

Chapter 11

Living the Narrative: Multimodal Blogging by Chilean University EFL Students



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Abstract In a multi-skill course with institutionally imposed competencies and final assessments, a teacher developed a multimodal approach to support students' learning to write problem-solution narratives. In analyzing students' collaboratively written blog posts, we argue that the multimodal assignment fostered students' embodied experiences, development of voice, and investment in their writing processes. Students made use of the affordances of the blog genre to design image-rich descriptions of outings, writing posts in a unified voice, and commenting from their own perspectives. We offer suggestions to teachers wishing to implement similar activities in language-learning contexts.

Keywords Blogs · Intertextuality · Embodiment · Images

First, they told me about a very special date, Halloween. They said that it's a well-known celebration here on earth, it's celebrated normally by kids who go to people's houses with a costume that they choose and ask for candies, saying "Trick or treat". I found it very interesting because in my planet we didn't celebrate it, so I asked them if we can do it too, and they agreed! So, we walked around the neighborhood, the girls went dressed as witches and I was a vampire, I spent a really great time asking for candies!

From post "Hallo-week!" November 5, 2018

I'm sorry, but you look more adorable than creepy as a vampire haha. It seemed like you really spent a good time asking for candies, but DON'T FORGET to brush your teeth after eating your candies (read it with your mom's voice).

From student response to "Hallo-week!" November 5

OMG you look so cute on your vampire costume. It suits you very much. I'm very happy that you got to celebrate Halloween, and even ask for candies. I usually give out candies

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D. Shin et al. (eds.), *Multimodal Composing in K-16 ESL and EFL Education*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-0530-7_11

to kids in Halloween, but this year I celebrated with some friends. It was fun, but I missed give candies too. Well, mainly because when I give candies I usually keep some for myself. Hehe. I really like candies too.

From student response to "Hallo-week!" November 9

The above exchange, representative of many in our data set, is excerpted from a blog post and comments written by students in a university English as a foreign language (EFL) pedagogy program in Chile. In a multi-skill course with externally imposed competencies and final assessments, the teacher developed a multimodal approach to support students' learning to write problem-solution narratives. Multimodal composing is rare in this program; competencies focus on discrete skills, with writing assessed through brief on-demand handwritten texts. This situation appears to be common worldwide; little research to date has considered multimodal blogging in EFL teaching contexts. In analyzing students' collaboratively written blog posts, we argue that the multimodal assignment fostered students' embodied experiences, development of voice, and investment in their writing processes.

11.1 Blogs as Multimodal Composition

Blogs are a contemporary genre that can engage writers in multimodal composing in ways that are rarely possible in more traditional text-only writing tasks. In this chapter, we draw on Kress's (2003, 2010) theory of multimodal composing, which considers the integration of multiple modes (e.g., words, image, sound) in representing ideas. Rather than solely *writing*, in multimodal composition, students *design* their pieces, drawing on the relative affordances (possibilities for representation) of each mode for enhanced meaning-making, focusing less on written conventions and more on the realization of their intended messages (Kress 2010). Along with considering the potentials of the modes themselves, selecting modes for representation also depends on what designers know about what readers expect and know (Kress 2003). Designers always have choices of how to represent their intended meanings (Kress 2003, 2010).

Designers benefit from additional aspects of multimodal composition that take their process beyond what is possible in text-only writing. Bazerman (2004) describes how designers can integrate aspects of intertextuality into their work through connections to other texts (written or multimodal), to other areas of the text they are creating, or to contemporary language usage and popular culture. Embodied "interactions with the world" (Bourelle et al. 2019, p. 90) push designers to greater levels of creativity and imagination. Creativity, Bourelle and colleagues suggest, requires student designers to connect ideas in novel ways that challenge their usual perspectives on the world. Through physically experiencing what they intend to present in their assignments, students develop alternative ways of understanding. "Unlike many 'traditional' texts, multimodal compositions afford composers the ability to engage all the senses, and thus embodiment is a necessary consideration when engaging

in multimodal composing” (Wysocki et al. 2019, p. 23). Murray (2014) adds that visual forms are eloquent and can often convey emotions and imagination better than words: “...one of the most vital roles for images is that they thrive in the domain of the unutterable or unsayable” (p. 329).

Limited research has considered how multimodal composition theory can be applied to pedagogy through blog assignments. Among benefits identified in the literature is a greater sense of audience awareness, in which designers make conscious choices based on what they know about potential and actual readers. The interactive nature of blogs, where readers can respond to the main post through comments, gives designers the sense of having a real audience and of participating in a community (Blackstone and Wilkinson 2012). Student bloggers show metacognitive awareness of the rhetorical situation:

Audience becomes a complex concept (instead of writers writing to the teacher or to ‘everyone’ or ‘anyone’) they must wrangle with—one that requires writers’ use of rhetorical knowledge and critical-analysis skills that enable them to make conscious choices and be able to articulate why they made them for a particular audience. (Ferruci and DeRosa 2019, p. 221)

Bloggging also gives student designers more options than in most college-level writing assignments, as they must not only choose a topic, but also think about framing, image selection, and overall design. Designers should make choices based on their purposes for text (such as persuading readers or eliciting an emotional response) (Wysocki 2004). Not all blog activities are successful, but Wysocki and colleagues (2019) argue that taking risks is part of the learning inherent in creating blogs. Furthermore, Bourelle and colleagues (2019) “argue that multimodality should not be limited to a final product; instead, instructors can and should promote multi-literacies during various stages of the composing process” (pp. 87-88). Although bloggging has become less popular in the wider world, it continues to hold great potential in language teaching contexts, offering second language writers opportunities for multimodal composing to audiences beyond just their teacher (Bloch 2018; Reinhardt 2019).

Limited research has examined multimodal composition through bloggging in EFL settings. In one recent study, Jiang (2017) found that blogs allowed Chinese university students to use multiple modes to represent ideas, rather than only employing spoken or written English. The students reported feeling engaged with the task and with language learning, as they were able to express their views creatively and demonstrate their language competence. In addition, the blogs provided more authentic contexts for using English and facilitated greater peer interaction with classmates, as the wider audience gave students the feeling that people appreciated their efforts (Jiang 2017). Similarly, in English for Academic Purposes courses in Japan and Singapore, bloggging allowed students to read each other’s posts and comment, leading to collaborative learning (Blackstone and Wilkinson 2012). Students appreciated being able to personalize their blogs for greater self-expression. Summarizing the research on bloggging in EFL contexts, Reinhardt (2019) highlights the fact that the author is not anonymous, which can be both positive and negative: “...tasks that emphasize an

external audience seem to be a double-edged sword, because awareness of that audience can both empower and intimidate L2 learners” (p. 10). Reinhardt cautions that students may be concerned with issues of face and unwilling to write on particular topics or for an unknown audience.

Taken together, the literature to date suggests that multimodal blogging has the potential to give EFL learners access to real-world audiences and to extend their learning beyond solely alphabetic writing. This chapter illustrates how a collaboratively written class blog allowed EFL students in Chile to draw on multimodal representational modes in posts that also supported them to write from another person’s perspective, potentially reducing the face-threatening nature of public blog posts.

11.2 The Project: “My Life with Freddy”

11.2.1 Context

Universidad de Atacama (UDA) is a state university located in the Chilean city of Copiapó; it is the only tertiary education institution in the third region of the country. Founded in 1857, the university is mainly focused on careers related to mining. However, its Faculty of Humanities and Education includes English Pedagogy as a career within the Languages department. This program prepares students to teach English in every level of education, meaning preschool, primary, and high schools as well as language institutes for adults. The academic staff includes specialists in EFL, literature, linguistics, and teaching methodologies.

The English Pedagogy program at UDA follows a competency-based curriculum where the characteristics of the competent graduate are distributed developmentally across the curriculum (Albanese et al. 2008). Course goals and objectives are reoriented by the presence of the competencies because students must evidence that they have achieved each competency before advancing in the curriculum. Courses in this nine-semester program are divided into three developmental areas: pedagogy, electives, and English language and culture. Because most incoming students are still developing their English language proficiency, the first two years of the program focus primarily on written and oral language learning. The project described in this chapter took place in the second-year course titled Communicative Competence, which was designed to foster the four language skills in an interactive, student-centered approach (Wright 2011). Teaching activities are adjusted to students’ interests and needs, since this approach considers that the affective and cognitive areas interrelate to determine classroom success.

11.2.2 Participants

This chapter examines blog posts and responses written by twenty-one students (4 male and 17 female) enrolled in Communicative Competence during the 2018 academic year. These second-year L1 Spanish speakers had an average English fluency level on the CEFR scale of A2-B1.¹ They generally struggled to compose original texts and connect ideas within and across texts in all genres. Unlike other cohorts in the program, this group of students had not come together as a close community of learners, and individual students sometimes expressed resistance at working with certain classmates; they were divided into four groups which did not interact at all. Deisy Campos (second author) was the teacher of this class. She is a Chilean L1 Spanish speaker holding an MA in English Language and Culture with 18 years of experience teaching English in both EFL (Europe and South America) and ESL (United States) contexts.

11.2.3 Intervention

The focus of this chapter is the multimodal, collaboratively written blog posts that Deisy added to her standard instruction during the second semester of the second-year Communicative Competence class. One instructional goal of the course was for students to be able to tell stories (orally and in writing) following a problem-solution pattern, which covers four steps that are common as the organizational structure of narratives (Hyland 2018): (1) setting the scene, (2) describing the problem, (3) explaining an attempted solution, and (4) evaluating the success of that solution. To supplement individual assignments in which students related brief problem-solution narratives, Deisy introduced the ongoing blogging activity titled “My Life with Freddy,” focused on Freddy, a stuffed toy space alien who was depicted as an exchange student at UDA from Neptune University.

In the first class, all students were asked to respond to a blog post written by Deisy in which Freddy introduced himself and described his first day at UDA. Deisy’s post included photographs showing the toy Freddy in various places described in the post, such as meeting with a professor and visiting the university cafeteria. After dividing the class into pairs or groups of three, Deisy told the students that Freddy would spend one week with each group so they could take him sightseeing and experience life in Copiapó; the adventures were to be described in a blog entry written as if Freddy was telling the story. Students took the stuffed toy and had one week to send their story to Deisy to upload; the post had to include pictures of the activities carried out, and in each entry, Freddy had to ask for assistance regarding a problematic

¹The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) establishes reference points for six levels of language proficiency (from A1 to C2), with the A2-B1 range suggesting learners have developing competency in talking and writing about topics of interest (Council of Europe, n.d.).

situation. Teachers edited the written text for grammatical clarity before posting (so the posts could serve as class readings). Every week, the rest of the class individually commented on the post with opinions and advice to resolve Freddy's problem. Betsy (first author) performed the role of Freddy's bossy mother and commented alongside the students. After each entry, Deisy provided general language feedback to the class.

11.2.4 Research Questions

This chapter examines the student written blog posts and comments to answer these questions:

- In what ways did students make use of multiple modes of representation in the multimodal collaboratively written blogs?
- In what ways did students demonstrate creativity and humor in their blog posts and responses?

11.2.5 Data Collection and Analysis

In this chapter, we examine the eight collaboratively written blog posts and the individually written comments at the end of each post. Post length averaged 671 words; comments were each approximately 200 words.

Our analysis process began with the systematic reading of the main posts and responses in chronological order. Taking an inductive qualitative approach, we highlighted words, phrases, and sentences in the posts that indicated ways the student writers were taking up the spirit of the assignment with respect to writing from Freddy's perspective for a non-judgmental audience (beyond the teacher) and responding directly to the character of Freddy. We then created a spreadsheet on which to track students' incorporation of multimodal elements such as inclusion of intertextual references (to previous blog posts and to external cultural elements; Bazerman 2004), use of humor and reference to the senses (Wysocki et al. 2019), coherent integration of images with text (Kress 2010; Murray 2014), embodied experiences (Wysocki et al. 2019), and collaboration. We selected three representative posts for which to analyze students' individually written comments looking for references to past and future posts, proposed solutions to problems posed in the current post, and allusions to popular and Chilean culture.

Our purpose in this chapter is to analyze the blogs as a collective whole rather than to consider individual student development. Each post was written by a different team of two to three students, so we cannot compare across posts for language or rhetorical change. We can, however, see the posts and the students' comments as evidence of how this particular group of L2 writers drew on the affordances of multimodal composing to write in ways that the traditional EFL curriculum did not support.

11.3 Findings

The findings reveal that students took the assignment seriously and used it not only to practice multimodal writing in English, but also to express their creativity and voice concerns about Chilean culture and society. The table in the appendix lists the nine blog posts (the first written by Deisy) and shows word count, topics and activities covered, and the number of photos in the post.

11.3.1 *Multimodal Representation*

In contrast with academic assignments where meaning is conveyed solely through words in written or spoken modes, the blog posts engaged students in representing their stories both visually and in words.

11.3.1.1 Use of Images

The blog assignment required students to include photographs to accompany their written texts, but Deisy did not specify how many photos or what should be included in the photos. Wysocki (2004) points out that in multimodal analysis, it is important to analyze not just the photograph alone but how it interacts with the written text to make up the overall design. In these blog posts, the student designers made ample use of the photographs to extend their written texts and allude to previous posts and to popular culture, as well as to illustrate activities mentioned in words.

Figure 11.1 shows five photographs from different blog posts in which students posed Freddy within the contexts of their narratives. The photo on the top right is from the first student written post, “Caldera,” and shows Freddy at a natural juice stand. This portion of the post links to the initial post, where Freddy mentioned being vegetarian; here students took him out for food and introduced him to some plant-based foods he could eat. This photo also illustrates the embodied experience of planning and doing before writing the story: the students had to talk with the juice vendor to explain the project, set Freddy on the counter, and take the photo. We saw throughout the posts evidence of the students’ engagement with the project to the extent of potential embarrassment being seen around town with a stuffed toy.

The photo on the top left is from the post “Doggy Friends.” Building on earlier posts where Freddy commented about being afraid of dogs, the student designers introduced Freddy to the *perros callejeros* (stray dogs) that live on the UDA campus. Stray dogs are a national concern in Chile, with some residents considering them a serious safety and health problem and animal rights activists arguing for humane treatment (Generación 2019). Following a meeting with a student’s pet dog, however, Freddy wrote in this post, “I think I want a dog, they are so soft and happy, and maybe having a little friend could be a good experience.”



Fig. 11.1 Photographs of Freddy Posed in Locations and Wearing Costumes

Two photos show how the students extended previous posts' posing of Freddy to add costumes to the toy. In the post "Don't Stop Me Now!" the students took Freddy to the cinema to see the movie *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a biography of musician Freddie Mercury. The photo on the bottom left shows a Freddie Mercury-style mustache on the toy, posed next to the movie poster. The photo bottom center, from the post "Hallo-week," illustrates the costume the students put on Freddy while they took him out trick-or-treating while dressed in costumes themselves. Though not a traditional Chilean holiday, young Chileans have embraced Halloween as an opportunity to dress up and show off fanciful costumes.

The photo on the bottom right from the post "FreddyGo!" shows Freddy at a beach. This post references previous posts where Freddy commented about not being able to swim and wanting to learn. The post also includes a sequence of photos showing Freddy with various video games (Pokemon Go on a mobile phone and playing a desktop computer game). Mobile games like Pokemon Go had recently been adapted to include Chilean myths and a pokemon named "Chorolagi" who visits different renowned places of Chile (Matteucci 2018).

Figure 11.2 is taken from the post "Mystical Freddy." This final post was written by two students who had custody of Freddy during Christmas and New Year's (the university had holidays on December 25 and January 1, with classes held during the



Fig. 11.2 From the Post “Mystical Freddy” (Jan. 3, 2019) Showing Use of Photo Editing Tools and Effects

days in between). Not only is this post more than twice as long as the previous posts, but the student designers made ample use of photo editing software to illustrate their more fantastical tale. The story revolved around the students wanting to perform a ritual to release the soul of a pet cat that had just died. In narrating their visits to the cathedral and cemetery, the students included manipulated photographs of Freddy sitting on the lap of Santa Claus on the city plaza, smoke surrounding a mysterious house, and auras radiating out of Freddy sitting in a garden. Figure 11.2 is a collage showing Freddy and a student with the cemetery and the park behind mist effects. The darkness of the photo hints at the supernatural powers described in the narrative. This post addressed issues of societal acceptance for people considered different from the norm, with Freddy expressing feelings of uncertainty about whether or not he fits in, as well as gratitude for the students who helped him find a community.

11.3.1.2 Intertextuality

All student-designed posts and comments contained elements of intertextuality, which Bazerman defines as “the explicit and implicit relations that a text or utterance has to prior, contemporary, and potential future texts” (2004, p. 86). Intertextuality appeared frequently in comments as students proposed solutions to problems posed in the main post or in previous posts. For example, the post “Discovering Pool”

ended with a request: “P.S: I want to give my followers a name, do you have any suggestion? Comment down below. ☺” In the comments responding to this post, five students suggested names for the followers, one proposed that Freddy conduct a survey, and two apologized for not having a solution. The following week’s post concluded, “P.S. I couldn’t choose among all the comments a name for my fans, so I mixed them like this: ‘Cherryfreddyners’ I’m not good with names either, but I hope you like it!” This solution takes up several recommendations from the comments on the previous post, indicating that the student designers had carefully read what their classmates had written and made use of those ideas in their response. Other references to past blog posts revisit Freddy’s professed fear of dogs and his desires to get a bicycle and learn to swim.

We also noted intertextuality that anticipated future posts, especially in the comments. For example, three comments to the post “Discovering Pool” anticipate the following week’s activities. One of the authors of the subsequent post, P–, commented:

So about J–’s birthday, it’s going to be interesting, she told me that there’s going to be lot of sauces, one made of chickpea, and is weir[d] to me, because I can’t stand eating chickpea, and I promised to taste it, but I keep refusing to do it, sorry J–, luv u haha!

The following week, P–’s co-written post described Freddy’s participation in J–’s birthday party, where he ate vegan foods and met a puppy, among other activities.

Student designed posts also made references to global and local pop culture, as in the post “Don’t Stop Me Now!”, where students took Freddy to see *Bohemian Rhapsody* (a highly popular movie at the time all across Chile) and to a punk music gig. About the concert, Freddy wrote, “the place didn’t really smell good, ‘it smelt like teen spirit’ (which is actually a mix of teen’s sweat and feet) but it was awesome, I felt like the ultimate rebel!” Here the student designers reference the US band Nirvana’s well-known 1991 song. Posts also referred frequently to Chilean food and local culture as the students took Freddy to activities around the Atacama region and gave him advice in the comments section about what to eat to cure his stomachache.

11.3.1.3 Embodiment

The task assignment led students to considerable physical engagement when it was their turn to take Freddy on an adventure. “Creativity and invention are sparked by dialogic interactions with the world—words, images, people, sounds—that challenge writers to rethink and reimagine their own experiences” (Bourelle et al. 2019, p. 90). Unlike traditional writing assignments, where students may tell a story developed solely from their imagination, in this project, students took the Freddy toy to the locations discussed in their posts, posing him with objects (such as a pool cue or plate of food), people, and animals. Their narratives and images show how the student designers ate, danced, and traveled alongside Freddy. In this way, the posts illustrate how “multimodal compositions afford composers the ability to engage all the senses,

and thus embodiment is a necessary consideration when engaging in multimodal composing” (Wysocki et al. 2019, p. 23).

The students took the choice of activities and scenarios seriously. As the appendix shows, in every week’s post, the students took Freddy out into the city and region and engaged in multiple activities with people beyond their classmates (including family, friends, and even store owners). Their choices illustrate ways that they saw the assignment as an opportunity to actually *do* what they were writing about rather than simply explain it.

Another innovative feature of the blog posts is that in writing the texts, the student designers embodied Freddy himself. The main posts are all written in Freddy’s “voice” rather than in students’ individual voices, maintaining a consistent perspective as a naive newcomer to UDA who is unfamiliar with local customs. We see how this revoicing allowed students to speak through the toy and make statements about their community without as much concern for possible loss of face (Reinhardt 2019). Several posts present students’ advocacy for local social concerns such as pollution caused by the mining industry. On a road trip described in the post “Don’t Stop Me Now!”, Freddy wrote about the experience of stopping near a mine facility: “...she insisted ‘Copiapó is a mining town so you have to meet places like these’, we arrived there and I disliked it so bad, the smell was terrible, but I put a smile on my face anyways.” Despite the social pressure to maintain a positive attitude towards the mining industry (the financial backbone of the entire region), these student writers used Freddy’s voice to express their distaste for its environmental consequences. In the post “Doggy Friends,” the writers reference the ongoing issue in Chile of stray dogs: “We went to feed some doggie friends from the university with the girls, and they told me that we have to take care of animals and adopt them, not buy them, because there are a lot of little friends on the street that need a home.” Speaking through Freddy allowed the students to discuss issues and share small moments that might not otherwise have been appropriate topics for academic writing. These topics were directly relevant to students’ lives, rather than the neutral topics covered in their coursebook. This meaningfulness may explain why the students were able to use richer language in their posts.

We further noted how the entire assignment seemed to minimize the strong discord among members of the class. Writing comments directed to Freddy allowed students to at least pretend that they were not addressing their classmates. The responses were polite and lengthy, full of positive perspectives and offers of help and advice (as the comments excerpted in the epigraph illustrate). In this process, students also embodied a Chilean cultural practice of offering foreigners not only help, but also an explanation of local customs and beliefs. They chose focal areas that they considered important to show to outsiders. Seeing Freddy as a stranger, in need of support, brought the students together online in a way they were not able to do in person.

11.3.2 Creativity and Humor

Throughout the blog posts, the students expressed themselves with creativity and humor. Though not explicitly required to do so, each post was developed with attention to originality, as students tried to avoid taking Freddy to the same places or activities as their classmates had done earlier. They embraced the character of Freddy, directing their comments to him (as illustrated in the excerpt at the beginning of this chapter), and appeared genuinely invested in helping him solve the problems he encountered in his visit to Copiapó.

As illustrated in Fig. 11.1, students made an effort to dress Freddy up for Halloween and added a mustache to make him look like the character Freddie Mercury in the movie they attended. In discussing the film, the students also made the humorous connection between the character's name and Freddy's backstory:

...the movie was about someone who had the same name as I do, 'Freddy', which i actually found very funny, I think he is from Mercury or something like that, ... I even took some pictures of me with a moustache like his (the man was extraordinary, I was quite surprised that he was from Mercury because that planet is very small).

Another aspect of humor is seen in the designers' careful posing of Freddy in photos with objects, people, and animals mentioned in texts. For example, in the post "Freddy's Adventures," a four-frame photo series shows a baby holding onto and biting down on the toy. The accompanying text reads:

I thought the baby was going to eat me, because she threw herself in my direction with her mouth open! Can you believe that? I was so scared, so I screamed "AHHH!" but quickly P- took D- away and let me know that she doesn't have teeth yet, so I only got covered by baby drool.

This comment is also an allusion to earlier posts where Freddy had expressed fear of being eaten by dogs.

The student designers further used humor in addressing cultural issues that might otherwise have been touchy subjects for discussion in society. For example, some Chileans had taken up vegan diets in defiance of the meat-heavy traditional foods of the country. Many students picked up on Freddy's initial search for vegetarian food at the university, and some (as we noted earlier) joked about their personal dislike of this diet while still trying to accommodate his needs. Individual student responses to Freddy's posts further highlighted the humor in everyday language. When Freddy reported being treated for a stomachache with *agüita de oregano* (a folk cure) and commented on the suffix -ita to the word for water, one student responded "You know, for me is really normal to use words in diminutive like 'agüita', 'cosita', 'pelito', etc. But, I understand that it can sound funny for some people but, it's just that using those words makes everything sound so much cute."

11.4 Discussion

This chapter examined the multimodal blog posts and accompanying comments designed by students in a Chilean university EFL course. The analysis shows that students took advantage of the relative openness of the assignment to make use of the multimodal affordances of the blog genre, as well as the embodied nature of the task itself, developing posts that show humor and audience awareness. In this section, we discuss features we found valuable about the assignment.

For one, the activity gave students an opportunity to experiment with voice and play with language. Writing in Freddy's voice instead of their own may have helped them overcome some of the issues noted in earlier EFL blogging research where students reported being intimidated by the idea that an unknown audience would be judging their language choices (Reinhardt 2019). In their comments, they could then respond as themselves. The students found ways to explain local culture as they were really living it (birthday parties, stray dogs, dying pets, problems with the mining industry) rather than through stereotypical "culture" description tasks that often focus on national culture (music, holidays, dance) instead of students' everyday experiences. Going to gigs and to the cinema further indicates a sense of sharing with other (imagined) readers around the world.

In addition, the designing process foregrounded student choice (any topic was relevant if they could incorporate Freddy) and embodied experience (doing before writing), two factors missing in most of the writing assignments in their coursework. Collaboration seemed to be helpful as well; students were able to draw on their partners for ideas. Especially when the task required them to be silly, this might have been helpful as they were not doing something potentially embarrassing alone. In a few cases, however, students were paired with classmates with whom they did not get along. We noted that in these cases, the posts consisted of two separate activities, each with one member of the team. The student writers nevertheless maintained Freddy's voice throughout, so it did not come across as problematic in the final post. Classmates' responses also maintained a positive tone addressed to Freddy, even when they knew that the actual writers of the post were classmates with whom they did not have a good relationship. Neither were humorous comments directed meanly at classmates but rather at situations where all could laugh together.

It is important to note that we did not provide any instruction in multimodal composition. An earlier course on information technology had introduced students to tools like Prezi, and they drew on what they already knew about blogging, audience, and integration of images. Most students were active users of various social media platforms (especially WhatsApp and Instagram), so they were already immersed in considerations of image framing and selection as well as the relative affordances of image versus text in communication. Multimodal composing requires designers to make such choices with their purpose and audience in mind. As we did not inquire into their composing processes, and students completed their posts and photographs outside of class time, we cannot make any claims about how they approached the assignment or made design choices.

11.5 Conclusion and Implications

For students with little opportunity to use a second language outside the classroom, multimodal blogging activities bring real-world language use to their development of classroom skills. This project has several implications for teachers working in similar curricular contexts:

- Collaboration for multimodal work is valuable. Working together allowed students to get creative, share the planning, and possibly also overcome the embarrassment of carrying a stuffed toy around the city. Collaboration in online writing has also been shown to foster greater peer scaffolding and feedback, and writers receive input throughout the process on how others are receiving their intended messages (Hsu and Lo 2018).
- Consider scaffolding the multimodal design process. In this class, Deisy was teaching the problem-solution pattern for narratives in the context of individual written and oral texts, but did not provide any additional support for students in writing the blog. They followed her initial post and built on that model, drawing on what they already knew about blogs and about image design. In a context where students are less familiar with multimodal composition or where instructional objectives include specific aspects of multimodal design, the teacher may need to provide more scaffolding in the form of lessons on image and text integration, uses of intertextuality, or other features.
- Understand the blog platform. An IT specialist set up the platform and uploaded each post for us, but a free blog site (e.g., Blogger, WordPress) or website platform (e.g., Weebly, Wix) would work for a class blog. If the teacher or IT specialist uploads posts, students do not need individual accounts; if students are responsible for uploading their own posts, then all students need access to the site.
- To grade or not to grade. This assignment was ungraded except for participation, which we believe allowed students to have fun and not worry as much about linguistic accuracy. If students post more frequently, however, it seems important to give them credit for their work, but without stifling creativity. Further research is needed into how teachers can fairly and effectively grade multimodal collaboratively written texts (Wysocki et al. 2019).
- How public to make the blog? We did not share the URL for this blog outside the class, so while technically it was public, in reality, only the students could read and comment on the posts. This may have saved face for students, but it also meant that the posts did not really have the broad and unknown potential audience that is a feature of blogging in the literature. Teachers must balance between these two aspects in developing a multimodal blogging project, considering their particular students' attitudes and vulnerabilities. Further research is also needed into the effects on students' language learning, perspectives, and willingness to take risks depending on the degree of publicness of a class blog.

This chapter has shown how a whimsical premise—a space alien exchange student in the Chilean desert—can promote EFL students' active engagement

with language use through multimodal composing. The blogging activity gave the students a friendly, non-threatening environment in which to use English for a real communicative purpose, writing to a character who was a student like themselves.

Appendix

“My Life with Freddy” Blog Posts

Date	Title	Word count	Topics	Activities	# of photos
25-Sep	Me	248	Intro to Freddy Neptune history First day at UDA	Getting set at UDA: meeting students and professors in the department, eating lunch at the cafeteria	6
5-Oct	Caldera	331	Visit to Caldera City	Spending time at the beach: eating fries at food truck, buying juice, and watching ships and boats	6
12-Oct	Discovering pool	365	Playing pool Vegetarian diet	Hanging out at UDA, playing pool, cooking lentil burgers at a student's house	5
19-Oct	Freddy's adventures	482	Life with babies Vegan birthday party Stomachache	Participating in a slumber party at a student's house, attending a birthday party	12
29-Oct	Doggy friends	440	Cycling Adopting animals	Meeting a dog at UDA, getting to know a student's dad and his bike, meeting her adopted dog (Rocket)	5
5-Nov	Hallo-week!	528	Halloween Hanging out at Kaukari Park	Trick or treating in a student's neighborhood, watching horror movies, hanging out at park	6

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Date	Title	Word count	Topics	Activities	# of photos
13-Nov	Don't stop me now!	731	Mining Punk gig Movies Love	Visiting a mining town outside Copiapó, going to the cinema and a gig at a bar, rescuing Freddy's love	10
13-Dec	FreddyGo!	429	Video games Surfing	Playing "Pokemon Go" and "Roblox", getting to know a student's gamer family, surfing and hanging out with a dog at the beach	10
3-Jan	Mystical Freddy	2065	The death of a pet Christmas Paranormal activities Religion	Meeting a cat just before it dies, getting to know Santa Claus, going to haunted house to find a gem and perform a ritual, going to a cemetery	11

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