. They were asked to write about their situations for at least thirty minutes, four days in a row. The results of this research project showed a great difference between the treatment and control groups, indicating that journals can be used as another tool when counseling is not enough. There were implications for practice beyond the NICU: other people suffering of some similar traumas could benefit from using journals the same way as in this case.

Another thing that could be said about the use of journals is how much a writer can learn about himself or herself by using a journal on a regular basis. Richard-Amato (2003) says that journaling, and more specifically reflective journaling, is among other things, a path to developing the ability to:

Organize your thoughts

Explore questions and fears

Reflect on the day's events

Express our joys and frustrations

Plan improvements and incorporate new ideas

Many teachers work hard in order to have their students improve their writing skills and for that they use what Spack and Sadow (1983) call the traditional composition teaching method. It is a standard process that focuses on the form and correctness of a finished product. Spack and Sadow say that first language composition researchers have shown that by using a traditional composition teaching method, which focuses on the form and correctness of a document, teachers ask students to produce writing which does not reflect the actual writing process. According to their most school-sponsored writing does not involve the self-motivation, contemplation, exploration, and commitment, which characterize real life writing. They recommend that in addition to being taught expository writing, students should have more opportunity for expressive writing in their writing courses to allow them to become better academic writers. According to some second language composition researchers and teachers, these recommendations are applicable to ESL college students because their composing strategies are similar to those of native English-speaking college students. Most importantly Spack and Sadow think that ungraded, uncorrected journals can provide a non-threatening way for students to express themselves

in written English. In their research they work with their own type of student-teacher working journals that were different from student personal journals in two important ways: first, the topic of working journals was not personal, but was rather an outgrowth of the writing class; and second, the teacher regularly wrote journals to the class on the same subject and included in those journals, selected student journal entries. They say that the advantages of this approach were that a common awareness developed around issues relevant to ESL composition, that students came to see writing as a way to generate ideas and to share them, and that teachers became participants in the writing process. Richards and Lockhart (1996) say that the recording of what they call classroom experiences, that is events that happen in the teaching practice are especially useful for student teachers who could use them as a source of reflection that would eventually lead to the improvement of their own practice.

Sebranek, Kemper and Meyer (2006) compare journals with diaries, though they are specific in stating that journals go deeper into the writer's inner world. They also remark that the main source of what is written in a journal comes from the writer's personal experiences. They show there is a fundamental difference between journals and diaries. While diaries are meant to be a very private record of the everyday events and impressions, journals also they constitute an act of reflection though journals are not necessarily private. This "inner world" mentioned by Sebranek, is hard to access with a casual overview of things and can possibly be attained only by the use of introspection. It is the sum of a writer's personal experiences, plus its careful, impartial, analysis and understanding, what truly makes a journal a more valuable tool than a diary.

Smalzer (1996) frames journal writing in the product approach, implying that it's a form of expressive writing which can be later used as the base for objective writing.

Objective writing, as Smalzer implies, is the logical opposite of subjective writing, which is usually dominated by the writer's own subjectivity whereas in objective writing no editorial remarks are allowed for the nature of this kind of writing is only to describe facts in a way devoid of any subjectivity. Smalzer sees the construction of a formal core writing assignment happening through stages and one of those stages is the use of private journals to which students are expected to respond subjectively. Later on, when they move from subjectivity to objectivity is that Smalzer indicates that academic writing will be achieved.

Peyton and Reed (1990) call journal writing a "versatile" tool, indicating that journals easily adjust themselves to the needs of the writer and if handled properly can go beyond the single record of events. Specifically, they refer to the use of dialogue journals, which can benefit students of any age group for their unique characteristics. The differences really begin with two parameters: the way journals are handled and their purpose. In my investigation I found the classical journal types, the ones everyone commonly know and use, but as I progressed I discovered that actually there are more some completely unheard of types, even in my own area of experience. In sum, journals are as diverse as the people who become journal writers.

That diversity seems to be more evident in dialogue journals. A dialogue journal implies the use of oneself as a different voice yet part of the same individual so you write asking or commenting while you also answer or respond. This activity, called *inner dialogue*, goes one step further into one of the purposes of journals which is getting students to reflect about their own learning, day to day experiences, opinions, feelings in general and so on. According to Peyton and Reed (1990) doing it this way leads to a more sincere and open disclosure than using journals as simple recording tools. Peyton also says that the journal partner does not have to be the teacher; in fact it could be anyone with a

level of proficiency that allows communication between the writer and the reader. Unlike other types of school writing, which is often only for purposes of evaluation, dialogue journals are interesting, interactive, mainly about personal topics, and quite connected with the life of the classroom. Both, teacher and student or another partner, write to each other in an informal, direct style about topics of interest for both, usually every day at elementary level, two or three times a week for more experienced students. Dialogue journals do not replace natural conversation, but help in “breaking the ice”. They help develop confidence, self-esteem and trust in their teachers. In addition, they are an excellent alternative to the traditional classroom tasks of journal entry and report writing. Staton (1987) says that keeping a journal allows students to develop a more coherent self-expression and a personal "voice"- aspects of writing which are often lost when basic composition skills are stressed.

Journal Writing as a Research Tool

One other expert with similar ideas about using dialog journals would be Santana-Williamson (2001) who worked with teacher learners in Northern Brazil. Looking for a way to have her students reflect, she instructed her students to use dialog journals. She herself had a journal of her own where she kept notes on the progress of her students and those notes usually were accompanied by numerous reflections that she included in her final report of this experience. One of the most outstanding conclusions she reached is that telling students to be reflective from the very beginning was not enough. Out of the seventeen students she began with, only one was reflective from the very beginning and that was a fact that could not be attributed to Santana’s intervention since the others showed lower reflective skills. It was then necessary to show the rest how to be reflective. It was a slow process, which began by asking students to reflect on suggested topics at first. Little by little, students were encouraged to find their own topics to write about until it was a

natural thing for them, and a necessity, to write and reflect about their experiences in and out of the classroom. After she did that it was then that the initial objectives for that course could be achieved. It is an interesting fact to consider since these were not young students but teacher students with a certain level of education already. One exercise Santana asked these students to perform was to work on an event in class, which they would recall later on and describe without making comments or giving opinions. Finally they had to review and respond to that material. One important detail was that these stages had to be performed on different days, especially the reflection period because “we tend to oversee our errors when we are tired.” If they needed to be shown how to reflect properly then students with lower education levels could be in need of similar treatment if they engage in journal writing projects as well.

Crème (2008) sees journal writing is a new type of writing, *hybrid writing*. As it was implied before, Crème is not the only one who sees journals as a bridge to more elaborate forms of writing. Smith (2009) \in his article *Improving Discussion Strategies within a Reading Classroom* says journals are in fact part of the process to gain the skills for academic research. For him reading journals are intensive and independent assignments that require the students to read summarize, give an opinion, and create discussion questions about what they have read.

There is also the idea that journals can act as a bridge between life narratives and more elaborate writing such as academic essays. Crème perceives journal writing as some kind of transitional space, one which allows students to develop the necessary skills to progress and meet the demands of academic writing. In a way it implies that journal writing can be used as one section of a road that leads to writing according to academic standards.

Varner and Peck (2003) prefer to think of journal writing as reflective writing and as an excellent learning strategy. However, they also argue that when journal writing is envisioned as an assignment the effectiveness of such an assignment when compared the uniqueness of each learner presents important challenges. They claim that the integration of learning with theory may be insufficient for real learning to take place. Also this idea that reflection is an excellent learning strategy is shared by Stamopoulos (2006) who recommends it specifically for preservice teachers. She conducted a project with preservice teachers working with individuals with diverse abilities. Writing reflectively helped them build positive attitudes towards people with disabilities, deeper knowledge and understandings of diversity, and greater confidence to develop more inclusive classrooms. Moore (2006) reports a similar “broadening” in the perspective of the participants of the project she conducted, also preservice teachers. Data sources used by Moore and her assistants consisted of reflective writings from participating in a Book Club, and initial and final surveys. Their findings revealed that the multicultural preservice teachers moved beyond simplistic understandings of issues of diversity to more inclusive and broader meanings. With these broader understandings also came their concerns and fears for teaching diverse learners. Encouraging preservice teachers to develop positive dispositions needs supporting them in teaching for diversity.

Conroy, Marchand and Webster (2009) from Saint Xavier University also believe that motivation is important if one expects his or her students to become knowledgeable writers. In order to carry on with their purpose they designed a Writer’s Workshop Program in which, as part of its curriculum, they considered and implemented activities that addressed multiple intelligences precisely to provide motivation more effectively- among those activities they included the use of journals.

Chabon and Lee-Wilkerson (2006) of Hampton University focus on journals as sources of information that help provide assessment and show how students apply course materials to their experiences whether on the personal or professional side. In their program, journals were used to record reflections on the connection of new material with old material, personal assumptions, and experiences in their relations with others

Journal Writing seems to be a versatile activity. Janesick (1999) of Roosevelt University felt that the best way to demonstrate journal writing as a valuable qualitative research technique was to write a journal herself and present her journal in the form of an article. For Janesick the target of the research is the very researcher and for that journal writing is “a type of connoisseurship” which allows the writer a better understanding of himself or herself as an individual and the processes of reflection that happen inside his or her mind. There is a lot to learn from reading Janesick’s well-written article: *A Journal about Journal Writing as a Qualitative Research Technique: History, Issues and Technique* where she presents a document “full of candid observations and explanations about the process of journal writing as it relates to research.”

Another author (Watson, 2006) tested the possibilities for the use of journals and discussed the existence of *simulacrum reflective journals*. For Watson, there is no equivalence between the real and its representation, so a journal can be a path to something entirely different. She says a journal can be “the source of inspiration for research” (p. 880) and because of that she wrote a simulacrum journal, quite similar in style to Janesick’s with the difference that Watson is a more consummate writer and her observations and language are quite sophisticated full of terms such as “intertextual sources” or “phantasmatic”.

In the end, Watson uses this simulacrum as a way to find truths about her own narrative and her approach to the research process discovering that research is only a quest

for a literary theme. In other words she may have devised these other purposes for the use of journals to end up performing the same act as many others journal writers, which is the endless search for finding who we are and the understanding of how we think and how we come to exist.

Ward (2009) explained that learners are better motivated if they know their writing will be read by an audience other than their teacher or instructor. He mentions that such audiences could be any of their peers, meaning in this case their classmates; yet, his personal interest lies in training his students into a more professional level of writing and he argues that writing to other students is still not an ideal test so what he actually does is to engage his students in collaborations with learners from partner classes. The idea is to find an external audience, people outside the class environment who in turn would be more critical and therefore more useful at providing feedback. On the other hand, Boud (2001) says that keeping journals private, away from the eyes of others, can be a useful principle to adopt in courses. It means that writing may not be as constrained, as it would be if it were going to be revealed to others and so the postponing of decisions about to whom and in what form what was written would be shown, can be liberating and even encouraging.

Progoff and the Intensive Journal program

Ira Progoff is counted among the most ardent believers of the power of journal writing as an activity that promotes not only reflection but in a greater aspect, the development of each individual that happens when we discover our dormant potential and then activate it to improve the quality of our lives. When interviewed once, Progoff (1993) said about journal writing that it is necessary because it leads to a person's further self-development. By writing and reading back their journal entries, new feelings and images appear in their minds from which new thoughts, images, and energies are generated.

Writing adds to the experience because we find that we are more in touch with our journal entries than we originally supposed. This process of writing and then reading back all those journal entries generates additional material that builds a momentum, which prepares us to develop our own potential.

Progoff, a renowned psychologist, invented the Intensive Journal System and has been so successful that he regularly trains and authorizes people that multiply the effect of the system he invented by offering workshops all over the United States and abroad as well. Progoff and his method has garnered him several followers. One of them even describes what the Intensive Journal system can do after participating himself.

The Potential Social Implications of Journal Writing

Blair (1981) in his article puts as an example of Progoff's success with an experimental program at a New York City facility for the elderly. Around 300 volunteers from the city's welfare and unemployment rolls were registered in a journal workshop as part of their on-the-job training as nurse's aides, dietary workers, security guards, maintenance men, and housekeepers. Ninety percent of them kept their journals over six months (they met once a week), finished their training, and continued with their hospital jobs. After a year, 80 percent of them either were still on the job or had gone on to better jobs. One in three had moved on to better housing; one in four had started night school or community college. Program officials gave the journal method much of the credit and agreed with Progoff: "Poverty is not simply the lack of money. Ultimately, it is a person's lack of feeling for the reality of his own inner being."

The Freedom Writers

One of the most interesting events in my research was to learn about the Freedom Writers. Theirs is an amazing story that illustrates how people can change their ways and

succeed even in the face of adversity. For me the most rewarding thing was to discover that they have used journals as tools to change their lives. It all began in the fall of 1994, at Woodrow Wilson High School in Long Beach, California, with Erin Gruwell, a young teacher who faced her first group of students, teenagers who were considered a difficult group. The class was made up by African-American, Latino, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Caucasian students, who had grown up in dangerous neighborhoods in Long Beach.

In the first few weeks of class, the students did not want to hear what their teacher had to say. Then one day Erin told them about the Holocaust. To her surprise, the students did not know anything about that event so she had them read stories related to the Holocaust, in particular Anna Frank's Diary and soon her students found themselves comparing their lives with those who lived in the face of danger just because they were different.

Later on when she asked how many in her class had been injured in the past almost everyone raised their hands. Erin asked her students to keep his or her own anonymous diary, recording their experiences with drug use, physical and mental abuse, and reactions to Erin's teaching style. The positive effect this activity made all the difference for this group who eventually named themselves "The Freedom Writers" to pay homage to the Freedom Riders, the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.

One of the values they learned was that they could be strong if they worked together and together they raised funds to bring Miep Gies, the courageous Dutch woman who sheltered the Frank family during World War II, to visit them in California. Soon after, Zlata Filipovi, another Holocaust survivor, also visited the Freedom Writers. So extraordinary is this story, especially because it's real, that it was made into a movie with the title *The Freedom Writers*. One of its highlights, besides the acting, which is very

convincing, is the moment when Miss Gruwell's students get to read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and feel identified with the suffering and angst expressed by Anne in the pages of her diary. They too had suffered in their own lives and they were also given the chance to express themselves through a journal, an act that would eventually change their lives forever.

Precious

The influence of Hollywood and its productions in our global culture is undeniable. Sometimes such influence is positive or it could be negative, but at the same time and for the extension of its reach it can easily touch us, and even change us, in many different ways. It is therefore rewarding to find in this unreal realm, examples that clearly reflect, and at the same time commend, the role of teaching and its importance in the development of the individual. One such case is *Precious*. This film tells the story of Precious who is a sixteen-year-old African American girl who is pregnant a second time and for that she is suspended from school. Precious lives with her abusive mother who under the influence of her perverted logic blames her daughter for the absence of her husband who is also Precious's father. This man is the father of Precious's two children who were conceived because Precious was forced by her father to have sex with him. As a result Precious feels unappreciated and during her second pregnancy she is forced out of school so she has to attend a special institution where she meets a different kind of teacher who encourages to read. When she is to write, Miss Rain uses journal writing to encourage her (in fact all the students had to keep journals in this school). Under her teacher's guidance, Precious, who has never before been treated and respected that way, learns to voice her long suppressed feelings in a journal. When Precious writes in her journal and then shares the details of her life to her fellow students she has a new lease on life. She breaks ties with her mother and

plans to complete a General Educational Development test. Also at the end, the responses to Precious's journal written by her fellow students can be seen and read, an example of how journals are far more than something to write on but also an instrument with the power to unite, and reunite, people that otherwise would not be together.

Music and Journal Writing

Some experts have connected the use of music as an aid for teaching student to use journaling. Lewis (2009) is in favor of the use of music in the classroom especially when the students are writing, only that not any kind of music should be used. She plays soft classical music. She believes that listening to classical music, especially Mozart, makes people smarter and thus, every time her students write in their journals, they want to be quiet so that they can hear the music and get smarter.

Whether this claim about Mozart's works, and by extension all classical music, being capable of making people, and especially little kids, smart is true or not, that is not going to be discussed here. However, Lewis is not the only one who feels this way: Beare (2009) says that the use of music in the classroom can make the entire learning process more enjoyable and can stimulate "right" brain learning. According to him researchers have reported that people scored better on a standard IQ tests after listening to Mozart. Apparently even people with Alzheimer's disease function more normally if they listen to Mozart and the music even reduces the severity of epileptic seizures. For Beare the most important point to remember when using music in the classroom is that it is an aid to learning and not a distraction; in other words, it is necessary to select music that accompanies and does not disrupt.

Beare advises using music to introduce an exercise, activate vocabulary and get students thinking in the right direction. Here is an example he offers: take a piece of music

or song, which can be associated with a certain activity or place ("New York, New York" sung by Frank Sinatra) and play the first 30 seconds of the piece. Soon associations come to students' minds - many more than if the lesson is introduced by saying, "Today we are going to talk about New York City".

Peterson (2009) claims that for teachers of ESL and EFL, it is necessary to go beyond the book and use alternative activities in the classroom like using music in the classroom though Peterson's recommendation is more oriented to the teaching of English songs. In a way Peterson uses music to set the tone of his classes.

That idea is not new: *Headway*, the ELT book series published by Oxford University Press does something similar so every extended listening included in those books is preceded and followed by a short excerpt of related music, usually the beginning and the final tones of a given piece.

According to Miller (1996) music helps to bring that relaxation and that clarity of mind, both so much needed for the development of a journal writing session (or any other kind of writing for that matter) and there lies the argument to add it in the form of a companion element to the journal writing sessions that are part of this project.

Now, in order to explain the importance, and also relevance, of having other students check their peers' production is that the following section on Peer Review is included.

What is Peer Review?

Academic peer review is the evaluation of creative work or performance by other people in the same field in order to maintain or enhance the quality of the work or performance in that field. The idea behind Peer Review is that a larger and more diverse group of people will usually find more weaknesses and errors in a work or performance and

will be able to make an impartial evaluation of the piece of writing. In this project each participant would be peer reviewed by another fellow student. Each participant would be a writer and then, also someone else's reviewer

One goal in using journal writing is to encourage students to be more responsible for their learning "...because people learn language as they use it, it is logical to have them learn English as they study meaningful content, rather than to have them study the English language as a separate subject apart from meaningful content" (Freeman & Freeman, p. 32).

The practice of authors who ask an equal to read and comment on their writing is called peer review. According to the site www.linfo.org, peer review keeps and improves quality both directly by detecting weaknesses and errors in specific works. It is used indistinctly in many different professional fields, including academic and scientific research, medicine, law, and even computer software development.

Peer review ensures that an article—and therefore the journal (as in a periodical journal)—maintains a high standard of quality, accuracy, and academic integrity. When you consult peer-reviewed sources, you can count that is a wealth of established, verified knowledge. Citing such sources in your assignments gives your work credibility and demonstrates that you're familiar with the issues and trends in the field of study. When I thought of this project I wanted to make the experience of journal writing different. I wanted the participants, my students, actually enjoy Journal Writing this time and also perceive it as something more than a light activity. Not that I believed they had not enjoyed working with journals with other teachers, nor did I have any evidence they thought to prove Journal Writing was a light activity; I only suspected it was that way. Therefore, by adding music to the participants' working time I wanted to provide a cozy environment and by having the participants work with one of their classmates I wanted to widen their

audience awareness. Their journals would be what Bromley (1989) and McDonald & Roselli (1997) call “Buddy Journals”: These authors ask their students to work together and give feedback to one another that is after they are trained to give feedback properly. Their students first attend training sessions where they are told what to look for in their partners’ works and what kind of feedback to provide. I liked that idea and I felt that I could do something similar so the participants would receive feedback from their partners and also from me. I sought if other experts besides Bromley, MacDonald and Roselli had worked with peer review and the results of that search, which are somewhat diverse, are included in the following section.

Some projects that explore Peer Review

I am already engaged in using peer revision applied to the use of journals and as part of the process of academic writing. One of the things I have observed is that students find it easier to reveal who they are in their writing to their peers rather than their teacher. It does not seem to be a reaction of rejection toward me but a natural attitude caused by the generational gap. Also reading what the experts below had to say reinforced my idea that having my students review one another’s journals would make the participation in this project more interesting

There have been several experts who have addressed the complexities of writing, including journal writing, and explored ways to make it easy for everyone. Soares (2006) in her research shows how peer review help improve journal writing, especially in content. Her work studies data collected from forty intermediate/advanced nonnative speakers of English enrolled in freshman composition for international students at a large private university. It also includes student reflections on peer review, which indicate that the process is helpful for their writing, not only journal writing, in more than one way.

According to Soares, peer review can help since it gives writers more options to consider when they revise their papers. Also peer review does not preclude teacher feedback, but is meant to supplement it. The qualitative study she conducted included the following research questions:

- 1 .Do students write helpful (text-specific) comments when they respond to a peer's paper?
2. What do students add to their papers as a result of the feedback given to them?
3. What do students have to say in reflections about the usefulness of peer review?

Soares remarks that peer review is always productive if proper training and structure are provided. She recommends strategies for interaction and revision.

Levine (2002) says that the difficulties EFL learners have in L2 writing are a reflection of their own problems in L1 writing. There is also one more thing central to this section that is the usefulness of peer review in this case to journal writing. Peers' assistance to the improvement of journal writing has been discussed to determine if that kind of feedback is really effective or perhaps the extent of its contribution is not really that significant and thus should be passed by, better neglected than praised. Levine's research aimed to find the similarities and differences in the peer responses of writing classes of different settings (one in an EFL setting and the other in an ESL setting). In a study conducted in Israel, the first group of students learned English as a foreign language while the other learned English as a second language while in the United States. The following were the research questions Levine worked with:

- 1) Are there differences in peer responses because of the different learning environments in EFL and ESL?

2) Is there a difference in attitudes toward peer response between students in EFL and ESL learning environments?

With regard to the first research question both similarities and differences were found in the revision behavior of Israeli EFL and U.S. ESL students. Most of the students in the U.S. group wrote more extensively while most of the Israeli students wrote shorter comments in an effort to complete the task quickly. Regarding the second research question there were also differences: the Israeli participants were more self-confident in ranking their writing abilities and more skeptical about peer evaluation. The students in the U.S. group were more consistent in their critical responses.

Paiva (2008) offers an interesting study, which introduces an element that is not frequent in most studies about peer review which is the use of electronic media. Claudio de Paiva conducted a study to see the significance of this element when used as a tool to improve the efficiency of peer review. Considering that these days more and more virtual communities are forming, it makes sense that such fact can be used to foster and perhaps awaken interest in the learning process.

These are the two research questions set at the beginning of de Paiva's paper:

1. Do learners develop their writing skills if cooperative learning strategies were applied into the digital context, namely through *wikis* (a type of blog)?
2. How do learners of English evaluate the process of collaborating in the digital environment to improve their writing skills?

This work examined the production and interaction of learners of English as a Foreign Language in a private *wiki*. *Wikis* aim to represent a new generation of web-based tools for collaborative learning and, according to Paiva, offer a meaningful context for

students to move towards autonomous learning. They favor process writing and student-student interaction in the online environment.

Chisholm (2003) did not write a study on peer review but an account of the apparent success the author had by using a certain method of instructional peer review of writing. Chisholm has written a paper where he gives instructions on how the writer should ask for feedback and the kind of review he should aim for; also, how to provide peer feedback that is meaningful to the writer and what the writer should do with that information.

Chisholm's paper is designed to set the student in what Chisholm calls "Collaborative Peer Review". According to him what students do once they receive the paper and read it is respond to four questions about the paper. They must also respond orally and engage in a general discussion of positive and negative aspects of the document and at the end they all must write their feelings on collaborative peer review. According to Chisholm (2003) once they have done this, students will be capable of:

- 1) Grasping the concept of collaborative peer review
- 2) Understanding appropriate procedures
- 3) Facing realistic problems in a supportive environment
- 4) Participating in an actual document review
- 5) Engaging in collaborative peer review beyond the classroom (p.3-4)

Regarding the responses he received, Chisholm does not offer numbers or statistics. He only says that applying this method has met with "considerable success" with very heterogeneous groups. Students found the paper interesting and easy to relate to. They liked the idea of being able to review in a more realistic situation and the fact they are doing this in groups makes the experience more inviting for them resulting in more "lively classes."

Coit's qualitative/quantitative study is part of this selection for the approach it had. Coit (2004) is very honest from the beginning by recognizing there is already a great number of studies out there that collectively indicate that peer review is one of the greatest tools in a writing class. What Coit offers is this relatively new concept of using peer review as the only way to correct all writing done during the entirety of the course. The writing course prepared by Coit was offered online at a university level and it was EFL oriented. Her study analyzed the types of corrections performed by the peer reviewers plus the first and last texts produced by the students were also examined to determine if there was any substantial and positive change in the quality of their writing skills. In the end portfolios containing two drafts of each assignment were prepared and collected. The first draft contained the corrections, comments and suggestions made by the reviewer and the second draft was the same paper now modified and improved by the student as a response to the reviewer's correction. Fifty of such portfolios were chosen at random and their contents evaluated to verify the success of the process considering the following criteria: cohesion, unity, structure, vocabulary and grammar. According to the numbers exhibited by this study there was an improvement in Coit's students' general score of 1.9, in a scale of ten, which is remarkable. Coit herself is the first to recognize that this data is not conclusive, that more research is desirable and should be conducted in order to confirm or rectify her findings. However, this work has validity in terms that opens new doors for more research focusing on the role students can play.

After reading these studies there is the general feeling that effectively Peer Review is a useful and powerful tool not to be neglected in our EFL/ESL writing classes. Each study offers something new. Soares searches for what makes feedback provided by a peer more meaningful than that offered by a teacher. Levine questions the incidence of different

settings for EFL and ESL in their learning processes. Claudio de Paiva Franco points that there are new paths to follow and how we can connect things such as peer review to the use of new technologies. Chisholm emphasizes the role of writers as the ones who benefit more from peer revision and delves into the necessity of those writers to make that role more active. Finally, Coit takes peer revision to a new level in a daring effort to focus more on the student rather than the teacher.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to offer a wide view of journals, journal writing and their importance. The chapter began by reviewing several definitions of what a journal is and other terms related to the activity called Journal Writing. Journals are versatile in nature and for that there are several possible classifications of types of journals. The chapter explored the possibilities of journals as a learning tool in EFL classrooms, its many benefits and also negative aspects in not handled properly. We have heard the voices of how other teachers have introduced journal writing as both a tool for their students to use and enhance their learning and also as a deposit of their reflection on their own teaching practice. Journals have proved to be so dynamic and adaptable in nature that are not only used in the educational field and therefore voices of other experts have also been included, experts such as Ira Progoff who has created his own method of personality development strictly based on the use of journals. Not only that but journals are perhaps the only form of writing that has been portrayed in movies as a path to change lives and thus two significant examples of recent years have been included, examples of films that show the relevance of journal writing when it is used to make a difference. Also journal writing lends itself to be used in combination with other features such as the playing of background music and the intervention of other students as peer reviewers whose usefulness was also explored in

separate sections of this chapter. Finally the possibility of assessing journal writing was considered though not much has been done in that aspect in comparison to other uses given to journals.

Journal writing seems to be an activity full of possibilities and implications. Its use in class, as in other fields, is promising though care and responsibility are required in using it as a pedagogical tool.

Chapter III

Methodology

EFL students are exposed to different teaching methods with the purpose of the development of specific areas of knowledge, the acquisition of a foreign language being one of those. What perceptions those students have of such methods is an interesting area to be explored and this study focuses on the perceptions secondary EFL students may have regarding the use of Journal Writing. In this Chapter, I will explain the methodology I used in order to carry on this research study. There are sections devoted to the participants, data collection sources, protocols and instruments used in the project, as well as a chronology of the research process.

Participants

Two groups of high intermediate English level were the participants, and both groups studied at the same secondary private school in Ecuador. At the time of the project their ages ranged 15-16 years old and were studying fifth course also known as *Segundo de Bachillerato*. The number of students in both groups came to forty with the target group made up of exactly twenty students.

The English proficiency level of the participants was initially measured by using the Second Language English Proficiency (SLEP) test as part of the usual procedures of the school (see Appendix 6). This happens in the month of September every year meaning that these groups had already been evaluated using the aforementioned test the year before this project began. The members of both groups were deemed High Intermediate.

Data Collection Sources

All the students of both groups were provided with an initial survey (see Appendix 3). The form I used for the initial survey and the final survey was written using the following sources www.sxu.edu, (website of Saint-Xavier university), www.jazanu.edu.sak, the website of Jazan university, and www.About.com (in their educational section), and was designed to collect their perceptions of journal writing mainly based on their experience with journals as a language learning tool. The survey was written in Spanish in order to allow students of both groups to express themselves better and with deeper answers.

A post survey (see appendix 4) was completed only by the students of the target group. The members of the other group were not required to take this survey because it asked information pertinent only to the procedures adopted by the project. The survey was administered the week after the intervention was over.

Also after receiving explicit instructions as to the journal writing procedures (see appendix 2), there was another evaluation considering an improvement in the writing skills of the participants. In order to establish a comparison both groups took the exam on the same date in a common classroom. The test used was the TWE test which evaluates the students' writing abilities. It is considered a reliable test in particular for that it is designed by the same organization that creates the TOEFL.

The teachers

I have twenty years of experience as an EFL teacher and was who envisioned and coordinated this research project. There was another teacher who collaborated evaluating the TWE exams and had a similar background. I purchased the TWE kit with instructions explaining how to use the test and the criteria to follow when assigning grades. My partner

teacher was paid an amount of money that was equivalent to his hourly salary paid by the school and according to the terms we both agreed on before the project began.

Observations

The observation was carried out by the researcher according to the following protocol:

The participants' impressions and interactions while going through the classroom journal writing practice were monitored and written down in my personal observation journal in the form of around twenty-five entries, twenty corresponding to what happened in class and the others that were the product of my personal reflection before and after the project. Also each student journal was collected at the end of each week for me to read them, take notes and then return them to the students the following Monday. They were collected a third time once the participants had read the comments written after their entries.

Research Plan

- On September 22nd, 2009, a letter was sent to the corresponding authorities of the secondary school requesting authorization to carry on the project.
- On October 2nd, 2009, the project began with an initial survey.
- From Oct. 5th to Oct 16th, 2009, classroom observations took place.
- On Oct. 19th, 2009, a post survey was administered.
- On Oct. 23rd both groups took the TWE test.
- From Nov. 2nd to Nov 4th, 2009, the results were analyzed.

Historical Description of the Intervention

I sent a letter of request for permission to carry out the research to the principal of the corresponding Language Department to work with both classes during 10 class-hours

throughout October 2009 (see Appendix 1). This authority and also the student participants gave their consent for participation in the research. Explanations were given to the participants in order for them to understand clearly what was going to be done. For many it was a bit of a surprise since they were accustomed to much simpler processes.

As I had planned the week before the project I gave detailed instructions (see Appendix 2) on what the participants needed to know about the use of journals. Also by then each student had already personalized his or her journal. Taking one idea from Lewis (2009) also we discussed possible topics to cover during each session and we narrowed all the possibilities down to twenty though only ten were necessary. All these prompts were written down on small pieces of paper that were put inside a container. The idea was that at the day before each session one student would pick one of the pieces of paper and that would be the entry of the following day.

The objective of this project was to explore students' perceptions about journal writing. The teacher researcher focused specifically in the areas of creativity, detail, and accuracy in the student's writing. In order to accomplish the objective, the researcher administered a student interest survey, a post survey and also collected student journals. The TWE test and my own journal were also used. This variety of data sources resulted in triangulation of the data.

Around forty students were targeted in two secondary classrooms but only one was object of intervention. The length of the intervention was two weeks, though there was a preparation period and another designated for assessment and analysis. During the week before the intervention, students were introduced to the program. They learned the rules and procedures of the program. The teacher researcher modeled and demonstrated the process that would be used throughout the program for the use of journals. Topics were

discussed with students to make them responsible for their own learning. Students also created covers for their journals and thus personalized that material.

In order to collect and compare data during the intervention some tools were created and applied. One of those tools was used to determine a baseline before the intervention. The initial collection method was the *student* survey. The survey questions were about attitudes toward the use of journals.

In order to assess the effects of the project the researcher used the following data collection methods a survey and a written test. The post- survey was based on the work of Al-Hazmi (2003) who developed his survey while at the University of Essex. The survey was meant to explore if and how the students' impressions about journal writing had changed due to the intervention. This one was used with the group that was object of the intervention. The questions included were the following:

1. In your opinion, is journal writing a good technique to use when learning English? Explain.
2. Do you feel you enjoy journal writing now more than before? Give reasons.
3. Would you like to continue using journals in class in the future?

How to begin a journal project

One interesting thing about today's websites is that they are host to several different individuals or groups that in turn offer information to the visitors of such websites. They are like an extra something, an added value or perhaps one more attraction in a shopping mall. One of such websites is www.About.com that has an entire section devoted to education run by educators who write about a wide variety of educational issues. There is always something for both teachers and students and in my case I was looking for ideas to use in my project. One suggestion they offer for anyone who wants to start a journal project

is to begin with something basic trying to keep the economically disadvantaged students in mind when picking a class journal for the students to buy.

Something basic and generic, such as a notepad, was more than enough for this project, however, there were students who preferred to buy notepads of more expensive formats because they were more “fashionable”. If it is not a real problem then it is a decision that teachers and students can make together, as it was in this case when the participants were given freedom to choose the format they felt more comfortable with.

The teacher is responsible for providing ideas that the students will use to decorate their journals. The teacher presents the works of former students with their permission. Students can use crayons, glue, ribbon, colored paper, markers and similar things, excellent for decorating journals. My male students wanted to use items that were more “masculine” so using stickers with their favorite characters was their choice.

The idea is to allow the students to decorate their journals and thus create in them the sensation that those books truly belong to them by conferring qualities an average notebook does not have. This process of personalization was important to ensure students would not only take care of their journals but actually *care* for them. The only constraint perhaps was that of social boundaries: in the present project students were asked to decorate their journals in good taste.

How journals were used in this project

As one of the productive skills in the learning of English as a foreign language, writing requires a certain amount of input, and also certain quality of input, in order to enable EFL learners to communicate in the target language (TL). The problem is how we connect language learning with real life situations. It has been my observation during my years of teaching English in Ecuador, that EFL teachers specifically find that exposing their

learners to real life situations, or quasi-real life situations, is more an ideal than an achievable goal.

The panorama seems an unwelcoming one for those teachers who are always seeking new strategies to accomplish their goal of having their learners successfully write in the TL. This project explored the activity of journal writing as a tool to increase EFL learners' writing production and sharpen their skills. Students in EFL classes in Ecuador and elsewhere are often asked to write about one topic their teacher came up with perhaps five minutes before the class begins. Students write during the given time with no other purpose than to follow blindly their teacher's instruction. At the end, the students give the teacher their journals which they probably won't see again in a week, or two, that is when their teacher finally finds time to sit down, read the entries and write some feedback-comment for each one of his students. The whole practice takes too long and by the time journals are given back the students may have even have lost interest.

The project was carried out in two different classes at the same secondary school in Ecuador, where English is taught as a subject and it is called Language B following the standards and requirements of the IB (International Baccalaureate) to which that school is associated. The two groups were observed. Both groups were similar in terms of age (15-16 year old), number (each group had twenty members), and the subject they chose as their major (Engineering, meaning in this context their study program is strong in Physics and Math). One of them received instruction following the curriculum assigned by the school while the other was subject of the intervention and also received the same instruction.

Prompts used in this project:

There is one prompt per session totaling ten. Some of them are obviously better than others in terms of how easily they can elicit a response.

- If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.
- A man's word is his bond.
- Any man can be father. It takes a special man to be a dad.
- Visions
- What if our school were like Hogwarts?
- The craziest party ever
- This is the coolest TV show
- The one person I'd like to meet, but probably won't...
- Things I don't have but I'd like to...
- What if we lived by the sea and we were pirates of the Caribbean?

How music was used in this project

The advantage of having the prompt picked the day before was that it allowed me to choose the most adequate music to act as background music during the writing session. I really liked the idea of Cambridge University Press of using music to introduce the theme of some of the listening exercises in their Headway series. That helps set the stage for the exercise in the minds of students, so I wondered if I could do something similar. What I did was to use segments of movie soundtracks that somehow were connected to the topics. I have to confess that I was more successful in some cases than others especially when the prompt really called for the use of imagination. Three prompts in particular were easily connected to film music:

- *What if we lived by the sea?*
- *What if we could change any aspect of the school?*
- *Imagine your friends and you are in terrible danger, what would you do?*

I took the liberty of making some changes then and the aforementioned prompts ended up being the following:

- *What if we lived by the sea and we were pirates of the Caribbean?*
- *Imagine that (your school) were Hogwarts (the school that attends the overly popular Harry Potter character). What would studying be like in this school?*
- *Imagine you're on a boat in the middle in the sea...*

I asked my students to close their eyes and imagine for a minute the situation suggested by both the music and the prompt. When the minute was up I set the time limit (usually fifteen minutes) and they kept listening to the music until it was time to finish the activity.

Not always did I have them listen to film music because not all the prompts were fantasy-related. Most prompts required their opinion and reasons to support such opinion such as: *School uniforms are necessary*, to which they were supposed to respond either positively or negatively. In those cases I asked them to think for a minute about the topic and organize their ideas in their minds. I felt my students' work would benefit with this "planning".

With or without introductory music, they continued listening to music. If I could not use film soundtracks then I played soft romantic songs in English. The advantage of using songs is that they have a relatively short duration, something in the vicinity of the four minutes so if I played three or four that would be equivalent to the amount of time I required them to write. Thus I used to tell the participants: "*When the third song finishes you have to stop.*"

Once the time was up students had to stop. About that, students were previously instructed not to stop too soon but to keep writing for as long as the last song kept going.

During the first two sessions some students experienced problems adjusting since it was the first time these students worked their journals in class and followed specific directions. It did not take them that long to get accustomed to the procedures though and by the third session almost everyone was working as it was previously planned. One other thing: students were instructed to write freely without worrying so much about being thorough in their use of conventions as it would be expected if they had been writing an academic paper. That was a call to be relaxed. The following step was to give their journals to a partner they selected previously. The role of such person was to read and comment on the other participant's production. This was done on a one-to-one basis meaning each participant would give the journal to only one person, always the same person, and in turn would read and comment on that person's production as well. Part of this project contemplated the participation of students not only as writers but also as peer reviewers in order to strengthen the sense of purpose students would have regarding the use of their journals. On deciding if there should be one peer reviewer or several (per participant that is), I consulted the works of Chisholm (2003), Coit (2004) and Soares (2006) and found no clear distinction or a definitive difference between one option and the other. I decided to go for something more practical so each participant had only one peer reviewer.

Peer reviewing journal entries

The only explicit training in journal writing that I gave the student participants was through brief indications on what to do, and in particular, and what not to do regarding peer review. Paulus (2000) and Tzumin (2004) have worked in providing proper training to peer reviewers. Some of those instructions suggested in their works would be:

- to comment substantially avoiding the usual "well done" or "wonderful".
- to keep in mind that people tend to be sensitive about what they write.

- to be honest but tactful at the same time.
- to use positive expressions and praise, but not criticize.
- not to correct grammar mistakes. (p.265)

These students were called “journal partners”. Their task was to read what the other student had written and then write a comment or an opinion at the end of the entry. They were also encouraged to give their opinions on that work, honestly but also in a respectful manner. The time for that activity was five minutes approximately and once they finished all journals were returned to their owners who in turn read their partners comments.

I collected each journal at the end of each week and read the five entries of each participant, the comment written by the “journal partner” and wrote my own comments. That meant one hundred entries with the comments from the journal partner to read and one hundred comments to write. Now, this is a good comment to come back to the questions I asked in page three of this same Chapter regarding the extension on the teacher’s comments. Hopkins (2008) says that some teachers check journal writing to work on their students’ polishing skills while others use journals as the one “uncorrected” form of writing that students produce. I decided it was important to write all those comments per entry because it was my way to offer feedback to my students. Proffoff (1995) recommends journal writers to attempt some type of sharing of this growth through journal writing with others. In this case it was a huge task but one that was rewarding for my students were curious and wanted to know what I had written about their work. I also followed my own rules and always tried to be honest but gentle with these amateur writers.

Student Journals as a Source of Data

The student journals of twenty students were analyzed to investigate how students recorded their reflections and perceptions of their course experience during two weeks.

Each student was expected to have approximately twenty journal entries at the end of the project. Before the analysis procedures were carried out, each journal entry was coded for easy referencing according to week number.

The student journals were read a few times in order to get a holistic picture of how students used their English to express themselves. Each student journal was subjected to both macro and micro level analysis and this process yielded useful descriptive and reflective data. Descriptive data covered essentially details of their own lives, when the topic required so. Reflective data included students' feelings and perceptions towards the prompts.

Initial Surveys

I gave all of the participants surveys modeled after forms I found being used by professors and practitioner teachers of St. Xavier University. These were the questions that were used:

1. Before this project begins, are you interested in Journal Writing?
2. Do you think that using journals in the past helped you improve your writing skills?
3. Now that you know what this project is about, are you interested in participating?

Each question was written in L2 and in L1. Also, all students were encouraged to write comments explaining their choices. How they explained their choices provided valuable data (which has been included in Chapter IV). With this initial survey I collected information about how my students felt about journal writing in general. The survey was conducted one week before the project began to allow time to review the responses and to make last-hour modifications if it was truly necessary though in the end no change or adjustment was done, not at least based on what the students had responded. Once this information was collected, I read and coded all the responses. The idea of this step was to

have a general idea of what progress students perceive occurred by including the use of journals as part of their learning process in the past. I felt it was necessary to know what experiences in particular they had retained, what details had stayed with them and why.

Research Journal

I also had my own journal, which is included as a data source. I took notes of the little occurrences during the development of every session. Each entry recorded my impressions on what was going on in class, while the participants worked in their journals. My journal had more entries than the participants' journals because I began writing some days before the project actually started and some parts were still in sketch form. Therefore, you can see the actual development of the final stages of the project I have included excerpts from my journal in Chapter IV. Hoping those entries will offer a reflection of what was happening in class but also of what was happening in my mind during those days, and my impressions on the work my students were making as the project progressed.

There was a short post-survey (Appendix 4) with the specific purpose of collecting the participants' perceptions of the use of journals. I obtained ideas for this survey in the educational section of www.About.com and the site of Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. It was difficult to find experts who had conducted research on the particular aspect of assessing EFL students' impressions on the validity of journals as learning tools.

Finally, I used the TWE (Test of Written English) which tests the ability to write a cohesive essay with both groups. The first group is the one that was exposed to the procedures of the project and also the instruction corresponding to the plan designed before the school year begins. The other group did not participate in the project in any of the other stages but in the final one, which was the test-taking part and they only received the instruction planned for both groups as part of the school curriculum.

The TWE test is offered with the TOEFL four times a year and none of the participants had taken or obtained a previous score in any of those exams. The TWE requires test-takers to write between 250 – 300 words in 30 minutes. Students are given a topic they must develop into a comprehensive grammatical essay within the time limit. Usually this test is read by two evaluators and each gives a score of 1 to 6 with 6 being excellent, 5 very good, 4 good, 3- 2- and 1 (any of them) needs improvement. The average of both scores is the final score. I worked with a partner teacher (who received payment for her assistance) for this instance.

The reason why I used the TWE was to establish a comparison between the group that used journal writing and the one that did not. I wanted an external check that I could use to determine in a reliable manner if the intervention in the project had indeed helped the participants improve their skills in more ways than only increasing their reflective capacity. The results of the test, my personal findings and in general the information I could collect thanks to the aforementioned sources are described in detail in Chapter IV. Also my conclusions are offered in Chapter V.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis and Findings

This section contains the findings and the analysis of the information collected during the research process. I have also included excerpts from my students' journals, some parts of the journal I wrote before, during and after the project and the scores from the TWE.

Initial Survey results

The student survey used for this project was loosely based on the surveys designed with similar purposes by professors and practitioner teachers of St. Xavier University (their website is www.sxu.edu) and also the hosts of the education section of the www.About.com site. To ensure the answers were as accurate as possible, each of the queries was written in L1 and L2. All students were asked to respond to each one of the queries in the survey.

Each item could be answered by selecting one of the following three options:

YES UNSURE NO

Students could explain their answers if they wished to do so, and, in fact, many did. Fifty-eight percent of students in both groups were interested in journal writing before the teacher researcher began the intervention. Some of those who answered positively said “it was an easy activity” in the comments section. Thirty-six were unsure and six were not interested at all.

Forty percent of the students felt they had improved their writing skills when using journal writing in previous school years “because it gave them a chance to practice”.

Thirty-four were unsure and twenty-six just answered “no”.

Sixty-six percent answered positively when asked if they were interested in participating in the project saying: “it could be fun if the topics are interesting” (in the past all of them had used journals in classrooms). Twenty-four were unsure and ten percent answered negatively.

Final survey results

To ensure the accuracy of responses to the final survey each of the questions was written in L1 and L2. This form was administered to the target group only. The survey comprised general, open-ended questions, to be answered partly in class and completed at home. The questions of the survey emphasized that this was to be a self-reflection on how they normally write in their journals. They were:

1. In your opinion, is journal writing a good technique to use when learning English? Explain.
2. Do you enjoy Journal Writing now more than before? Say why/why not.
3. Would you like to continue using journals in class in the future?

After the intervention, sixty-seven percent of the students of the target group reported they enjoyed journal writing more than before which constitutes their response to the second question in the post-survey. Curiously the percentage is higher when answering to the first question: “In your opinion, is journal writing a good technique to use when learning English? Explain.” In that case, seventy-eight percent of the students pronounced favorably toward the use of journals in class. The justifications to that response were quite similar:

- “I feel relaxed when I write. I don’t like speaking.”
- “Writing in the journal is more easy for me. I like this technique.”
- “I think it’s useful. I can write more and faster.”

- “It’s good because we can practice and use the new words.”
- “I like to read the other students’ entries. I can learn that way, too.”

There were of course negative reactions, though they were not the majority:

- I just don’t like writing. It makes me sick.”
- I don’t think I know more English now than before.”

Regarding the third question: “Would you like to continue using journals in class in the future?”, fifty- eight percent of the target group answered positively and an eighteen percent answered “maybe” or “perhaps”; fourteen percent were unresponsive, and a ten percent answered negatively.

Their journals

The participants’ responses were interesting because of the things they said. In particular I found the responses of the first and the last days to be quite positive and productive in terms of the amount of writing and more importantly the quality. The term *quality* here refers to the care they showed when looking for the right word or expression, the number of ideas they wanted and tried to communicate, and even the way they ended their entries fell into this consideration. In order to illustrate my words I have presented a sampling of what the participants wrote. For that I have selected several entries from different students and in some cases their partners’ comments. The study of my students’ journals told me things about the way they used English especially from those who prefer not to talk much, perhaps because they are naturally shy. One thing for example is that there was a lot of mother tongue interference, a problem that I found in two out of every three participants. One of them, Melissa, for example, wrote: “*Everyone have...*” which could be interpreted as a mistake. At the beginning of Chapter III, these students are at an intermediate level so they have been taught that using *Everyone* this way is incorrect. Why

is this problem still happening? Perhaps this mistake is done unconsciously since in Spanish the equivalent word is *Todos*, which is only plural and not singular; hence, the origin of this mistake is perhaps in L1 interference rather than in knowledge that was not correctly assimilated.

Following there are more fourteen more examples and none of the following fourteen texts have been modified so mistakes in grammar, punctuation and vocabulary are to be expected. These examples are excerpts of the student journals. The students have also included some comments in Spanish here and there. The first line in bold is the prompt I provided, then comes the student's entry and at the end of most entries and in italics a comment written by the classmate called "journal partner". Those comments were usually short perhaps because this "journal partner" had to first read the entry and then write the comment, all in the time of one given song or two or three minutes if there was not a song available at the moment. After the journal partner's comment or the participant's last line of the entry I included my comments on themes that seemed general to all students, though they are grouped and presented again in page 70 in this very chapter.

Prompt: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

Gina: This proverb is no more than a show of perseverance and a way to give people the option to never give up. If we are constant we could not get anything, we should be perseverant on what we want with all our live like a dream or a goal, for example when a man is in love of a girl but that girl is like just a friend, the guy if he really want to be, he will never give up, he must go for it no matter what.

Partner response: *Sure, whatever you say...*

Teacher's comment: Here most of them talked about being perseverant, trying again. Gina's partner's response shows little interest in what she wrote.

Prompt: A man's word is his bond.

Bélen: This tries to explain mostly how a man is remembered by 11 people. As we know a person has quite a short life period. He's probably not gonna be remembered by the look of its face. The only thing that a man leaves when dying is his acts, his words, like Che Guevara phrases that have inspired a lot of people around the world. The words of a man are his bond with the world, also with other people since using word could be considered as talking.

Teacher's comment: Though everyone seemed to understand only two or three put the names of prominent people (one was Belén) as examples of what they meant.

Prompt: Any man can be a father. It takes a special man to be a dad.

Antonio: Well, it's true, since being a father only means you have a child. However, in order to be a true dad, one has to accept the responsibility of the child, and to care and love him or her. After all, even foster children have good parents sometimes. To be a dad is a great responsibility, and only those who manage to take it can leave a good legacy on their child. Your father gave you life, but your dad loves you all your life.

Partner response: *My dad is very strict and I don't know why. But I guess he loves me and my little sister much, and my mom too.*

Teacher's comment: Apparently, the father figure is important in the participants' lives. They know how essential it is for a child.

Prompt: Everyone has been made for some particular work, and the desire for that work has been put in every heart

Melissa: It means that all people are able to do a job. Everyone have different skills and you must be able to develop them. It's better when you do something you love,

because you have the opportunity to improve your skills and develop yourself in an area you love.

When you are in a work that really bothers you, you won't be able to do a great job so you won't succeed as you'll want. However, there are people who are multi-skilled so they chose the one they love the most, no matter if it gives you less income. More than work we need to rest, vacations.

Partner response: *What's multi-skilled? Sometimes you use this words that are...well, too complex, and I want vacations, too.*

Teacher's comment: I liked when journal partners showed genuine curiosity about words or things their partners had written. This was also the first entry in which most of them mentioned their need to have vacations.

Prompt: Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and points his own nature into his pictures

Andrés: It means that when an artist is going to work, it can be a portrait of a model or something like this; the artist tends to express his feelings. When an artist is expert at painting in canvas, I think they can express their feelings even more since they are able to throw paint and create a new design.

There are much kind of painters, an artist, the one who uses canvas, the one who use easel, the one who does murals or even the people who does graffiti. All those persons express their feelings, but in a different way. Even if they are sad or happy, they can give a reflection of their internal world which tends to be amazing to the "audience".

Teacher's comment: This was the prompt that gave them the hardest time so to speak. When they were writing I could see in their faces how they struggled to

understand and most did eventually, but perhaps for that this prompt was the one that received the shortest responses in general.

Prompt: Visions

Adolfo: Well, when I was a child, I had visions. One time, I could predict that my dad will have an accident. The next day, my dad had it. It was very strange but my mom was very happy in one part because I almost travel with my dad but I didn't so here I am. It was very ugly, my aunt have a lot of scars.

Teacher's comment: This prompt was obviously the shortest and that was precisely the problem. I remember that before they began I decided to give a quick explanation of what I expected them from them. The responses centered on the weirdest dreams they had. I wondered what kind of responses I would have obtained without that little intervention.

Prompt: What if Our School were like Hogwarts?

Josué: If our school were like Hogwarts be so cool. First, I won't have to come every day in a bus. At April the Hogwarts express will be a station because it will be a train. All the students gonna enter it and probably we take all the day until we arrive to the school. We could eat chocolate frogs, the bubble gum of all the tastes in the world and whatever of the food little car. When we arrive to Hogsmade (the station) we will have to wear the uniform, our tunic. Then some horses will our transport to the school. In the first day of classes we will have a special ceremony and we wouldn't study a lot, only the necessary.

Partner response: *It's very cute. You're a fan of Harry Potter. It's very interesting all the histories of him, and in this compassion I see how much do you like Harry Potter.*

Teacher's comment: Some prompts were better than others. Apparently they wrote more, or felt more compelled to do so, if they had to write about things they knew about such as schools for example. They used this opportunity to talk about things such as their subjects, their uniforms and even the food of the bar.

Prompt: A day at the sea

Stefan: The other I went to the beach with my friends. We were in the water play with a ball when we heard the safeguard saying: "Be careful, everybody go out to the sea because there are a shark". It was terrify because I couldn't go out because my feet was stopped by algae and the shark was in my back. When I looked it... it was a dolphin jejeje. That's good.

Partner response: *It was very funny, ja. If its happen it will be a embarrassed moment. I like it, good job. ☺*

Teacher's comment: It was interesting that while most people talked about going to the beach with their friends there was one, Stefan in this case, that saw it from a different perspective.

Prompt: The craziest party ever

André: Oh, my craziest party will be in my 21 or 18 birthday. I will invite to all my friends from school because we need to rest! It will be in the Vegas and take two days approx. It will be great. It have food and drinks everywhere. All drinks that you can imagine. A very big swimming pool inside the bar; music everywhere and so lought. Reggaeton of course. Gorgeous girls dancing on the tables with little cloths. And take off.... Juju Really, I can say all that I'm imagine. I just want pass incredible with all my friends. A thing that I will never forget. Invite everybody less Wilson.

Partner response: *It's a great idea. I'll help you to organize everything. Handosme guys will be hot.. jaja I know I'll be excellent.*

Teacher's comment: Some of these were truly fun-oriented, and it was fun reading them. Many imagined long-lasting celebrations, and they did not include their families in these fantasies.

Prompt: This is the coolest T.V. Show

Cristina: My favorite TV show program is a soap opera call "las tontas no van al cielo". It is so fun, it makes me laught a lot. Every day I see it because is cool. When I can't see, I have a lot of curiosity and I want that be tomorrow to watch it. Gamavision pass this amazing soap opera. I like because it is different than the others. In the tipical soap opera you watch people crying everytime. It's not like that. It's funny. Well what more I can tell you? You have to watch it. That's it. 9:00 pm in Gamavision after RBD "La familia" ☺ juju

Partner response: *It's funny!! I saw it too!! It's an incredible soup opera... and also very cool.*

Teacher's comment: This is another prompt that received good responses. There were comments on soap operas, police series or sitcoms. I kept wondering where they could find the time.

Prompt: I have something to tell you...

Lizbeth: Ehh... I don't remember what is that I had to write in this entry, ha-ha.

Well I have something to tell you: I'm a brother, I'm a lover, I'm a child, I'm a father, I'm a sinner, I'm a saint, I do not feel ashamed. I guess you already know this. Mmm. Did you know that I hate our school? Yeah? Ok. Why? I really don't

know, I just hate it and that's it! I love you with all my heart! I start to hate this, it and that's it! .

I start to hate this, it turns a little boring, last year it was better, maybe it is because you know all about me, everything, so there's nothing new for you to know!

Partner response: *We talk every day so there's really nothing new to say.*

Teacher's comment: Some students used their journals to vent issues such as Lizbeth did here. I never made any observation on the matter to any of the participants so they could understand there was a level of confidentiality implied.

Prompt: Why apologize?

Leonidas: For me, the apology is important if it is really necessary. Many times we apologize for things that do not deserve. Unimportant things to forget, or things that people accuse we did, but it is not your fault, but because we want to do well, we could accept it and apologize. But I think in such cases it is not well to apologize, this should be only when you feel that it is necessary and when you think that apology is going to help you, the other one and the relationship of both people.

Partner response: *It is important to accept when we are wrong and apologize, in that way we turn into better people and mature.*

Teacher's comment: There were times I was pleased to read some entries when they showed maturity. In this case both Leonidas and his journal partner did a good job at responding to this prompt.

Prompt: The one person I'd like to meet, but probably won't...

Leonor: I'd like to meet Zac Efron! He is gorgeous, cute, beautiful, etc. He's the actor that film High School Musical. He's twenty years old, he is good looking. He has blue eyes, light brown hair and a beautiful smile. Also he is tall, slim and

perfect.jajaja! Shh is a secret because you know who can be jealous. jajaja! I'd tell to him that he continue his career that he is very good person and he has a lot of fans that love him! Also I'd like to meet mmm... I don't know... maybe Yandel, Corbin or David!!! I'd like to be with them now traveling and not in the school, studying and studying. Celebrities and boys

PD: I'm aburrida de esa kncion y q la Dolores se va. Jajaja...

Partner response: *Jaja you're so copiona... Yandel is mine, nobody else jajaja....*

U know you too be shhh... and yes that's good that Dolores go away... jajaja

Teacher's comment: Frequently they talked about their favorite artists and celebrities in general. Leonor here is one of the few examples of participants that forgot the rule of not using Spanish at all in this project.

Prompt: Things I don't have but I'd like to...

Benjamín: Mmmhhh.... I don't know!! Maybe independence because my parents like to control me everything that I do so I feel that I don't have privacy. Maybe I'd like to have my degree because I'll finish with my torture of staying in a close place studying. Other thing that I'd like is to feel happy every day of my life. Enjoying every moment of my life with people that I consider special in my life...

Principal...Mmm...U know Shar who is he... jaja. well I don't know what to said to you!! I'm bored and also I'm very happy because I resolve my problems.

Partner response: *Jaja that nice and i'm agree with you. I want my independence too. Sometimes stay with my parents is very hard. But take it easy when you have 18, everything will change jaja.*

Teacher's comment: Sometimes what the journal partner wrote was as interesting, or more, than the participant's words. This one for example shows clear signs of mother-tongue interference – *"I'm agree", "when you have 18"*.

I have found that journal writing in class stimulates student discussion, clarifies issues that are not so clear, reinforces previous learning, and stimulates imagination. To illustrate this point in particular here are some more sections taken from some of my students' journals:

Prompt: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

Cristina: "...like many people have success, but that is not important. I don't want success. Other things are more important. Love for example because we all need love in our lives. It's a feeling that makes you feel in the sky. Success in love would be good, and for that I suppose you have to try many times not only once."

Fabián: I need success for my career because I want to be a doctor and I need to be careful when I'm operating. If I operate correctly I will become an important doctor, but only if I operate correctly or cure my patients. My father says that success does not come to you but you come to success."

Gina: "Success is important and if you fail is important to try again. Important people work very hard in order to be successful, for example Bill Gates or Steve Jobs, who are important people that work hard and get the success they wanted. Often there are things like defeat in our lives and we feel down, but we have to follow, we have to stand up and try again. If we want victory in life, we have to do things several times and then I think it will be perfect like when we write essays in class and then the mister of Language B says we do it again and we do it. That way we become better and are successful."

Themes Students mentioned in their Writing

One theme that seems to be in common to all of them is the need to rest, and another is to have a good time as evidenced by the words of Melissa, Josué, André, Lizbeth and Leonor when they say things such as:

- Melissa: “More than work we need vacations...”
- André: “...and we wouldn’t study a lot, only the necessary...”
- Lizbeth: “I just want pass incredible with all my friends.”
- Leonor: “Let’s go away from school and have fun.”
- Josué: “I’d like to be with them now traveling and not in the school, studying and studying...”

When asked about the value of trying again the participants talk about perseverance, never giving up, being constant; when asked about their school their main concerns are in their uniforms and the food in the snack bars and some of them claim to “hate school”; they also like celebrities and though they study a lot they still seem to find time to be updated about what is the latest in the world of entertainment. When commenting on their classmates’ work they tend to be brief and those comments appear to be the product of a carefree attitude toward what their classmates write. Their writing is sometimes can also be profound when it touches themes such as how much they love their family as when Paola wrote: “I’d like to have health for my parents and my sister...” ; the way they express their religious beliefs as Leonidas who wrote: “...because God is everything. He gave me my life and my family.” They also want to be successful in life and as everyone else to get to love somebody.

In other words the participants showed themselves more than Language B students as individuals with their problems or conflicts, people that had needs beyond the classroom.

Benjamín for example seems to desire to be by himself and thus he wrote: “Maybe independence because my parents like to control me everything that I do...” And Josué lets us know he’s unhappy with the way he arrives at school when he writes: “First, I won’t have to come every day in a bus...” And Belén seems to have thought of the meaning of death in the past: “The only thing that a person leaves when dying is his acts.” So the students were not reticent about expressing some of their deepest life concerns in their journals, which were triggered by the prompts.

Mistakes found in the students’ journals:

In general the participants made several mistakes though the objective was not to develop accuracy in the use of the language, I did pay attention to this aspect and I have seen that:

- They rarely use passive voice.
- They use Simple Past only. They avoid using Present Perfect.
- They tend to over generalize when using comparatives (even my Canadian student writes “more easy” instead of “easier”).
- They never use semicolons.

About vocabulary I have learned that:

- They can’t recognize false cognates easily (*actually* for example which they use as *currently*)
- They have a lot of L1 interference (meaning they say things as *I had ten years* instead of *I was ten years old*)
- When using idioms my students use the ones they know in Spanish only translated.

About the students themselves:

- They can already use L2 to communicate their feelings and ideas, but their success in doing so seems limited by their command of the language.
- Their level of reflection is in most cases acceptable, only a few show deep reflection all of the time. This could be attributed to the age (the participants were all middle teens), or to the few chances they are given to reflect using journals in L1 (it's not customary to use journals in L1 programs in Ecuador).
- They showed themselves more than Language B students as individuals with their problems or conflicts, people that had needs beyond the classroom.
- The students all have other problems of their own in either grammar, punctuation or vocabulary. I must first make provisions for those "general problems". I am planning to stop my regular classes and prepare some "remedial" classes to do something about this situation. It's not correct to continue my school plan without taking any action.

The Researcher's Observation Journal

I wrote a journal to document this project so as I would not forget important details that would turn out important later on, and so I would reflect on the process of implementing the study. I wanted my journal to be a camera that recorded what I observed, I wrote my own journal in order to use it later as another evaluation tool, however, it turned out to pay off better results than I originally expected. I had never written a journal, but I decided to give it a try, also responding to the necessity of having another source of evaluation rather than anything else. Once I began working on it, first with my reflections before starting the project, then during and after the project I learned there were several things I was just not seeing about my teaching practice. Not only were my students telling

me things I was also talking to myself, identifying things that were right and more importantly some that were wrong. These are some of those entries:

Day 1 (One week before the intervention): Will it work? I see it and see it and it looks like some kind of puzzle. The pieces are there, the “players” are there. I have everything ready and still I have got time to make modifications. But, no, that shouldn’t be...no more modifications, one too many already. I would like to get this over with already.

Day 5 (Friday, the following Monday the intervention began): Ok, preparation is done. I don’t know if my anxiety is noticeable. I tend to smile too often when I’m anxious, I drop the markers, the erasers, I act like a novice. Bad thing. The kids seem nicer than usual. Do they know how important this is for me? Yes, they do, don’t they? Do they care? It’s not usual they work like this. I’m lucky class hours are 50-minute long, otherwise I would have problems orchestrating everything.

“Orchestrating”, that’s a nice word...am I a director of sorts?

Day 8 (first day of the intervention): I don’t know what to write. How did it go? Maybe it was Ok. I felt I looked a bit improvised. I don’t know if the kids liked the music I brought. I’d better be more careful with that. Again they were nice and did as expected. Perhaps there are too many expectations from my side. Ok, the girls did like the music. And the topic? It’s a lousy topic maybe? Well a prompt such as *Visions* doesn’t really say much. I just don’t know. I’ll know when they give me their journals. Was the activity too long? Was the class affected? I guess so. I don’t want to push them, but perhaps I am. I got to give it some time, think about it. I’m tired, time to go sleep.

Day 13 (four days before the end of the intervention): I feel so tired. At the beginning I thought this part would be easier, but no. Reading everyone's journals and their peer's comments ... it was fun. Once I was done with that I wrote notes in my journal, I tried to find patterns. I wanted to see if my kids were making some progress and well. Some of my "slow" students actually write better than usual. It's like reading two different people.

I haven't slept much, but it's Ok. I tell myself that I'm done with the toughest part and that now the best is about to come. Honestly, I'd like to have more energy for this is exciting. I'm learning about my students, some are different now. I see them at an entirely different light. They are more complex than I thought. Have I been too centered on my own life that I've forgotten about others, in this case my students? I have a rule: "Don't get involved" and thus I keep my perspective or so I've believed. Perhaps I'm getting involved with my students' lives inadvertently. That's a line I don't ever want to draw. This is only a project and nothing but. I have to focus...man, am I tired?

(Day 14) One day I'm going to sit down and I'm going to use all this material and make a deeper study. I'll write a thesis so cool they'll have to give me the Nobel for teachers. That's then. For now I have gathered data for this project and that's all. Of course now I know certain things about my students that I didn't know before, in form and also in the way they are as individuals.

(Day 17, end of intervention): All right, it's over at least for the kids. For me, well, not really. Ahead, I have another weekend of sleepless nights. I can't work during the day on Saturday because of my job so it is during the night or it is just not. Now

it's when I'll know if there were results or not. If there are, then the whole thing was worthwhile; and if not, at least I can say I tried. We will see.

(Day 20): I've slept only two hours, but at least I finished. Still there are other things for my students to do; next it is reading my comments and feedback for their entries. If I hadn't imposed myself this strict schedule they would be receiving my comments just after another week. This week they also have the survey. They will say if their perceptions about journal writing are different now or pretty much the same. Writing this entry has taken me like twenty-five minutes. When I think I finished I see I erased what I just wrote...

(Day 24, one day after the survey): The first thing I did once I arrived home was to read the answers to the survey. This was to be the way my students would tell me how they felt about this project once it's over. I asked them to be honest. According to the comments in the initial student survey, fifteen of my twenty students liked Journal Writing. Curiously, none of them said why they liked it or if they believed it was important in their learning process and that made me think they saw Journal Writing as an activity designed to be a source of amusement, a possibility which I discuss in chapter V.

As I worked and wrote my impressions, I felt a different sense, an idea that was different from my original idea that all journals are only tools to collect data. I found out that, just as Progoff (1993) claimed, journals are also paths that lead us into deep reflection. In other words, I found myself discovering not only things about my students' ways of learning but also I learned about myself, about how I was performing as a teacher.

Prompt: What if our School were like Hogwarts?

Guillermo: "...the Language B teacher would be *Snape*, but only sometimes when he's too serious. Well, it's not only that mister but teachers should smile. In my school it was nice because all the students and teachers smiled more..."

Prompt: The craziest party ever

Lila: ...so we could be away from all the study, and the school and the teachers. The misters are not bad persons is only they are strict. The Language B teacher for example gives you less points if you give homework late. That's good but if you have a problem for the late homework he doesn't justify..."

I was amused by Guillermo's comment since I had no idea they cared for those things and I agree: smiling is important in this field, but I was not aware I was not smiling so ever since then I try to be more positive when I'm I class and smile more. Regarding the second comment, it's true I do that since I want to teach my students the importance of meeting deadlines. Still there are problems that might affect my students and perhaps I should be more open to that in the future. All this helped me understand what I was doing right and to what extent I was being successful, but it also showed me what needed my attention and my reflection. For example by reading Gina's and Josué's entries I could see they were expressing themselves by using complex and compound sentences. Belén or André preferred shorter less complex sentences, and that meant they would probably restrain themselves from producing more elaborate writing. As a result, I decided to stop what I was teaching at the moment and go back to how to form longer sentences, and I also made some changes to that class in order to focus in practice rather than theory.

TWE scores

I thought that I needed to include an external check of the student's improvement in the research. I selected the TWE test for it is a tool entirely devoted to evaluating

EFL/ESL students' writing proficiency. The fact that the TWE test is a creation of the same organization that offers the TOEFL, the ETS, also weighed in my decision of using this evaluation tool. The TWE is a 30 minute essay and tests the student's ability to perform writing tasks. The TWE score is reported separately on a scale of 1 to 6 on the TOEFL score report. A score of 4 is considered to demonstrate minimal competence in writing. A score of 4.5 or 5.0 would be more desirable.

The TWE was administered to both groups one week after the intervention finished. Since both groups had received the same instruction and they were similar (if not the same) in most aspects it stood to reason to believe that if there was any improvement in their performance this had probably occurred due to the intervention in the target group.

As it was described in Chapter II, teachers are necessary for the evaluation process. Each one reads the essay written by the student and assigns a score separately. The two scores are then added and divided by two to obtain the final score. In this case the 1-6 scale was used with six representing the highest grade and one the lowest. The results were tallied by me and were as following:

Experimental group	Control group
14 % scored 6	12% scored 6
33 % scored 5	30% scored 5
39 % scored 4	40% scored 4
13 % scored 3	14% scored 3
1% scored 2	4% scored 2
0% scored 1	0% scored 1

These results do not show a significant difference between one group and another. While the target group scored higher by obtaining more sixes and fives, the number of

people scoring four is by one percent an equal number and the same can be said about those scoring three and even in the case of those who scored two the difference is not that substantive.

Discussion

Seeing the responses to the student initial survey, it is almost inevitable to correlate the numbers of the first options in questions one and three (58% and 66% respectively).

The difference is only 8% which is not really much and that made me question if in the end it was correct to present both ideas separately. Again the questions of the survey were:

1. Before this project begins, are you interested in Journal Writing?

To which 58% answered YES, 20 % were UNSURE and 22% said NO.

2. Do you think that using journals in the past helped you improve your writing skills?

Only 48 % answered YES, 33 % were UNSURE and 14 % chose NO.

3. Now that you know what the project is about, are you interested in participating?

In this one 66% said YES, 22% chose UNSURE and 12% said NO.

All this was information that was meant to show the participants' perceptions regarding the use of journals before the project began (that happened a week before). Not using a post-survey was another decision that seemed practical at the time. The idea was to obtain more than a positive or a negative answer or something in between, but also comments that allowed me to assess through their words their opinions once the project was over. When you see the results it is noticeable that though the approval to the use of journals in class is not overwhelming it is still quite positive especially if we consider that the project took only two weeks.

The participants' written production seemed to be more fluid and more natural. The number of grammar and punctuation mistakes was comparatively higher than those in the papers I'm used to receiving from them, so they were careless. I don't think that was entirely wrong for the opportunities for authentic situations to happen in the classroom are scarce and this looked like more realistic English and besides the participants also had time constraints so that made the data obtained more valuable for me. Sometimes the most important discoveries happen in the simplest situations. During my research, I ran into many different testimonies of the power of journals as reflection tools as it was evidenced in the works of Barry and Singer (2001) with mothers whose babies were treated in Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU); Proffoff (1993) and his innovative Intensive Journal Writing program; and Erin Gruwell (2001) and the Freedom Writers. This reflection is more evident in the participants' responses to the final survey than it is in their responses to the initial survey. Following there are the questions of the final survey and some of the participants' responses

1. In your opinion, is journal writing a good technique to use when learning English?

Explain.

Adolfo: "Yes. It helps and it's interesting."

Benjamín: "I'm not sure. I don't like writing, but I'm writing in English more than in the past, so I suppose it's a good technique."

Melissa: "Of course, and I'd like to continue using it in class. This project was too short."

André: "It's a good way to practice instead of all those long and boring essays that we have to write as assignments."

Fabián: "The nice about journals is that they are more personal, like a diary. Of course is

in class but I can know what my friends are writing and my journal partner's comments were funny..."

2. Do you enjoy Journal Writing now more than before? Say why/why not.

Benjamín: "It's the same for me. It's like another lesson."

Gina: "I think so. I like the songs and I like the comments of my journal partner. It's different now, but the teacher shouldn't read."

Leonor: "I'm not sure. Well, I didn't like it before, but now we can reflect and say things from our personality."

3. Would you like to continue using journals in class in the future?

Lila: "Sure. But we should make a change, so the teacher sends less homework and we write in journals instead."

Belén: "Yes. I like it now because my English is better now and I can express my feelings better. When I write in my journal about these topics I feel more relaxed and I make reflections. I want to continue with that."

Melissa: "I would like to play games instead of writing, but journals [is] also good. Of course I like to listen to music when I'm writing. Also I like to write about what I think and my feelings."

Lizabeth: "I don't know. In this project we wrote every day. I'd like to continue with the journals, but I don't know if I want to write every day. Maybe, once or twice a week, but listening to music in class we should have do that more often."

Some recommendations for the research process

The very first day of this project I understood it was very important to have materials organized in the classroom. Most of them had their journals stored in their school lockers, which meant we would begin a bit delayed. Having the materials ready to go

before each writing session saved time for the students and allowed them to stay focused without having to wait to get the materials they needed for each journal writing session.

It was by reading my own journal that I found it necessary to create and monitor my students' motivation. In the very first page written before the project I wrote: "I have read a lot and still I cannot make up my mind on how to begin. What is a good warm-up activity before journal writing? Is there something like that? Perhaps writing in a journal is a warm-up activity..." In the end, this idea of having the students select the topic at random as suggested by Lewis (2009) could have worked better than assigning them myself. Using music to present that topic worked well (that is when soundtracks were available) and while they were writing though not everybody enjoyed the same songs as the rest. So motivation should be part of projects like this and we should find or devise ways to keep our students' interest as high as possible. Competition is tough these days so incorporating things they like (such as modern music or TV sitcoms) is an alternative that could work though should be introduced with careful planning; or perhaps negotiating with them in a "reward" program (offering extra points for example) could also do. Our grandparents had to deal with the influence of the TV and movies, our parents with VCRs and Super Nintendo games. We have the Internet, mp4 music, cell phones, iPods, 3D games and net books. It's not easy to keep a teen focused these days, but with creativity it can be done.

Chapter V

Conclusion

How the research questions of this study were answered

These were the research questions I asked in this research, and what answered these questions of this research.

1. How do EFL secondary students perceive journal writing as a tool for developing their English proficiency?

Mostly they perceive journal writing as a positive way to practice writing. As evidenced by the results shown in the data most of them are positive about. They remarked that they liked it better than the other writing assignments they are used to, also they like the fact that is done in class and not at home. Some of them also became aware of the value of journals as reflection tools, an aspect that they have seemed to enjoy as well. For them the downside was the time devoted to the project.

2. What are the research driven principles and practices for teaching and learning Journal Writing for the purpose of language learning?

In my research I found out that journal writing in the context of language learning requires a lot of planning. It is also necessary to set all the elements of the project in a way that the collection of such information allows the researcher time enough for the analysis. The literature to support this research should not only be extensive but also diverse since there is a great number of people working with journals not only in education and that means the use of journals might potentially have more benefits than just language practice just as Progovoff (1993) suggests.

3. How does a group of Ecuadorian secondary students respond to the research driven practices for using EFL journal writing?

The fact that this project was carried out with Ecuadorian secondary students did not seem to establish any apparent difference in the outcome if we consider what has been done in other parts of the world where the learning outcomes of the participants have been also positive. At all times students collaborated and were eager to participate.

4. How can the influence of journal writing on the learning outcomes of the participants in this study be described?

Judging based only on the results of this project it is perhaps safe to say that influence is positive. It seems journal writing helps to produce an increase in both the interest of the student in writing and that writing production itself. Also it created in most of them the necessity to reflect, to think about what they were going to write not in a mechanical way but with a more personal approach so their writing became more natural and authentic.

Evaluation of Journal Writing

Apparently, journal writing can be subject to assessment. Because this study sought to understand how students perceive and what they perceive of journal writing when used in the EFL classroom. The criteria used for this purpose differs from one expert to the next, perhaps for lack of a system accepted and used by all. Connor (2000) indicates something like that when she says that although journal writing has been extensively covered in the teaching literature, not much attention has been given to prove how effective it is in increasing student learning. In the past, evaluations typically relied on student and faculty perceptions rather than performance measures. Connor believes that journal writing is a way to actively engage students in learning about personality theories and include new criteria for instructor evaluation of journal entries. She conducted a research project to measure the impact of Journal Writing in the performance of her students. The analysis of

student test grades indicated that a journal writing assignment increased student learning, and student evaluations supported the perceived usefulness of this exercise in fostering understanding. It is certain also that in order to evaluate effectively we may need to ask certain questions first:

What is the object of evaluating journal entries?

Who is conducting the evaluation?

What is the purpose of such evaluation?

The answer to the second question would be the journals used by the students since it is there where we can find the data we need to collect. About the third, there seems to be two choices with one of them being the teacher and a less traditional one but more popular these days, the students themselves. One who prefers giving her students such responsibility is Lewis (2009) who recommends having the students use a checklist to self-evaluate their own creative writing since according to her it adds structure and focus to journal writing. Below there is an example of the journal writing checklist she suggests in her site hosted by www.About.com.

- Date (1 point)
- Neatness/Handwriting (1 point)
- Capitals (1 point)
- Periods (1 point)
- 1-2 sentences (1 point)
- 3-4 sentences (2 points)
- 5 or more sentences (3 points)
- Total (out of 10 points)

As we can see the main problem with this checklist is that it concentrates on punctuation and form. After writing, the students take about a minute to assess their own work by filling in each aspect of the checklist and attaching it to that day's writing. The idea of having the students deal with the checklist themselves is to help them meet the language standards for Journal Writing, and at the same time show them their areas for improvement.

When the teacher evaluates one way to approach such a task is to use a set of yes / no questions to be answered while the entries are read and analyzed. This document, also a checklist, according to Raimes (1983) is a very useful tool as a starting point. The sample below comes from <http://www.uefap.com/writing/writfram.htm>, an *English for Academic Purposes* site, and focus mainly on discourse.

1. Does the journal entry deal with the topic that was set?
2. Does the journal entry answer the question that was set?
3. Does it cover all the main aspects and in sufficient depth?
4. Is the content accurate and relevant?
5. Is everything in the journal entry relevant to the question?
6. Is the material logically arranged?
7. Is each main point well supported by examples and argument?
8. Is there a clear distinction between your ideas and those of other authors?
9. Have you acknowledged all the sources you have used?
10. Is the length of the journal entry right for its purpose?
11. Is it written plainly and simply, without clumsy or obscure phrasing?
12. Is the grammar, punctuation and spelling acceptable?
13. Is it neat and legibly written?

Nevertheless, according to Raimes (1983, p.147) teachers can devise their own *checklists* to meet their groups' specific needs or to fit each writing assignment, focusing attention on the critical features of one particular task. These words suggest then that the most practical way to approach the problem of how to evaluate student journals properly is to delve into the nature of the journal itself; in other words, the purpose for which it was created. We have seen before that the classification of journals is rather ample. Therefore if we are to evaluate dialog journals we should perhaps focus on the quality of the response to both the prompt given and the reviewers' comments.

Reflections on the Research Process

Journal writing teaches you the value of reflection, an attitude that in the educational process is a vital component in the development of learning and thinking skills on the part of the student. As the following words from one of my students' journals shows:

Prompt: Any man can be a father. It takes a special man to be a dad

Gina: I agree. I don't know my father and I have never met him. I know he lives in Spain, and he never writes or tries to communicate with me. I don't care really because my mother has always been with me, she has never abandoned me and she has supported me in everything. Sometimes I wonder if my father had been a different man and loved me, but then I would also be different because in a way I come from him. I don't know if I'd be more happy or maybe not, but I don't need him because I have the mother I have. Sometimes I forget how wonderful she is, not now. She's the best. And also I'm going to learn from this experience and I'm not going to repeat that mistake and if I have a son I'll love him, and I'll be with him because a child does not have to suffer for his father's mistakes."

Reflection on the educational process is a key component in the development of teaching skills on the part of the educator. Perhaps it could be said that critical self-reflection is not just something students do: it is something teachers have to do, too. As Richards (1996) states, “teachers move from a level where they may be guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine, to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking”.

The intensive reading of my students’ work gave me a perspective I did not have before and gave me options I had previously ignored. Lizbeth for example wrote: “I’m a brother, I’m a lover, I’m a child, I’m a father, I’m a sinner, I’m a saint, I do not feel ashamed...” which is taken from the lyrics of *I’m a Sinner* by Alanis Morissette, a song popular at the time. I wondered why a girl would like a song like that, one that is more distinctly aimed at boys rather than girls according to its message. Since I could not answer that myself I went to the source and asked her and then she said: “I don’t think it’s a song only for boys, it’s for anybody who feels he or she can be many things.” Song lyrics are something I have always dismissed as inferior literature, but perhaps songs could also be subject of literary analysis and thus they could be used in my class. I decided to do so and presently I’m still working at collecting possible songs to use. My students’ work also gave me information about them that otherwise I would have never known. Josué, Cristina and Leonor are apparently very into popular culture. They like talking about movies, TV shows and artists, and that made me wonder if I could combine that with their learning process in some future project.

I also learned several things about the kind of learners they are, their strengths and weaknesses. The most striking problem for the students, is their limitation in vocabulary, as in the case of Stefan or Adolfo who could probably said more, and wanted to say more,

but did not do so. This could be limiting their production of written work in a way because they use only basic vocabulary or in other words, they use just enough to be understood. Stefan for example wrote: “It was terrifying because I couldn’t go out because my feet was stopped...” that could easily have been said: “I was so frightened I was paralyzed...” One thing I could have done to rectify this situation was to use their samples to have them rewrite using more appropriate and efficient vocabulary. This expanding on their vocabulary by means of revision could potentially have improved their skills.

As the project progressed I was interested in how they used English to express themselves, if the language they used was appropriate and used successfully so as to be able to transmit content for example. I didn’t expect to find mistakes in basic lexicon, though it happened, and I expected all participants to understand the prompts given. Here are some more samples:

Prompt: Things I don’t have but I’d like to...

Adolfo: “I’d like to have much things because I always want to see the last videos and the last things that everybody like. I need a lot of money because I want these things. I can ask my father or my mother, my fathers are good when my notes are good and then they give me the things I not have.

Leonidas: “There are many things I’d like to have, but the best thing is when God is with me because God is everything. He gave me my life and my family. I have friends too and all these are gifts that God give me. I’d like to have health for my parents and my sister and all my friends at school. I don’t need the money because the money is not really important is God what is important in the end.”

Gina: It’s an interesting question...one thing I don’t have is time. In this school time is a treasure, really. I’d like to have more time to turn in all my homework, but



it's no easy task. It's really ironic since if I understand correctly I could ask for anything I'd like and the only thing I want right now is not money, only more time to sit down and finish everything I have to finish. Of course I'd like to have money and also love. Eternal life is a temptation and still maybe living forever could be a bad thing since it might be boring, I mean to live forever...no, normal life is difficult enough already."

I feel student Gina was the one that responded most successfully to this prompt. Nevertheless, student Adolfo and Leonidas manage to get their ideas through only that with different levels of proficiency with student Leonidas showing better command of the language than student Gina. This clearly indicated for example that my group was not really homogeneous and their needs were different as a consequence. While Adolfo needed to review *quantifiers* and show little reflection. Leonidas seems more reflective talking about God and why God should be the recipient of all our thanks and blessings. Gina was better than the others in terms that her command of the language is better, but also her level of reflection is higher: not only does this student says things but also explains them and questions them.

As I read their journals I used to write notes in my own journal and that gave me ideas so I could improve certain aspects in my teaching practice. I noticed these things as I wrote and when I read the notes I made while I was reading the journals. For instance, I had four students that when they were unsure of some word they preferred to draw the concept as Gabriel did for example: "Something else about our uniforms, I think they should have more long (a drawing of a sleeve). Good for when it's cold..." Following there are images that show individual pages with material written by the three other students that did the same as Gabriel (with Gabriel they were four).

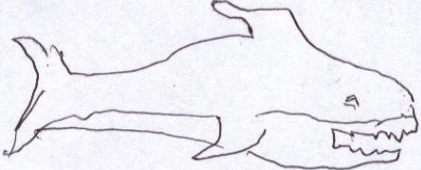

(Adolfo)

“ Things I don't have to
but I'd like to...”

Well, money for sure. It won't make
me happy but it will help me. I could
buy a  and the people there
would pay me so I could travel
to ... what is the name? I can't remember
It's the city with that monument 
the capital of La Yoni. My girlfriend
lives there so I could go visit
her and have a great time
together as when she was in Ecuador



(Andrés)

"A Day at the Sea"

This reminds me of a dream I had about when I was at the sea on a boat and suddenly I was alone so these animals  were all around me, I mean, around the boat and I was all alone. Can you imagine? There were other creatures a dinosaur and this animal with eight arms  but he was enormous and they were all trying to eat me. The worse is trying to wake up but I couldn't until I woke up. It was horrible!

(Lila)

If I could give one piece of advice to
any person from history, that 'd be...

I would like to meet Martin Luther King. I like
him because he was an African-American and
me too. I would ask him if he could include
in his  something about African-Americans
of Ecuador because we also have problems and
there is hate against us. He was an important
man and I'm really happy he was black.
I would ask to visit Ecuador and go to Guayaquil
and Esmeraldas. I know he is death...  but
this is like a dream to me so that would not
be a problem because all are possible in dreams.

And at last I found evidence of Passive voice such as *I was told* (Belén) and *she was reprimanded* (Cristina). But perhaps the main progress was in altruistic thinking. Of course the project did not last long but I have continued using journals in my class and the level of thoughtful reflection seems to have increased and that it's noticeable in their latest entries. Some of the themes that emerged in this deepening reflection were righting historical and family wrongs and religious thoughts. Here are some examples:

Prompt: If I could give one piece of advice to any person in history, that'd be...

Belén: I would tell Hitler to think two times before killing the Jews. He's not God, or a god. I would tell him not one, other things too. Like for example we all have a right to live, we all exist and there is a good reason for our lives. I was told once a life is a precious thing and we have to respect other lives."

Gabriel: "I think that I would tell Bin Laden not to attack the Towers. That was cruel. Why do innocents have to pay for other things? Many persons died but they did not do nothing wrong. Why he killed them? That was not good!"

Andrés: "I would tell Jesus how much I love him. I would tell him that in the future we need his message, to be with us. Maybe we need good things in our time, more than before. We forget what is important and what is not. We need a guide and for me that guide should be the son of God"

Cristina: "I don't like History and I'm not good in that, so I'd prefer to travel to the past and talk to my sister Elena. She was reprimanded by my parents once and ran away from home. She married a bad man and now she lives in Spain and she's unhappy. I would like to convince her to stay in Ecuador."

As part of this project I attempted to provide students with a fresh take on a learning tool that they already were familiar with, but the potential of which remained largely untapped. I tried to engage students in thinking and reflecting on their own writing in a way they could enjoy. I also tried to spark the students' ideas and thoughts, premised on their personal beliefs.

The procedure followed in this study aimed at supporting students in the target group in their thinking and reflection activities. The teaching strategy included teaching the skills of writing journal entries, which, at the same time, would involve reflection, introspection and a reciprocal communication of impressions, as well as meet the aims of the course. Most students seemed to be happy with journal writing once the project was over but there were of course those who felt displeased. The reasons for that "displeasure" can be many and that is one thing I would do if I could repeat this project, to find out what causes some students to feel that journal writing is not productive. Is this something that we should credit to a boring conception of the project or just plain apathy?

Thanks to this project I also learned that in general the participants needed more vocabulary of the kind that makes everyday communication. In other words, their exchange sounded too "Ecuadorian".

The participants were at a level where communication was mostly possible, with different degrees of proficiency, and still they did not have that element that only knowledge of the culture provides, that only casual contact with L1 learners could confer them. Guillermo for example wrote in one of his entries: "I hate those people that believe they always have the reason. That's not good, what happens when I have the reason, but I can't prove it...?" What Guillermo meant with *to have the reason* was very likely *to be right*, however, he had obviously not acquired this specific knowledge. The reality that the

members of other cultures (in this case L1 speakers') say things differently is rarely addressed in our classrooms probably for being deemed too complicated to explain. We say in our culture *tener la razón* which translated literally is *to have the reason*, but no one in English uses that expression, everyone says: "to be right". Belén seems to fall in the same category as it can be perceived for what she wrote in one of her entries: "...and then I just want to be in my house because I'm safe and with my family there. My house is in..." When in Spanish we use the word *house* in this context we actually mean *home*, actually we prefer to say *casa* y no *hogar*. In fact we prefer to say *casa* y no *hogar* most times. I talked to these two students and coincidentally none had traveled to an English speaking country in the past. Perhaps it was this absence of cultural contact what was producing this improper use of the expressions in their writing.

And finally there was the TWE. After it was used the results did not truly shed any significant light to claim true success for the intervention. Expecting something else for a project of such short duration was perhaps too ambitious or maybe not. Going back to that, replicating the intervention for a broader period would probably give out clearer and more reliable results. That alone could justify repeating the experience in the future.

Limitations and Recommendations

This project cannot claim that the students achieved complex, deep meta-cognition given their still limited means of self-expression. The participating students, however, reflected on, and expressed, their thoughts and feelings about their writing and topics suggested by the prompts. Furthermore, it is evident that any claim for having engendered reflective and thinking skills would require proof of permanent, sustained change, and that the skills could be transferred to other areas of reflection and cognition.

A major recommendation of the present project is that EFL/ESL instructors be committed to affording writing students more opportunities for introspection, sharing and communication, all things that can be achieved through the practice of journal writing. Reading the participants' journals entries, taking notes about what I was reading, assessing the amount of information I was gathering, and responding to all that was really a staggering effort. Still, it was also a rewarding experience in more than one way for not only did I comply with an essential part of the process, but I obtained precious data as well. The value of this information is that it was collected in a context other than the usual. The participants were "collaborators" and not learners; whether they were aware of that and thus acted accordingly is one other thing I would have liked to know but did not find out.

The use of deep reflection and critical thinking are vital strategies that help learners in the acquisition of new EFL writing and language skills. Promoting thinking about one's own writing process is appropriate, accountable and effective in the EFL context. In a similar way, encouraging reflection and using thinking skills is the essence of teaching writing. When I go back to this aspect of guiding the students to intensify their capacities for abstraction and reflection, I have observed that it is not customary to use journals in L1 programs in Ecuador. This means students are used to writing compositions and other documents in L1 so when they perform the same task in L2 they find it natural, easy, comfortable; and yet, in order to use journals, teachers of other materials should be encouraged to use them.

Also one other thing that I would do differently if I repeated this project is the survey questions. As mentioned in chapter four fifteen of my twenty students liked Journal Writing and none of them said why they liked it or if they believed it was important in their

learning process therefore I would like to add questions to find out what is they like more specifically and why.

The main obstacle that made this plan a challenge was the time constraints. Many other mandatory subjects and instruction throughout the day made finding time to carry out the plan somewhat difficult. I would like to dedicate more time to this project because two weeks are simply not enough. It is true I needed time for both the preparation of this project and then the analysis of the information obtained; however, the fact that my teaching practice became more productive is a positive result of the research study. My students have not complained about it and the main difference is that now my assessment is less formal and more relaxed. That also makes me consider the fact that with more time at our disposal during the intervention their perceptions toward the project might have become even more positive.

In addition, I began to use new ways of teaching in my classes as a result of this study, such as peer review and the use of music in the classroom. I was anxious about implementing these ideas in my classroom for the first time; especially when I realized that the activities that our group had planned would not fit into our allotted time. Besides I was a bit unhappy with the way Peer Review worked in this project. I have no evidence that the peer responses were very helpful, or did not really help the participants to write better or even differently.

In perspective I feel that I could have done a better job when explaining the participants what my expectations were when performing reviewers' duties. Most seemed to enjoy this role for it was fun to be allowed to read and comment on someone else's written production, and precisely they focused on the "fun side" of it rather than on the provision of constructive criticism so in order to keep this from happening next time I

would try to clarify my expectations on the matter. Still it's not that everything was bad about it: their responses may have been too brief in most cases to be of any consideration. Perhaps I could develop a checklist for them to use as a guide.

There were also external factors that allowed for even less instructional time in the classroom. If I were to change any part of the research study, I would have allowed more time for each activity and have given students plenty of practice with each concept. Participants also needed to be aware of the amount of work they were doing each week. Keeping students interested and motivated was an important factor to the success of the project and that happened for the inclusion of extra features such as music in the classroom and peer intervention in the form of an early and brief pre-review, however, care, responsibility and commitment was expected from the participants.

Also, I tried not to have the participants do many things at the same time to avoid frustration in case they failed to perform one activity correctly for it could damage their self-esteem. It would seem that learning is subjective and comes hand in hand with an affective side that cannot easily be dismissed. It is perhaps because of that Journal Writing has the potential to aid learners to delve into their own minds in order to explore and reflect on the impressions, opinions and feelings about the whole language-learning process. Learners through the process of journal writing may learn to act as judges of their own learning. Belén for example wrote in her journal: "I like it now because my English is better now and I can express my feelings better." Antonio wrote: "I write faster, more quickly, but more important now I can say I write truly. I know more words, short and long, too." And there is also Paola: "I like what I can do now and that is use English in TOK. I am slow when I learn, but it's all right because I don't need to study a lot like the others I just take my time, read, listen..."

This project certainly will not accomplish for all that, but it's intended to be a reference for other people who decide to do that in the future.

Implications for future research

The material should be interesting and revealing enough to contribute to other research projects where the time given to the research is more extensive and the research tools are more diverse and also more accurate which of course would need the intervention of more researchers. Time is perhaps the greatest problem. I feel that affected the project somehow since it did not allow me to train students longer than I should have; specifically I refer to the aspect of commenting on their classmates' work, situation which I have addressed before. In general the impression I had was that most participants' comments were brief and such comments appeared to be the product of a carefree attitude toward what their classmates wrote. One possible evidence of that incomplete training was this tendency in all journal partners to "not disagree" with their classmates. Were they afraid to hurt the other's feelings? Were they perhaps not taking their role seriously enough? I could venture a hypothesis based on the knowledge of my own people and our common culture. Maybe this tendency to agree is an expression of the way we are, or better said, what we are taught not to do. Ever since we are in school we are taught to listen, to obey, and to follow rules and thus questioning and expressing our opinions is deemed as rebellious and confrontational.

There are other complications as the complete disinterest of most local universities to encourage or fund research in this field, or any other, always alleging lack of economic resources. In other words, whoever is compelled to conduct investigation at the university

level must do it at his, or her, own expense, situation which usually disenchant most potential researchers

In the end

At the beginning of this research project I must admit I was both overwhelmed and excited at the same time about this project. The idea of motivating students to write using journals is something of great value to me. I wanted my students to enjoy writing, but that was not happening with my students so I decided to change the way we handled journals. A new school term would be the perfect excuse to start this project and see if I could improve my students' writing by doing things differently and with stronger theoretical foundations. That was one of the several reasons why I created this project: because I truly believed in the usefulness of journals and wanted to find out if by changing procedures those benefits could really be achieved. Therefore, I first designed my research, based on the literature review of this thesis and on what I learned from that experience I decided to introduce changes.

I learned that it is important to write every day. Before this project I wrote a lot but randomly so for example, I wrote one day, but then I stopped and wrote again after two days. Because I had my own journal I had to write every day, and though it was not long enough to develop a habit, I learned the benefits of writing regularly since it allows a writer to maintain a line of thought that is fresh and enticing at the same time. It was easy for me to reflect on my own labor while writing in my journal.

In other words, a lot of commitment is needed, so I felt that most of my students were not as responsible as I expected them to be. I also suspected that they found ways to comply with the number of entries I used to require by doing everything "at the last

minute” for example. This attitude of finding ways around probably revealed that my students were not using their journals properly perhaps in the belief they were only writing to get a score. Of course they were given a score; however, obtaining such score was not the primary goal of the original journal program I had. This led me to reconsider how I had been handling that aspect in particular and for the present project I decided that the participants would write every day. I did not find a specific author recommending it should be done with this cadence; in fact, each of the experts I consulted seemed to have his or her students follow a different pace. Possibly I let myself be influenced by what I saw in movies such as *Freedom Writers* and *Precious*. The last one in particular has the main character attend a special class for female students who for one reason or another were almost illiterate.

I have come to believe that Journal Writing only works because every time a person writes an entry, then it is the individual who takes over; the act of silent writing, even for five minutes, generates ideas, observations, and even emotions. It is hard to daydream while you write unless the writer writes about the daydream. It is not that I believed that journal writing would make passive students into active learners just like that, but I wanted to create that habit in them.

Most of my students in the past would moan when it was time to write, but this writing project did make a difference in motivating my students to write. Along with the excitement and motivation, my students really began to understand the mechanics of writing. They would use “juicy” words in their entries: *however, even though, nevertheless, likely, breathtaking, actually, former* (adjectives and adverbs mainly). They began using their imagination and it wasn’t a chore to write anymore, especially for they got to listen to the music they liked. Though not impressive I was pleased with my students’ progress. My

students were also proud of themselves. The best part of the whole process was when my students got to share their writing.

This whole experience has taught me to value education even more. In many ways I am still a learner as well as a teacher for I found this project to be very educating and rewarding, while at the same time, slightly challenging to manage. There are of course things I would do differently if I could repeat this project and one of them is the prompts I used. By reading my students' responses I found out which ones they really liked and which ones they did not. It was not only a matter of what was interesting and what wasn't, but also how complex some prompts were since I used some proverbs, too (p. 59).

Overall, I am grateful to have had this wonderful learning experience. I feel I have learned as much as my students, if not more. I realized the importance of motivating students. When students are motivated, they are more likely to participate, feel successful, and learn. I look forward to finding other innovative strategies to help my students in the future. I feel more confident in researching effective teaching methods and implementing them in my classroom. The risks and work are definitely worth the reward.

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Appendix 1

Permit letter from Director of Copol English department

Guayaquil, 22 de Septiembre del 2009

Máster Peter Harrington
Director del Dep. De Inglés del Copol
Ciudad

Estimado señor:

Por medio de la presente me dirijo a usted para solicitar su permiso con el objeto de realizar un proyecto de investigación sobre las percepciones que tienen alumnos de secundaria que estudian inglés respecto al uso de *journals* (como se les llama en ese idioma) en clase. Además de recolectar datos sobre tales percepciones este proyecto busca usar tal información para hacer recomendaciones que puedan ser usadas en el futuro en relación al uso de tal medio como herramienta en la enseñanza del idioma extranjero.

El proyecto implica la toma de un cuestionario previo al inicio de una serie de observaciones y otro al final. Las observaciones se harían durante las horas de Lengua B y serían dos horas-clase como máximo en la semana destinadas a la actividad del uso del *journal*. Dos serían los grupos a ser observados, en este caso segundo de Bachillerato MIT y Johns Hopkins.

Este proyecto es parte del proceso que sigo para la creación de la tesis que debo sustentar como requisito final para la obtención de mi título de Máster en TEFL concedido por ESPOL-Celex; y por ello requiero un permiso escrito de su parte.

Conocedor de su profunda vocación de enseñanza y amplio criterio al favorecer el uso de nuevas técnicas de enseñanza agradezco desde ya la atención que dé a la presente.

Atentamente,

Lic. Luis Bermudes

Appendix 2

Instructions for the use of journals

1. Pay close attention to the prompt (sometimes we talked about the prompt before they began writing, especially when I felt the prompt was not that clear after all).
2. Write about the prompt. Don't worry about Grammar or Punctuation.
3. Once you begin writing you must not stop.
4. You will listen to two songs. Begin as you hear the beginning of the first song and you will stop when the second song finishes (the songs were productions I knew they were familiar with: therefore, they could predict how much more they had to write before the end of the second song).
5. Stop when the second song finishes, regardless where you are.
6. Give your journal to your journal partner (usually a classmate who would read the entry and then offer a comment).

Appendix 3

Initial Survey

Circle one option in each answer and explain. Elija una opción encada pregunta y explique

1. Before this project begins, are you interested in Journal Writing?
(Antes de que este proyecto comience, ¿está usted interesado en escribir en un jornal?)

YES UNSURE NO

2. Do you think that using journals in the past helped you improve your writing skills?
(¿Piensa usted que el uso de jornales en el pasado ayudó a su habilidad de escribir?)

YES UNSURE NO

3. Now that you know what this project is about, are you interested in participating?
(Ahora que conoce de qué se trata este proyecto, ¿está interesado en participar?)

YES UNSURE NO

Appendix 4

Final survey

Circle one option in each answer and explain. Elija una opción encada pregunta y explique.

1. In your opinion, is journal writing a good technique to use when learning English?
Explain.
(En su opinión, ¿Es el escribir en jornales una buena técnica para usar en el aprendizaje de Inglés? Explique.)

YES UNSURE NO

2. Do you enjoy Journal Writing now more than before? Say why / why not.
(¿Disfruta escribir en este estilo más que antes? Diga por qué sí o por qué no)

YES UNSURE NO

3. Would you like to continue using journals in class in the future?
(¿Le gustaría usar esta técnica en clase en el futuro?)

YES UNSURE NO

Appendix 5

Participants' agreement form

Fecha: _____

Nombre: _____

Por medio de la presente expreso mi consentimiento para prestar mi colaboración como participante y sujeto de observación al Sr. Licenciado Luis Bermudes en su proyecto de investigación "Students' Perceptions of the Use of Journals in EFL Classrooms" y durante el tiempo estipulado y necesario para este. Asimismo el mencionado señor puede hacer uso de la información resultante a su discreción.

Firma

Appendix 6

Slep Scores

PARTICIPANT'S NICKNAME	SLEP SCORES
Gina	57
Belén	57
Antonio	56
Melissa	56
Andrés	56
Adolfo	56
Josué	56
Stefan	55
André	54
Fabian	53
Lizabeth	53
Leonidas	52
Leonor	52
Benjamin	52
Cristina	51
Andrés	51
Guillermo	50
Gabriel	50
Lila	50
Paola	50

Note: These are the SLEP scores the participants obtained the year of the project. This test was administered in April 2009, several months before the project began. The names listed are not the participants' actual names.